

# Go Slow in Andalucia in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

8th – 14th March 2026

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Black Kite



Egyptian Vulture



Short-toed Snake Eagle



Western Black-eared Wheatear

Tour report by Niki Williamson  
Photos by Simon Tonkin



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Tour participants: Simon Tonkin and Niki Williamson (leaders) with 13 Naturetrek clients

## Summary

This week was defined by the raw beauty of Andalucía and a series of extraordinary and unforgettable wildlife encounters. From the misty, prehistoric-feeling hills of Los Alcornocales to the dramatic crags of Bolonia, every day revealed a new treasure, including a resident Spanish Imperial Eagle sweeping past us and the heart-lifting sight of Long-finned Pilot Whales guiding their tiny calves through The Straits of Gibraltar.

Above all, the sheer scale of the spring migration was a constant highlight, as we watched hundreds of Black Kites, Short-toed Snake Eagles, Booted Eagles and Black Storks battling the crosswinds to reach the Spanish coast.

We felt the excited energy of the breeding season as we watched ninety pairs of Griffon Vultures soaring around their nests, and Northern Bald Ibises busy with home improvements at their colony.

We found quiet magic amongst the pastures, orange groves and sunsets of our traditional *cortijo* accommodation, where we shared many a delicious three-course meal and some great relaxing afternoons.

## Day 1

## Sunday 8th March

After arriving late afternoon at Gibraltar airport, the group was transported in minibuses by guides Simon and Niki, driving along the coast past Algeciras and up through the cloudy, misty hills of Los Alcornocales Natural Park, passing nesting White Storks on the way. The westerly winds meant The Straits were clear of pollution, giving gorgeous, tantalising glimpses of the sunlight on Jebel Musa on the north coast of Morocco.

As we neared Tarifa, our onward journey was interrupted by a sudden influx of Black Kites. We pulled in to the raptor watchpoint of Cazalla, and were thrilled to see our first three or four hundred of these intrepid wind warriors crossing the sea towards us and dispersing into the hills of the Natural Park beyond: it was a really spectacular introduction. We also picked up several Black Storks making the crossing.

Journeying on, we were soon at our accommodation at Cortijo El Indiviso, where Francisco, Marianna and the team offered us a warm welcome, and chef Jackie fed us a glorious three-course meal. As we settled in, ready for a great week of birding and migration, Greater Flamingoes flew overhead, and Tawny and Little Owls were both heard in the grounds. What a promising start.

## Day 2

## Monday 9th March

Of all the reasons to visit Andalucía and The Straits, there is one that is unique: the experience of watching hundreds, if not thousands, of birds of prey flying across the short stretch of sea between Europe and Africa. Today we set out to show our group just that. With a slight wind in the west and mist on the coastal hills, it was a challenge to know where to start, but using our guides' local knowledge and expertise at gauging weather conditions, we headed to the high central watchpoint of El Algarrobo.

This immediately proved to be the right choice, as we were greeted by several Alpine Swifts and a Hoopoe. It wasn't many minutes before Black Kites were emerging out of the haze across The Straits. It was a phenomenal sight, and soon we were surrounded by hundreds of them arriving in Europe, rising on coastal thermals all around us before disappearing into the hills of Los Alcornocales. Among them, the local Griffon Vultures had come to have a good look, and amazingly they were joined by twenty or more endangered Egyptian Vultures which had crossed as a flock. Also among them were Pallid Swifts, Black and White Storks, and we glimpsed our first Montagu's Harrier, Booted Eagle and Short-toed Snake Eagle, along with two arriving Lesser Kestrels.

It was a spectacular couple of hours, but having experienced the "Kite Highway," we decided to move further along the coast to see if we could connect with the "Eagle Motorway." Different birds have different wing loading, which affects where they arrive on the coast, so with a mounting westerly, we headed to the area of Punta Carnero.

Again, we found ourselves right in the thick of it, with Short-toed Snake Eagles pounding in over our heads, some of them just metres above us and visibly panting after their arduous crossing. Many were mobbed by the local colony of Yellow-legged Gulls, making their arrival even more dramatic. This time, the flocks were peppered with more Booted Eagles, as well as Marsh Harriers and more Egyptian Vultures.

As we tucked into our picnic of freshly-baked bread from the local village, seasonal salad, organic olive oil, artisan salt, local wine, and a tasty *tortilla de patatas*, it was hard to know whether to look down at our feast or up at the flow of beautiful eagles above our heads. We managed to return to the Cortijo in good time for afternoon tea and some relaxing time in the grounds before dinner.

