Autumn Birding in Southern Portugal

Naturetrek Tour Report

15th – 21st September 2022



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Tour Participants - Philip Thompson & Simon Wooley (Leaders) with 12 Naturetrek Clients.

Day 1

Thursday 15th September

We had a staggered group arrival into Faro with four different flights from various parts of the UK. The time difference between was not too bad, only complicated by a lost bag causing a considerable delay before being found and reunited with a relieved client. The group relaxed over a coffee and cake in the open air while we waited.

Once all was well, we drove the short journey to Tavira and our first hotel where we checked in and had a sizeable three-course lunch in the restaurant. With our remaining time in the afternoon, we then undertook a short walk to explore the local saltpans and coastal scrub. A fenced and hedged dry pan near the hotel held a few waders among which the highlight was a Stone Curlew on the gravel track surround that quickly wandered out of sight. Reaching the main large salt pans we spent time scanning through the selection of waders present totalling 15 species. Overhead a couple of passing Slender-billed Gulls put in an appearance followed by an Audouin's Gull and a Caspian Tern making a fine start to the trip. Also making a flyby was a rather unexpected Glossy Ibis. Scanning the distant embankments of the pans we picked out a Great Egret before we headed back to the hotel to freshen up before dinner.

Day 2

Friday 16th September

A few of the group took a pre-breakfast walk to the tidal estuary to witness the sunrise and enjoy some early birding. The lovely calm quiet conditions made for a beautiful sunrise and some close viewings of a selection of waders on the shoreline. Unfortunately, a Bluethroat that posed briefly in the open on a Tamarisk was only seen by the leader, before dropping down into the dense saltmarsh vegetation to elude the group.

We continued our coastal explorations today by first visiting Castro Marim NP to the east of us on the Spanish border. The drive was soon completed and we disembarked alongside part of the large and extensive salt pan complex of the area. The first pan we had parked alongside held a fine selection of waders and Greater Flamingos, but these were a little overshadowed by the wonderful views we enjoyed of a number of Slender-billed Gulls feeding on the shallow water surface nearby. The pink flushed plumage was particularly noticeable. In the ditches lining the pans were numerous Broad Scarlet, Red-veined Darter and Lesser Emperor dragonflies. We took the path around the perimeter of the pan getting closer views of several of the waders, notably Little Stints. Our route led towards the centre of the complex where the pans were actively used for salt harvesting. Here a large flock of Audouin's Gulls were roosting, giving distant and rather hazy views. Again, a couple of unexpected Glossy Ibis flew over to drop down on the water's edge to become surprisingly difficult to pick out. Retracing our route, we reboarded the vehicles to drive around to the eastern side of the reserve, stopping on the way to scan a rather ordinary looking low hillside next to the pans. Here we soon picked out numerous roosting Stone Curlews. The more you looked the more you found, with a final estimate at 30+ birds.

We then continued on to the large Visitor Centre where we had our picnic lunch on the tables provided. On the saltmarsh bordering the Guadiana River, that forms the border with Spain, we picked up an Osprey perched on a post in the hazy distance. Once lunch was finished, we walked a short distance to overlook another large area of

salt pans that held a similar range of waders and flamingos. Notable was the small assembly of Caspian Terns roosting on the earth embankments separating the various pans.

We then undertook a rather lengthy transfer back west to visit the lagoon of San Lorenzo set within the golf resort of Quinto do Lago. Our walk led past the tidal estuary on which we saw another Osprey making a number of fishing dives as well as numerous Mediterranean Gulls and waders that included a couple of Curlews. We ultimately reached the freshwater lagoon that resulted in us finding several desirable birds. Highlights included Western Swamphen, Black Tern, numerous Iberian Magpies, further individual Audouin's Gulls and Blackheaded Weavers. The undoubted stars were the Little Bitterns, of which at least four individuals were seen, indicating a successful breeding season as most were juveniles. In the screening shelter-bed of pines several Pied Flycatchers and single Common Redstart were seen. Having spent a relaxing afternoon at the lagoon we headed back to the vehicles for our return to the hotel.

Day 3

Saturday 17th September

In complete contrast to yesterday we took an earlier start to take the lengthy transfer upcountry to visit the Alentejo on the hunt for various steppeland species. The good modern road for most of the journey meant we achieved our destination in excellent time and we were soon keeping a sharp eye out from the vehicles as we began a looping circuit of the Castro Verde SPA.

