

Go Slow in Andalucia in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 23rd March 2022



Booted Eagle



Egyptian Vulture

Tour report by Niki Williamson, images by Simon Tonkin



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Tour participants: Simon Tonkin & Niki Williamson (leaders) with 14 Naturetrek clients.

Summary

The Spring passage of soaring birds was in full flow over The Straits of Gibraltar this week! Using local knowledge to follow the ever-changing wind, the group found themselves right in the aerial pathway and enjoyed the best of the stunning spectacle! Numbers were impressive even in blustery conditions and we enjoyed witnessing several thousand assorted Black Kites, Short-toed and Booted Eagles, Black Storks, White Storks, Egyptian Vultures, Griffon Vultures, Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers and a stray Atlas Long-legged Buzzard making the crossing from Africa to Europe!

Resident and breeding species didn't disappoint either, with Spanish Imperial Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Northern Bald Ibis, Collared Pratincole and Blue Rock Thrush providing some superb highlights!

Our guests also enjoyed excellent dinners and hearty breakfasts at our tranquil, elegant accommodation, scenic picnics packed with fresh local produce, a lavish *tapas* lunch and plentiful coffee and ice-cream breaks – all in all, a week of thoroughly relaxed but thoroughly exciting birding!

Day 1

Thursday 17th March

Simon and Niki met the group at Gibraltar airport, and we made our way towards our accommodation at Cortijo El Indiviso, a beautiful traditional farmhouse villa located near the white town of Vejer de la Frontera.

White Storks and Cattle Egrets were spotted along the way. Overhead were innumerable Pallid Swifts interspersed with dozens of Alpine Swifts.

We settled in to our rooms – each one spacious and tastefully-decorated in Spanish style – before reconvening at the bar for a welcome drink and sitting down to our first delicious three-course meal, courtesy of chef Katarina. She specialises in modern Spanish and Moroccan flavours created from seasonal local produce, but tonight she welcomed the Brits with a Spanish twist on Shepherd's Pie – delicious!

Day 2

Friday 18th March

After a hearty breakfast featuring freshly laid eggs from the farm, we headed out into an easterly breeze to hopefully seek out the flow of migrating raptors crossing The Straits. We began at La Peña, a viewpoint looking out over Tarifa Bay and to the coast of Morocco beyond. Already we could see the first Black Kites and Short-toed Eagles arriving – very exciting! Griffon Vultures were leaving their roosts on nearby cliffs and Thekla's Larks fed and sang close by.

Following the wind and the migratory flow, we headed next to Cascabel watchpoint on the cliffs above Tarifa. Some previously arrived Short-toed Eagles were hunting over the fields, and Alpine and Pallid Swifts swooped overhead.

The wind changed again, taking us back to La Peña, where things were really kicking off! Now there was a full

flow of Short-toed and Booted Eagles, Black Kites and Egyptian Vultures powering hard across The Straits and up the ridge next to us. We took our picnic there, enjoying these spectacular scenes, alongside assorted friendly livestock!

After stopping for a coffee at a cosy local spot, we headed back and did a little birding around the grounds of the *cortijo*, picking up Sardinian Warbler, European Serin and many Glossy Ibis flying overhead.

Day 3

Saturday 19th March

Today we headed out to the Marismas de Barbate, a rich coastal nature reserve alongside disused salt pans.

Black-winged Stilts and Kentish Plovers were waiting for us as we arrived. A Little Stint was spotted amongst groups of Sanderling and there were Audouin's Gulls with the assembled Yellow-legged Gulls. Many Pied Avocets, Greater Flamingoes and Common Shelduck graced the pools. Despite their fantastic camouflage, we managed to spot Eurasian Stone-curlew on one of the islands, given away by its googly yellow eyes! A real highlight though, were the views of Collared Pratincoles. These first individuals to arrive back to their breeding colony treated us to close perched views and flew low overhead.

As we were enjoying them, we caught sight of a Northern Bald Ibis coming in to land in a nearby pasture! We quickly headed over to look and were thrilled to find three of these brilliant-looking and incredibly rare birds picking out soil invertebrates from among the grazing cattle.

Moving further round the lagoons, Calandra Lark and Yellow Wagtail showed well and we watched a Eurasian Spoonbill sifting for food.