## Day 3

Tuesday 10th March

Today was a day of treats, sugary and otherwise! We headed out the short distance to the Barbate Marshes where, after judging the tide, we pulled up at a spot overlooking the main nature reserve. We were delighted to find ourselves looking at a feeding flock of pastel-pink Greater Flamingoes standing very close to us. Other long-legged visitors included Black-winged Stilts, Black-tailed Godwits and Avocets. Little Stints scampered along sandspits with Sanderlings, Kentish Plovers, and Common Ringed Plovers. It was great to spot an Osprey perched on a nearby fence post: it later flew right over our heads.

We took a stroll along the pathway into the middle of the marshes, where we got stunning views of Iberian Yellow Wagtails, perched like lemon drops on the samphire bushes. A Caspian Tern or two stood proudly on the sandspits, their enormous coral-red bills showing well, alongside super Audouin's Gulls, some of the last wintering individuals in the area.

The tide was dropping, but we had time for coffee and an amazing hazelnut chocolate pastry in the local bakery before the water reached optimal levels to view the estuarine mud at the mouth of the Barbate River. Here, further treats included astonishingly close views of a Whimbrel, and more engaging action from other waders.

Still on our sugar high, we headed for lunch in the pine woodlands of Las Breñas. While our guides prepared lunch, we observed woodland specialties including Serin, Short-toed Treecreeper, Black Redstart and some Hoopoes making use of the sandy soil. The picnic included a custard slice to celebrate the nearby hamlet of San Ambrosio.

We began to meander back towards the Cortijo, but there were two more treats to come: an ice cream stop and a visit to a local cliff face, where thirteen pairs of the incredibly rare Northern Bald Ibis were nesting in hollows right next to a main road. We had astonishing views from the platform, and spent quality time watching them rebuild their nests and regale each other with foliage gifts for the breeding season.

## Day 4

## Wednesday 11th March

Heading out into a perfect, still morning, it was time to explore another aspect of The Straits' natural history: the sea itself. Splitting into two groups meant we could make use of the small cruiser yacht belonging to expert skipper Aurelio.

The sea was a fascinating place today, with avian migration happening overhead in three dimensions. As we headed out, we encountered many Swallows, House Martins and Sand Martins skipping across the waves towards Europe. Overhead, we had gangs of White and Black Storks, and low-flying Short-toed Snake Eagles almost reaching the shoreline. Moving into the Mediterranean were large groups of Cory's Shearwaters, and we came across Gannets and Puffins that had ventured into The Straits to feed.

The stars of the show, however, were the cetaceans. We had really special encounters with several groups of resident Long-finned Pilot Whales. Some groups had tiny calves with them, no more than three or four weeks old, sticking tight to their mothers' sides. They were curious and playful: as we hung back respectfully, they decided to invite us in by swimming all around and under the boat, providing some really heart-lifting moments.

Meanwhile, on the clifftops above Tarifa, the other group was watching migration in action once again as Booted Eagles, Short-toed Snake Eagles, and Black Kites poured in over them. They were even treated to the sight of a spectacular resident Spanish Imperial Eagle sweeping by. The groups then switched so that everyone got to see everything!

## Day 5

## Thursday 12th March

A day of culture awaited the group today, gastronomic and otherwise. After a relaxed start, we headed to the rice fields of La Janda, previously a huge freshwater lagoon until its drainage in the early twentieth century. This area still holds many natural delights: we found many White Storks feeding on the rice stubble, a flock of Black Storks soaring overhead, and Black Kites rising from their roosts. Corn Buntings provided the soundtrack as we watched over wet fields where Greater Flamingoes and Glossy Ibises fed. Waders included Little Ringed and Kentish Plovers, along with many Dunlins, while a distant Hen Harrier swooped by.

Then it was on for culture of a different kind, as we took a slow stroll through the picturesque town centre of Tarifa. Simon pointed out remnants of the town's Roman, Moorish, and Spanish past, before we reunited with Niki for a fabulous *tapas* lunch at La Burla. This local tradition of eating many small bites is very much alive, and the team treated us to a selection of typical dishes as we gazed out over the old port: These included stuffed courgette flower, artichoke with cheese sauce, spiced chicken, white fish in tomato sauce with olives, and a baked goat's cheese. After coffees, the group were free to wander at will and explore the town's network of crooked, narrow streets.

## Day 6

## Friday 13th March

For our final full day together, we began leisurely and built up to a climax. On a post-breakfast walk around the *cortijo* grounds, the group enjoyed a deep dive into Corn Bunting and Zitting Cisticola identification. The resident nesting storks gave us a lovely display of bill-clapping, and Sardinian Warblers popped in and out of the bushes. We were accompanied the whole way by the farmhouse cat, Hugo, who behaved himself on this occasion.