We got off to a good start with a sighting of a Black-winged Kite alongside the vehicle. A short stop at a roadside junction to have a general scan of the area produced an unexpected migrant Common Redstart in the open treeless country. Driving on we passed a rocky outcrop of boulders among which a Little Owl kept a beady eye on us as we crept past. We then reached a small reservoir among an Olive plantation where we stopped for a lengthy period of scanning. The waters edge held Common and Green Sandpipers and a few Little Egrets, but it was the passing raptors that held most interest. In short order we had Cinereous Vulture, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle and Short-toed Snake Eagle, all passing close by overhead. As we were leaving we were delighted to find a Western Black-eared Wheatear on the fence, a bird normally having departed south by now.

We continued on in a circuitous circuit with a few more scans at likely spots on the lookout for any birds of note. Eventually we struck lucky with a flock of nine Great Bustards being disturbed into flight from near the road. They flew over a low rise and out of sight, but once we had driven the short distance on, we were able to obtain some good views of the settled birds striding through the rough grassland.

We carried on into Castro Verde town where we stopped in a rather unprepossessing residential area and its treelined street. Here after a short search, we managed to pick out a single roosting Long-eared Owl peering down at us from 5m up in the canopy. Excellent views obtained by all, we headed on to our lunch destination where we enjoyed a huge feast of local dishes in the home of a local lady. Having eaten our fill, without seeming to have made much of an impact on the array of food, we headed out once more in search of more birds. After our busy morning we failed to add anything further of note but finished our day on the hilltop Chapel de Aracelis from where we could enjoy the view and cooling breeze before our long drive back to the coast.

Day 4

Sunday 18th September

Our day began with a walk through the saltmarsh vegetation and riverside in search of any wintering Bluethroats. We were unlucky in our quest but managed both Spotted and Pied Flycatchers, Sardinian Warblers and the usual array of wading birds and gulls.

We broke the journey half way with a stop at Salgados Lagoon. Here we had an abundance of birds to scan and admire. The initial spectacle were the large numbers of Glossy Ibis roosting and feeding in the lagoon. Mixed with them were plentiful Greater Flamingos, European Spoonbills and White Storks all utilising this important site. Wildfowl comprised a rich mix of familiar birds that included a couple of rather drab female Garganey that were easy to overlook. Another Western Swamphen made an appearance on the edges of the reedbeds. Among a diverse range of waders we found our first Wood Sandpiper and Common Snipe of the trip, and among the gulls we found a few Audouin's Gulls that seemed to be popping up all over this year. After an enjoyable and lengthy period of birding we regrouped at the vehicles where we had our picnic lunch before a coffee at the nearby café.

Continuing our journey westward we made another stop at the coastal bay of Boca do Rio where we walked out and up onto the cliffs from where we spotted a few European Shags and Northern Gannets (and our hotel in Sagres in the distance!). A further walk was taken alongside the nearby reedbed where it was very quiet birdwise, although a pleasant walk.

We then completed our journey, arriving in good time to check in and freshen up before a very enjoyable evening meal at our new hotel.

Day 5

Monday 19th September

For the early risers we took a pre-breakfast walk around the headland alongside the hotel to enjoy the sunrise with a few common migrants in the heathy vegetation.

After breakfast we drove the short distance to the Vale Santo area where we passed a rather rundown medley of farm buildings on which a Little Owl was seen on the rooftop. Once disembarked we took a walk alongside the short grassy grazing land. We were delighted with the detection of a flyover Dotterel, calling as it passed. In the farmyard, where an accumulation of dung and straw from the cattle had accumulated, a mixed flock of seed-eating birds were present, notably Corn Buntings and Greater Short-toed Larks, a couple of which provided good scope views for the group. A few raptors had got up with the warming day including Short-toed Snake and Booted Eagles, Honey Buzzards and Montagu's Harrier.

Returning to the vehicles we drove another very short distance to explore the open pine woodlands and sandy heath habitats. On starting the walk, we soon picked up both Woodchat Shrike and Eurasian Wryneck nearby. With a little patience the Wryneck, after a short initial view, reappeared and perched prominently in a short leafless tree enabling everyone to get a great view of this elusive and much sought-after bird. Calling from the bushes a couple of Subalpine Warblers were also picked up, and despite their skulking nature they did show on several occasions in the open. As we commenced our walk through the sandy heath a Common Redstart was seen flicking through the pines as well as the more regular Pied Flycatchers. After our initial flurry of sightings

things became a little quieter, but we were still able to enjoy several of the plants, dragonflies and butterflies as we went. A passing flock of Red-billed Choughs followed by a family party of Ravens feeding in the fallow arable fields enlivened things birdwise.