After a comfort break, we headed for lunch at the pinewoods of the Breñas de Barbate reserve. "Cheese of the Day" today was a delicious award-winning local goats cheese, matured in a *pimentón* rind! We picked up a nice selection of woodland and heath birds including Eurasian Hoopoe and Short-toed Treecreeper, and a couple of surprise Red Crossbills flew over.

The group had one last treat in store before heading back for some relax time. A colony of around 10 pairs of Northern Bald Ibis have made their home on some unlikely cliff ledges right next to a main road! The group were able to watch their mating and nesting antics from a specially constructed hide opposite the colony, giving fantastic photographic opportunities and a great way to enjoy these fabulous birds.

Day 4

Sunday 20th March

After a brief stop in the seaside town of Bolonia to buy freshly baked bread, we headed up into the nearby mountains to explore a different habitat.

Our first spot was by the crags of Cueva del Moro, the site of ancient cave paintings. Here despite the blustery easterly wind, we picked out several Blue Rock Thrushes holding their territories. There was also a pair of Griffon Vultures nesting on the cliffs and a pair of Common Kestrels nearby.

Moving on into the hills, we enjoyed the main event at the vulture colony of La Zarga. Here we were right amongst 50 or more Griffon Vultures soaring around their nest sites, low overhead! It was also fantastic to see Bonelli's Eagles, Peregrine Falcon and Critically Endangered Egyptian Vultures breeding in the area. With the easterly wind direction this site was right under the migratory flow of raptors, and we were treated to quite a number passing over during our stay, including Short-toed and Booted Eagles, Western Marsh Harriers, Montagu's Harrier and Black Kites.

We rounded off the day with a coffee in the village of Facinas before heading home for relaxation at the *cortijo*.

Day 5

Monday 21st March

Today our guides used local knowledge to follow the ever-changing wind and put the group right in the aerial pathway of hundreds of migrating raptors! Moving between several coastal sites both east and west of Tarifa, we enjoyed the best of the stunning Spring passage. Numbers were impressive even in blustery conditions, and we picked up 339 Black Kites, 149 Short-toed Eagles, 80 Black Storks, 671 White Storks, an Egyptian Vulture, 25 Griffon Vultures, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Montagu's Harrier and a stray Atlas Long-legged Buzzard making the crossing! But perhaps the most impressive arrival was that of almost a thousand beautiful Booted Eagles, swirling along the coast in great swirls of vanilla and dark chocolate colouration!

Our last stop of the morning afforded some nice sea-watching opportunities too, with views of Balearic Shearwaters and Northern Gannet, with Ruddy Turnstones on the rocks and two European Shags amongst the Great Cormorants – a relatively unusual find for this part of Spain.

We had definitely worked up an appetite, and today we were treated to a huge *tapas*-style lunch at welcoming and renowned local restaurant Venta Pelayo. The tastes of local delicacies just kept coming, and included *pescaito frito* (fried seafood selection) grilled local *retinta* beef and *iberico* pork, tasty spinach and mushroom croquettes and a seasonal roast cauliflower dish.

On the way home, we paused to walk off our lunch at the intertidal habitat of Los Lances beach. Here we picked up Purple Heron, Golden, Common Ringed and Kentish Plover, Sanderling, Audouin's and Mediterranean Gull, Caspian and Sandwich Tern to round off a fine day's relaxed but thoroughly exciting birding!

Day 6

Tuesday 22nd March

We spent our morning at the nearby rice fields and pasture lands of La Janda. Although this once-pristine wetland lagoon has long since been drained for agriculture, it is still an amazing place to visit to watch wildlife and had plenty of treats in store today!

Glossy Ibis, White Storks, Cattle and Little Egrets, Purple Swamphen and Black-winged Stilts mooched around the newly ploughed muddy fields. Impressive numbers of Corn Buntings and Zitting Cisticolas filled the air with sound. Aerial insect-feeders were super-numerous, with Common, Pallid and Alpine Swifts all present amongst Red-rumped and Barn Swallows, House and Crag Martins. But resident raptor species ruled today with views of everyone's favourite Iberian endemic, Spanish Imperial Eagle. Two stunning Bonelli's Eagles drifted overhead, and we enjoyed three absolutely beautiful Black-winged Kites.

For our penultimate picnic we headed to Monte Facinas, the scenic gateway to Los Alcornocales Natural Park – the largest Cork Oak forest in Europe. We relaxed in the shade of these mighty trees with plates full of local cheeses, meats, seasonal salads and fresh bread – and a glass of wine for those who wished! We once again enjoyed a good flow of raptors high overhead, especially Short-toed Eagles, Booted Eagles and Black Kites.