Next, we headed to the hills to the famous vulture colony of La Zarza. Here, the ninety-odd pairs of Griffon Vultures were busy preparing for the breeding season, cackling to one another and collecting nesting material by crashing into Eucalyptus trees. Among them, agitated Common Ravens and Crag Martins were also trying to make their nests.

We stopped for lunch in this magical, craggy place known locally as "The Cathedral", as swarms of Black Kites began to arrive from the coast and Blue Rock Thrushes sang from the pinnacles. Our final picnic featured a sublime local cheese called *Andazul*, a blue goat's cheese.

Finally, we headed up to the highest point at Cueva del Moro. From here, we could look out over the spectacular Bolonia Bay and the ruins of the Roman city of Baelo Claudia below. More stunning, close Griffon Vulture views finished off our day and our trip, and we headed back for the final time to the *cortijo*.

## Day 7

## Saturday 14th March

With mid-afternoon flights ahead of us, it was time to leave Cortijo El Indiviso, and to say goodbye to the lovely team. Before heading to the airport, we made a final birding stop in the lush cork oak forest at Huerta Grande Ecolodge. It was a peaceful final chapter to our journey, where we picked up Short-toed Treecreeper, Firecrest and Hawfinch amongst the trees. After enjoying a lovely warming coffee together, we made our way to Gibraltar airport for homeward flights.

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## Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

N=Near-endemic, I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	March 2026						
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			2				
	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			4				
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			6		30		
	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		2					
	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>		4		6	1		
	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		15	20				
	Feral Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	2	15	✓	✓	10	✓	
	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>					7		
	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				1			
	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	6		230		60		
	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			45				
	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			120				
	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			40				
	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			30		20		
	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>					7		
	Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>			20		1		
	Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			7				
	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			2				
	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			4				
	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			15				
	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			2				
	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>					3		
	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			50				
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			5				
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			4				
	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			80				
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			200				
	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			4				
	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>			9				
	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		3	20	10			
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓		✓		
	Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>			24				
	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓		✓		
	Scopoli's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>				40			
	Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>				60			
	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	12	7		23	26		
	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	30	80	✓	✓	600	✓	
	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		4		✓			
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		10	✓	✓	2		
	Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>			27				
	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			34	9	70		
	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>					50		
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			10		20		

N=Near-endemic, I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	March 2026						
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>					2		
	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			8		11		
	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			1	1	1		
	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>		16					2
	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	10	40	10	40	50	100	
	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		236		104			1
	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		44		63	1		
	Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>				1			
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		3	1	4	1		
	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>					1		
	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		3					1
	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		1	4	2			4
	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	300	963		19	200	400	
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1			1		
	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	2						2
	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	1						
	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		2	6	1	2		1
	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			1				
	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>							1
	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		2		3	6		
	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1	2	1	2		4
	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>			1				
	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	2	4	2			6
	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		2	✓	1	2		4
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		1	✓				2
	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	2	4		✓			
	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			20				
	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓			4			
	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			200				8
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	2	4		
	European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>		2	4	12			
	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		1	2		4		
	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		4	2	1	✓		6
	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>							1
	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	1	3	2		10		8
	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>							✓
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				1			2
	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			4				2
	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				1			3
	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		2					4
	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>							4

		March 2026						
N=Near-endemic, I=Introduced		8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Common name	Scientific name							
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>						1	
Western Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>						1	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>				1	10	6	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iberian Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>			7		1	1	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		1					
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			✓	✓	✓		
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	5	10	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>							✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		2	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		1	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			1				
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	2	1	3	2	15	✓	
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		3		1		2	

## Mammals

		March 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Long-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala melas</i>				30			
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>				1			
Loggerhead Turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>				2			
Common Shrew	<i>Sorex araneus</i>			1				

## Amphibians & reptiles

		March 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Iberian Stream Frog	<i>Rana iberica</i>						✓	
Mediterranean Tree Frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>		1					
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	✓		✓				
Vaucher's Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis vaucheri</i>			✓				
Ocellated Lizard	<i>Timon lepidus</i>						✓	

## Fishes

		March 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Grey Mullet	<i>Mugil cephalus</i>				✓			

## Butterflies &amp; moths

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026						
		8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>				✓			
Spanish Festoon	<i>Zerynthia rumina</i>						✓	
Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Western Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Moroccan Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis belia</i>						✓	
Provence Hairstreak	<i>Tomares ballus</i>			✓				
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>						✓	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓					
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓				✓	
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>		✓	✓				
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓		✓			✓	
Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>			✓				