With lunch time approaching we reassembled at the vehicles before driving to the Cabranosa viewpoint, a pimple in this flat landscape that gives a surprising panoramic view, where we firstly had our lunch. We then walked up to the mound to begin a spell of raptor viewing to ascertain what species were on the move. During our time there we saw 10 species of raptor, several passing fairly close overhead, the highlight being a trio of juvenile Egyptian Vultures. With necks getting stiff and the warm sun beating down the group's thoughts began to drift towards relaxation and coffee break. We therefore headed to a local café for coffee and ice-cream before ending the day with a brief visit to the cliffs and lighthouse of Cape St. Vincent where we enjoyed the views, Northern Gannets, Black Redstart and passing Peregrine.

Day 6

Tuesday 20th September

The day had arrived for our much-anticipated pelagic trip in search of seabirds. The weather could not have been any kinder with minimal breeze and glassy, flat calm sea. The group were excited as we headed out towards the continental shelf and deeper waters. It was not long before we spotted our first Cory's Shearwaters cruising, past soon to be followed by a wonderful range of Skuas, Shearwaters and Petrels. Not to be outdone by the birds we firstly had some wonderful close encounters with both Bottlenose and Common Dolphins that swam alongside and beneath our small rib boat, allowing us to watch them swimming beneath the surface as well as their breathing snorts on the surface.

Having reached the deeper water several miles offshore we began to spot other seabirds. We stopped the engine and after some judicious chumming of delectable fish heads etc it was not long before several shearwaters began to drift past followed by the diminutive European Storm Petrels. Paying careful attention to the petrels we succeeded in picking out a couple of Wilson's Storm Petrels. Shearwaters comprised all five expected species giving amazing views as many of them rested on the flat calm sea. Joining this array of birds a few passing Great and Arctic Skuas provided for a rush of adrenalin as they harried the gulls. Time flew by and we were seemingly soon having to head back to the distant harbour, by now over the horizon and out of sight!

Back in the harbour we were elated by our successful trip as we walked back to the hotel to freshen up and relax before heading out once more for a picnic lunch at the Cabronosa heath. There were fewer raptors on the move today due to the lack of wind so we only spent a comparatively short spell scanning the skies before we opted to take a walk in the pine woods in search of passerine migrants. Among the regular flycatchers we found Common Redstart, Turtle Dove (that nearly became a passing Sparrowhawks lunch!), Melodious Warbler, Whinchat, Northern Wheatear and Woodchat Shrike among the commoner species. After a long and hot day we then headed back to the hotel a little earlier to relax before dinner.

Day 7

Wednesday 21st September

For our final morning we returned to the Vale Santo area for a last attempt and finding the elusive small population of Little Bustards found on the Sagres peninsular. Not surprisingly we failed, needing a little more

luck, but did see several of the familiar raptors rising into the air in the process of reorientating themselves for their southward migration.

Back at the hotel with all our luggage safely packed we were blessed with one final highlight with a passing flock of Lesser Kestrels actively feeding on the abundant dragonflies caught and eaten on the wing. Up to 10 birds swirled around above us as we made our farewell and headed back to Faro Airport and our homeward flights.

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Species Lists

Birds

				D	ate: Se	eptem	ber 20	22	
	Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1	Red-legged Partridge	Alectoris rufa			✓		✓		
2	Northern Shoveler	Spatula clypeata		✓		✓			
3	Garganey	Spatula querquedula				2			
4	Gadwall	Mareca strepera		✓		✓			
5	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	✓	✓		✓			
6	Eurasian Teal	Anas crecca				✓			
7	Red-crested Pochard	Netta rufina				1			
8	Common Pochard	Aythya ferina				✓			
9	Pallid Swift	Apus pallidus		✓					
10	Alpine Swift	Tachymarptis melba			✓			✓	
11	Great Bustard	Otis tarda			9				
12	Rock Dove	Columba livia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	✓	✓	✓		✓		
14	European Turtle Dove	Streptopelia turtur					4	1	
15	Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Western Swamphen	Porphyrio porphyrio		1		1			
17	Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus		✓		✓			
18	Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra		✓		✓			

