

Go Slow in Andalucia

Naturetrek Tour Report

14th – 20th March 2026



Booted Eagle



Spanish Sparrow



Short-toed Snake Eagle



Northern Bald Ibis

Tour report by Niki Williamson



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Tour participants: Simon Tonkin & Niki Williamson (leaders) with 12 Naturetrek clients

Summary

Our group enjoyed a fantastic week of migration, the highlight being the "raptor motorway": we saw hundreds of Black Kites and Short-toed Snake Eagles arriving low over our heads.

Another real standout was our boat trip into The Straits, where we were surrounded by playful pods of Common and Striped Dolphins, including several very young calves. Other highlights included the marshes of Barbate teeming with waders, terns and gulls, the spectacular soaring of the Griffon Vultures over their colony, and the fields of La Janda buzzing with new life.

From the colony of rare Northern Bald Ibises on their cliffs, to traditional *tapas* in Tarifa and the hospitality at Cortijo El Indiviso, this holiday had a great balance of top-tier birding and relaxed Andalusian culture.

Day 1

Saturday 14th March

Having arrived mid-afternoon in Gibraltar, the group was soon in the minibuses and speeding west around Algeciras Bay and towards the hills of Los Alcornocales Natural Park.

With the wind in the west and time to spare, we took a left out to Punta Secreta, a raptor watchpoint overlooking Algeciras Bay and The Straits of Gibraltar. Against a stunning backdrop of windswept sea and the dramatic coastline of Morocco, we watched as dozens of Black Kites slewed in sideways above our heads, having made the perilous fourteen kilometre crossing from Africa.

It was a fantastic introduction to the area's avian migration spectacle, with Short-toed Snake and Booted Eagles arriving as well. It gave our leaders the opportunity to do a first swift raptor ID masterclass, setting the group in good stead for the rest of the week.

From there, we continued straight to our accommodation at the wonderful Cortijo El Indiviso, where a homely farmhouse greeting awaited us from the team: Francisco, Marianna, and Jackie. The group settled into delightful rooms around a traditional cobbled courtyard, full of orange trees. They had time to settle in and help themselves to an afternoon tea or coffee, before an introductory talk from Niki, and our first delicious three-course meal of the week, featuring roast Mediterranean vegetables, tofu with dill mayonnaise, and a sneakily-boozy fruit salad.

Day 2

Sunday 15th March

Working with boat skipper Aurelio, our guides had been looking for the best possible weather window for our boat trip into The Straits. As a calm day unfolded in front of us, we seized the opportunity to head back towards Algeciras and meet with our boat, the *Miamita*, to explore Algeciras Bay and beyond, in search of cetaceans. Half the group boarded Aurelio's yacht and we set out into the blue, picking up Striped Dolphins almost straight away. Moving deeper into the bay, we came across more and more Common Dolphins, including four tiny young calves hanging out together, the smallest of which were only weeks old.

For both groups, we spent most of the trip completely surrounded by playful, curious, and elegant Common Dolphins swooping around the bow of the boat, jumping, spy-hopping, tail-slapping, and surfing to our great delight! There were some great seabird sightings as well, including Gannet, Mediterranean Gull and many Sandwich Terns.

Meanwhile, the other half of the group were raptor-watching once more at Punta Secreta, as the westerly wind swept in wave after wave of Black Kites, Short-toed Snake Eagles and Booted Eagles, as well as hundreds of White and Black Storks, and flurries of House Martins.

It was an absolutely sensational day to sit in a chair looking at the spectacular view, and to think of the amazing journeys of these birds, some of which arrived just metres above our heads. Some got a sound mobbing from the local Yellow-legged Gull community!

We enjoyed a relaxed picnic in this fabulous spot, before making the journey back to the Cortijo for afternoon tea and to process our exceptional first day.