Day 7

Wednesday 23rd March

Our last day came around very quickly, but afternoon flight times meant we had time to enjoy it to the full!

We had a stroll through the picturesque Old Town area of Tarifa, enjoying its Moorish Fort, winding medieval streets and of course souvenir-shopping and ice-cream opportunities! We took our picnic in the grounds of a nearby eco-lodge, accompanied by Short-toed Treecreeper, Hawfinch, Firecrest, Crested Tit, Eurasian Siskin and Iberian Chiffchaff.

Then it was on to Gibraltar – crossing the border with plenty of time, we were even able to quickly view The Rock nature reserve, picking up Barbary Partridge there!

But soon it was time for the group to board their flight and complete their own northerly migration back to the UK, hopefully with some great memories and plans to return to The Straits!

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

	N = Near endemic	I = introduced	March 2022						
			17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	Common name	Scientific name							
1	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			20				
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓		1	✓	
3	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>				1		✓	
4	Barbary Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>							2
5	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		2					
6	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	100	50	10	8	4	20	10
7	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>						4	
8	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	20	✓	✓
11	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>							
12	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>						1	
14	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					2	6	
15	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			230				
16	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>			1				
17	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			40			16	
18	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			70				
19	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>					2		
20	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			6				
21	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			20		30		
22	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			40				
23	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>					20		
24	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			40				
25	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>					3		
26	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			1				
27	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			120		64		
28	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			10				
29	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			4				
30	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>					1	1	
31	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			3				
32	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			1				
33	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>			6				
34	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			2		34		
35	Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>			4		3		
36	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>					4		
37	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		40	50	10		✓	✓
39	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>					2		
40	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		6			59		
41	Scopoli's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>		20					
42	Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>					7		
43	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>					80		
44	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	10	12	94	✓	671	10	

	N = Near endemic	I = introduced	March 2022						
			17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	Common name	Scientific name							
45	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓			✓		
46	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓		50	✓	
47	European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>					2		
48	Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>			24				
49	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		52	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			1	1	1		
51	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			20		4	1	2
53	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>					1		
54	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			2		2	2	
55	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				1			
56	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>						3	
57	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>		4		5	1		
58	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		120		50	25	50	20
59	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		111		1	149	10	4
60	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		22		20	954	70	30
61	Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>						1	
62	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>				2		2	
63	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		4	1		6		
64	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		6	10	3		4	
65	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				1	1		
66	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>		192	10	30	339	50	127
67	Atlas Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>					1		
68	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	2	4	3	2	5	4
69	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		2		1	5	2	2
70	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	1	1					
71	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			3	2	1		2
72	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>							1
73	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>					16		8
74	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2	4	5	4	3	✓	2
75	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				1			
76	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>						3	2
77	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	4	10		10	✓	4	4
79	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>							2
80	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	3	4	3	✓	✓	4	4
81	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	2	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		5			5	2	
83	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	1	3	✓	✓	✓	6	✓
84	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			4			2	
85	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		4				2	
87	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		3				15	✓
88	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>						2	
89	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>					1	1	2
90	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>							✓
91	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>							2

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92	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		3		2	5	10	
93	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>							2
94	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	2	5	4	2	12	✓	2
95	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		3	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
96	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>						1	4
98	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		3	4	2	3	2	3
99	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>							1
100	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			1	1	1	2	4
101	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		1	5		2		3
104	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>						2	
105	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		3	2	1			
106	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				5			
107	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
108	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>						✓	
109	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	Iberian Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>			3		4	3	
111	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		1	5				2
112	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		15	✓		✓	✓	✓
113	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	2	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
114	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>							4
115	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		6	✓	✓	✓	✓	3
116	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
117	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
118	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			2				
119	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
120	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			5			4	10
121	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Others

Common name	Scientific name	March 2022						
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓		✓		
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>		1				✓	
Mouse spp			1					
Iberian Pond Tortoise	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>			✓				
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>			✓		✓		
Iberian Pond Frog	<i>Rana iberica</i>						✓	
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓			✓	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓				✓	
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>						✓	
Spanish Festoon	<i>Zerynthia rumina</i>			✓				
Green-striped White	<i>Euchloe belemia</i>			✓				

		March 2022						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>					✓		
Moroccan Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis belia</i>						✓	
Violet Carpenter Bee	<i>Xylocopa violacea</i>					✓		