			Date: September 2		ber 20	2022			
	Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
19	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis		✓	✓	✓			
20	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus		1					
21	Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus roseus	✓	✓	✓	✓			
22	Eurasian Stone-curlew	Burhinus oedicnemus	1	30					
23	Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	✓	✓	✓	✓			
24	Pied Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta	✓	√		√			
25	Northern Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus			√				
26	Grey Plover	Pluvialis squatarola	✓	√					
27	Eurasian Dotterel	Charadrius morinellus					1		
28	Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula	✓	√	√	√			
29	Kentish Plover	Charadrius alexandrinus	✓	√					
30	Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus	√	√			✓		
31	Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata	√	√					
32	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa	√	√		√			
33	Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres	√	√		√			
34	Ruff	Calidris pugnax	-	√		√			
		, <u>, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , </u>	√	√		✓			
35	Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea	√	✓ ✓		✓ ✓			
36	Sanderling	Calidris alba							
37	Dunlin	Calidris alpina		√		√			
38	Little Stint	Calidris minuta	√	√		√			
39	Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago				1			
40	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	✓	√		✓			
41	Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola				1			
42	Green Sandpiper	Tringa ochropus		√	✓				
43	Common Redshank	Tringa totanus	✓	✓		✓			
44	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	✓	✓					
45	Slender-billed Gull	Chroicocephalus genei	✓	✓		✓			
46	Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus	✓	✓		✓			
47	Audouin's Gull	Ichthyaetus audouinii	✓	✓		✓			
48	Mediterranean Gull	Ichthyaetus melanocephalus	✓	✓		✓			
49	Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
51	Caspian Tern	Hydroprogne caspia	✓	✓					
52	Sandwich Tern	Thalasseus sandvicensis	✓	✓		✓		✓	
53	Common Tern	Sterna hirundo						2	
54	Little Tern	Sternula albifrons	✓	√		√			
55	Black Tern	Chlidonias niger		1					
56	Great Skua	Stercorarius skua						2	
57	Parasitic Jaeger	Stercorarius parasiticus						3	
58	Wilson's Storm Petrel	Oceanites oceanicus						2	
59	European Storm Petrel	Hydrobates pelagicus							
60	Cory's Shearwater	Calonectris borealis						√	
61	Sooty Shearwater	Ardenna grisea						3	
62	Great Shearwater	Ardenna gravis						√	
63	Manx Shearwater	Puffinus puffinus						1	
64	Balearic Shearwater	Puffinus mauretanicus						1	
65	White Stork	Ciconia ciconia	√	√		√		-	
66	Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus	\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \	'		✓	√	√	
							\ \ \		
67 68	European Shag	Gulosus aristotelis	,	,		√		1	
กก	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	✓	✓	1	✓	1	1	

			Date: September 2		ber 20	022			
	Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
70	Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia	✓	✓		✓			
71	Little Bittern	Ixobrychus minutus		4					
72	Western Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
73	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea		√	√	√	√	√	
74	Great Egret	Ardea alba	✓	√					
75	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	✓	√	√	√		√	
76	Western Osprey	Pandion haliaetus		2	1		1		
77	Black-winged Kite	Elanus caeruleus			1				
78	Egyptian Vulture	Neophron percnopterus					3		
79	European Honey Buzzard	Pernis apivorus					√	√	√
80	Cinereous Vulture	Aegypius monachus			1				
81	Short-toed Snake Eagle	Circaetus gallicus			1		10		
82	Booted Eagle	Hieraaetus pennatus				1	4	√	V
83	Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	Aquila adalberti			1	-			
84	Bonelli's Eagle	Aquila fasciata			1				
85	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus			<u> </u>		√	√	
86	Northern Goshawk	Accipiter gentilis					•	1	
87	Western Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus		1		1	√	'	
88	Hen Harrier	Circus cyaneus		'	1	'	1		1
89	Montagu's Harrier	Circus pygargus			1		1		<u> </u>
90	Black Kite	Milvus migrans		1		2	√	√	
91	Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo		1	1	1	√	√	
92	Little Owl				i e	H	2	V	1
		Athene noctua		1	1	П			
93	Long-eared Owl	Asio otus		,			,	/	
94	Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops		√	√ 		√	✓	√
95	Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis		✓	1	1	4		
96	Eurasian Wryneck	Jynx torquilla		,			1		-
97	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major		√				Н	-
98	Iberian Green Woodpecker	Picus sharpei		✓					10
99	Lesser Kestrel	Falco naumanni		,	,	,	,	,	10
100	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus		✓	√	✓	√	√	✓
101	Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus					√		-
102	Iberian Grey Shrike	Lanius meridionalis		1	√		√		
103	Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator					√	√	
104	Iberian Magpie - N	Cyanopica cooki		√	√	√			
105	Eurasian Magpie	Pica pica	✓	✓	√	✓	√	✓	√
106	Red-billed Chough	Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax					30		✓
107	Carrion Crow	Corvus corone			✓		✓		<u> </u>
108	Northern Raven	Corvus corax			✓		6	✓	√
109	Eurasian Skylark	Alauda arvensis					✓		✓
110	Thekla's Lark	Galerida theklae					✓	✓	✓
111	Crested Lark	Galerida cristata	✓	✓	✓	✓			<u> </u>
112	Woodlark	Lullula arborea			✓				
113	Greater Short-toed Lark	Calandrella brachydactyla					✓		✓
114	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia		✓		✓	✓		<u> </u>
115	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica		✓	✓	✓			
116	Eurasian Crag Martin	Ptyonoprogne rupestris						✓	
117	Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum				✓		✓	✓
118	Red-rumped Swallow	Cecropis daurica	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
119	Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti		Н		Н			
120	Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus		√	√	√	√	√	√