Day 3

Monday 16th March

After exciting views of a Great Spotted Cuckoo flying over the hotel, we headed to the saltmarshes and estuary of Barbate for some salty treats, in the form of waders, terns, and gulls. With the tide still quite high, we headed first to the Marismas de Barbate salt pans. Disused since the 1980s, they are now a thriving nature reserve. We were greeted by the surreal grumbles, squeaks and impossibly long legs of a flock of Greater Flamingoes and many Black-winged Stilts. As we scanned across this pleasant pink-hued scene, we picked up Avocets, Black-tailed Godwits, Common Redshank, Little Stint, Dunlin, Sanderling, and Kentish and Common Ringed Plovers. One of the stars of the show were the newly arrived Iberian Yellow Wagtails, adding a citrusy-yellow flavour as they perched zestily on the samphire bushes.

We moved round to the river estuary as the tide began to drop, keying ourselves up with coffee and sweet treats at the local bakery. We headed back to the salt, adding Caspian Tern, Bar-tailed Godwit and some sensational close views of other waders to our list.

Soon it was time for lunch, and we headed to the pine woodlands of La Breña near Barbate, the other half of this tiny natural park, the smallest in Spain. Niki and Simon prepared our picnic lunch (different every day to showcase various typical products, but always full of local salads, olives, wine, fresh bread, and some exceptional cheeses) while the group wandered these pretty woodlands and enjoyed Short-toed Treecreepers, Serins and Hoopoes on the sandy soil.

Once our relaxed lunch was done, we headed back towards our accommodation, but not before a final treat for the day. No, not the additional ice cream we managed to squeeze in, but the Northern Bald Ibis colony nearby! These fantastic, charismatic birds were very busy at their nest site, doing home improvements, flirting with one another, and even evidently incubating eggs. We spent a good while enjoying their antics and appreciating fantastic views of one of the world's rarest birds, before heading back to our accommodation to enjoy a relaxed afternoon.

Day 4 Tuesday 17th March

One of The Straits' famous *levante* winds arrived today! We knew that this would drag any migrating birds further west along the coast during their crossing, so we took up positions in a sunny, sheltered hollow at the watchpoint of La Peña. The crossing was even more spectacular than we had imagined: birds of prey, driven by the strong instinct to get to their breeding grounds as early as possible, were attempting the crossing under horrendous conditions. We watched spellbound as first Egyptian Vultures, then flurries of exhausted Black Kites, Short-toed Snake Eagles and Booted Eagles began pouring in over our heads.

After a short walk around the area, we enjoyed close views of the cliffs as our guides explained and 'demonstrated' the mediaeval sky burial tombs in the grassy field. Griffon Vultures circled overhead, and we were thrilled to find a rare vagrant Rüppell's Vulture among them. We spent some relaxed time in our comfortable deck chairs enjoying the ongoing migration spectacle. We noticed that the Griffon Vultures were descending into a nearby field, so we approached respectfully to observe them from close up, watching them dangle their legs to land on some out-of-sight carcass behind a hedge.

Next, it was time to head into Tarifa. Here, at the narrow point of The Straits, the group was able both to experience the strong *levante* winds, and escape from them in the narrow, picturesque streets of this settlement, where settlement began in stone age times. The site has been occupied by Romans, Moors, and Spanish and French forces throughout its long and fascinating history.

It was then time to relax with a *tapas* lunch by the harbour: yet more lunchtime variety! Chef Pepe provided us with all manner of typical treats, including roast artichoke, baked goat's cheese with roast vegetables, avocado stuffed with prawns, and a delicious hake, olive, and tomato dish. After free time to wander the streets, and perhaps to enjoy a coffee or ice cream, we were soon back chilling out on the ranch.

Day 5

Wednesday 18th March

The wind dropped once more today, opening the Moroccan departure gates for all those birds that had feared to cross yesterday. We made our way straight to the watchpoint of Tráfico, just outside Tarifa, anticipating that in these conditions, the birds would make their crossing at the narrowest point across The Straits.

We weren't wrong! As we drove to the watchpoint, we encountered and had fabulous views of a Hoopoe feeding on the grass verge after a nocturnal or early morning crossing. Soon we were right in the flow of migratory raptors once more, and we settled into our chairs for a quite astronomical morning, beginning once more with Egyptian Vultures. Soon, the Black Kites and Short-toed Snake Eagles were coming, this time accompanied by many more Booted Eagles flying right in front of us, at eye level, and almost parting our collective hair as they arrived breathless to Europe!

By the end of the morning, the eagles numbered in their hundreds, and the raptor species numbered eleven, including Lesser Kestrel, Long-legged Buzzard, Marsh Harrier and Sparrowhawk. We also had exceptional views of twelve beautiful Black Storks gliding into Spain just above our heads. It was a truly phenomenal morning, and it was all we could do not to drop our lunchtime picnic to get better views of a passing Osprey.

We lingered after lunch as the flow began to dwindle, before heading back, all smiles, to the hotel, to sample some more delicious local sherry, which had been kindly gifted to the group by manager Francisco.

Day 6

Thursday 19th March

After another fantastic breakfast of great coffee and seemingly limitless free-range eggs, we headed out to begin our day's nature adventure at the rice fields of La Janda. With water levels just starting to fall after the heavy rains of February, the fields were still muddy, and many lay fallow, making them quite a haven for local wildlife.

Despite the wind, we picked up Golden Plover, Common Snipe, Corn Bunting, Calandra Lark and a distant Montagu's Harrier. In another section, we had our first views of a newly arrived Woodchat Shrike, and a large number of handsome Spanish Sparrows flitting around in the new crop.

After a coffee in the village of Tahivilla, we headed towards the seaside town of Bolonia. En route, we made an impromptu stop when we stumbled across a large congregation of Griffon Vultures on a field next to the road. On closer inspection, they were busy digesting, having fed on a calf carcass just out of our sight; we got great, gruesome looks at their blood-stained heads and full crops as they hopped about with wings spread, battling for their turn at what was left of the meal.

Next, we continued to our destination at the high crags of the Sierra de la Plata. Here, avian glory awaited us at the crags of La Zarga, where we spent the rest of our day in the realm of the Griffon Vulture, enjoying the comings and goings from the colony of these huge raptors. With their 2.8m wingspans. There were around ninety nests on the cliffs here, and we enjoyed the spectacular views of the resident vultures coming and going with nesting material and smashing into Eucalyptus trees to break off further branches. Two Egyptian Vultures soared by, and Ravens and Common Kestrels were all busy. A Blue Rock Thrush surprised us from the wires.

After enjoying our final picnic in this lofty and spectacular place, we went still higher to the top of the rock formation, near the 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

Friday 20th March

With the group destined for midday flights after breakfast, it was time to leave the Cortijo El Indiviso, say goodbye to the lovely team, and make our way to Gibraltar airport for our homeward trips.

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Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026						
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			6				
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			20				
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			10			✓	
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			1				
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>		1		2			
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		2		✓		6	
Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>			1				
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			200				
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			45				
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			120				
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			50				
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			50				
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>			20				
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			3		1		
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			3				
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			2				
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			30				
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			4				
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			300				
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			200				
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			1				
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>			2				
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	4	20					
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	3				
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>		2					
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓				
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>		108		1	16		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	40	353	30	20	✓	200	
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	2		2	
Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>			30				
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			2				
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			6			10	
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		1				7	
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>					1		
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>				3	4	2	
Rüppell's Vulture	<i>Gyps rueppelli</i>				1			
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	5	20	4	80	4	160	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		179		63	162		
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>		70		55	363		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		4		1	4		

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026						
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>						1	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			2	2	3		
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	194	40	4	11	37		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>					1		
(Atlas) Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>					1		
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		1			1		
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>					2		
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				5	2		
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			1			4	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			1				
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>						1	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			1				
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	4		2	4	6	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>				6	4		
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>						10	
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		1			1		
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>			2				
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			1				
Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		1					
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		1	3	2	2	10	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		1	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			1		1	2	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			6				
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	1	1		1			
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>					1	1	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			30			200	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>					2		
Iberian Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>			15				
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		1	2	3	2	10	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			1				
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓	✓	✓	5	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		2	10	3	2	20	
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>			1		1		

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026						
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Striped Dolphin	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>		✓					
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>		✓					

Amphibians & reptiles

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026						
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Mediterranean Tree Frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>		1					
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>				✓	✓		

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026						
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>				✓	✓	✓	
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>		✓					

Other insects

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026						
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
a dung beetle	Scarabaeoidea sp.					✓		
Violet Carpenter Bee	<i>Xylocopa violacea</i>					✓		