			Date: September 2022		22	22			
	Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
121	Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita		√	√			√	
122	Melodious Warbler	Hippolais polyglotta					1	1	
123	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis	✓	√		√			
124	Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla				√			
125	Common Whitethroat	Curruca communis					1	✓	
126	Western Subalpine Warbler	Curruca iberiae					✓		
127	Sardinian Warbler	Curruca melanocephala	✓	✓	√	√	√	√	
128	Spotless Starling	Sturnus unicolor	✓	√	√	√	√	√	√
129	Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
130	Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata			√	√	√	√	
131	European Robin	Erithacus rubecula		1					
132	Bluethroat	Luscinia svecica	L						
133	Common Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos					Н		
134	European Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula hypoleuca	✓	√	√	√	√	√	√
135	Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros					√		
136	Common Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus		1	√		√	√	
137	Blue Rock Thrush	Monticola solitarius					√		
138	Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra			√	√	√	√	√
139	European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola	✓	√	√	√	√	√	√
140	Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe	✓	√	√	√	√	√	√
141	Western Black-eared Wheatear	Oenanthe hispanica			2				
142	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	✓	√	√	√	√	√	V
143	Black-headed Weaver - I	Ploceus melanocephalus		√					
144	Common Waxbill - I	Estrilda astrild		√					
145	Western Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava iberiae		√	√	√	√		V
146	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea						1	
147	White Wagtail	Motacilla alba			Н	√	√		
148	Tawny Pipit	Anthus campestris					2		1
149	Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis					4		
150	Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis					1		
151	European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris						1	
152	Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina					√	√	
153	European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	✓	√	√	√	√	√	√
154	Corn Bunting	Emberiza calandra			√		√		√

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name
	Papilionidae
Old World Swallowtail	Papilio machaon
	Pieridae
Clouded Yellow	Colias croceus
Large White	Pieris brassicae
Small White	Pieris rapae
	Lycaenidae
Southern Brown Argus	Aricia cramera
Geranium Bronze - I	Cacyreus marshalli
Long-tailed Blue	Lampides boeticus

Common name	Scientific name
Common Blue	Polyommatus icarus
	Nymphalidae
Red Admiral	Vanessa atalanta
	Satyrinae
Meadow Brown	Maniola jurtina
Speckled Wood	Pararge aegeria
	Hesperidae
Sage Skipper	Muschampia proto

Other

Common name	Scientific name
Mammals	
Granada Hare - N	Lepus granatensis
European Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus
Short-beaked Common Dolphin	Delphinus delphis
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	Tursiops truncatus
Reptile & Amphibians	
Iberian Water Frog	Rana perezi
European Pond Terrapin	Emys orbicularis
Red-eared Terrapin	Trachemys scripta
Moorish Gecko	Tarentola mauritanica
Dragonflies & Damselflies	
	Aeshnidae
Lesser Emperor	Anax parthenope
	Libellulidae
Red-veined Darter	Sympetrum fonscolombii
Broad Scarlet	Crocothemis erythraea
Violet Dropwing	Trithemis annulata