

Autumn Birding in Southern Portugal

Naturetrek Tour Report

15th – 21st September 2025



Caspian Tern



Cory's (rear) and Great Shearwaters



Little Bustard



Sei (or possibly Bryde's) Whale

Tour report by Glyn Evans



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Summary

Autumn bird migration is always a mouthwatering prospect for birders. Add to this the value of warm sunshine, an excellent range of habitats, wholesome food (including a traditional banquet), comfortable hotels at prime locations and a boat trip to the Atlantic shelf, and you can't help but come with some high expectations. This trip was no different.

Day 1

Monday 15th September

Arrival

The view from the plane coming into South Portugal suggested that this summer hadn't produced quite the drought conditions seen in previous years, as healthy bodies of water were evident from on high. Good communication between us and the clients allowed us to procure and fully load the vans quickly, enabling us to hit the road within an hour of the plane touching down.

As transfers go, the drive from Faro to Tavira was a mercifully short one, at around forty minutes. Before we even got out at the van, we were able to note Black-winged Stilt, Turnstone, Sanderling, Yellow-legged Gull, several young Greater Flamingoes and Ringed Plover on the roadside salt pans, before we entered the foyer of the hotel. We were too early to check in, but left our bags tidily in the foyer. The outdoor bar provided a variety of lunch for refreshment before we decided to change into lighter clothing and explore the beach, scrub, and salt pans for a couple of hours to get the tour going.

On the approach to the beach the tremolo, we heard the tremolo call of a Whimbrel; there were two on either side of the estuary. Grey Plovers stealthily pranced on the opposite shore, whilst the chalky-white plumage of a couple of Mediterranean Gulls dazzled in the bright sunlight. As we peered into the tidal lagoon, the exposed area of mud revealed a good variety of other waders: Dunlins, a few Black-tailed Godwits, Common Redshanks, a single Bar-tailed Godwit, more Whimbrels, Oystercatchers, Curlews and Kentish Plovers. A female Sardinian Warbler briefly showed flitting around in the nearby scrub. The distinctive trilling call of the Red-rumped Swallow was distinguished from the more familiar knife-sharpening call of the Barn Swallow. A short stroll through the scrub to reach the salt pans was rewarded with a couple of male Stonechats, with a skulking male Sardinian Warbler nearby.

On the lagoons was a reasonable array of waders, featuring more of what we saw on the way in, plus a single Caspian Tern hunting in the lagoons. An extremely distant Black-winged Kite had been seen on the way to the lagoon, which drifted still further before others could find and enjoy it in the scope.

Slowly, we started to find some added quality for the list: a couple of Ospreys, Avocet, a single Slender-billed Gull in pristine condition, another distant Black-winged Kite mobbing one of the Ospreys, several thousand Fiddler Crabs, and some rather elegant Black-winged Stilts. Some very bright-looking juvenile Willow Warblers were narrowly surpassed in the brightness stakes by a couple of Iberian Yellow Wagtails. On the approach road back to the hotel, a very smart Audouin's Gull perched on the fence between two salt lagoons.

People's energy levels were visibly dropping, and some made a beeline for the shade of the hotel foyer. A fine buffet dinner was enjoyed by all, looking ahead to a forecast of magnificent weather during the week.

Day 2

Tuesday 16th September

Ria Formosa

The initial itinerary of visiting both Ria Formosa nature reserve and Castro Marim seemed a little ambitious, involving visiting two reserves each half an hour's drive from Tavira. We decided to visit Ria Formosa in the morning with lunch to follow.

The weather was again forecast to be hot, sunny and with little breeze. The drive through the salt pans yielded the usual selection of waders, and the Red-rumped Swallows were congregating on the wires close to the little house, but on the approach to these birds a very pale bird appeared to be on the wing with them; it was presumably a leucistic individual. As we neared the wires, we first looked at the swallows, and then at a bright yellow Budgerigar perched alongside them!

The drive to Ria Formosa was without incident, and as usual, the little man in the kiosk asked for the entrance fees in cash, declaring his little toilet out of order and out of bounds. On the way to the visitor centre loos, we spied a couple of Pied Flycatchers in the pines, and a couple of White Storks flew overhead. The advance party had a brief sighting of a Honey Buzzard before reaching the visitor centre, where refurbishment work was being undertaken. Adam's rearguard group countered this with the sighting of a Crested Tit.

Once everyone had used the facilities, we took a very gentle stroll down to the old mill and the tidal lagoons, which were full of water: the tide was in. On the shore were two Ringed Plovers, a Sanderling nestling in the flotsam, and a Common Sandpiper. Beyond this, the area around the pier featured several Turnstones and a few Whimbrels, with Black-headed, Lesser Black-backed and Mediterranean Gulls also on view. Red-rumped Swallows flew around the buildings with a few young in tow, along with a single House Martin.

Sandwich Terns and a couple of Caspian Terns were patrolling the channel out to sea, and a Little Tern briefly flew through. An Osprey gave decent scoped views for everyone, and a Broad Scarlet dragonfly was close to the tide mill. The stroll around the lagoons featured several Sardinian Warblers, a few Zitting Cisticolas, and both Blue and Lesser Emperor dragonflies. As we rounded the corner after the second lagoon, we finally found a decent mixed flock of waders, which featured Turnstone, Dunlin, Grey Plover, Whimbrel, Ringed Plover and a few Red Knots, some of which still had red bellies remaining from their summer plumage. We were quite surprised not to find rarer waders, but not upset, having such a vibrant throng to admire.

Yellow Wagtails were flying around, and occasional flypasts from Black-winged Stilts, Greater Flamingoes, Slender-billed Gulls and White Storks kept us entertained, but by now people were getting hot. We were waylaid by three other birders whose telescope was pointed up into a canopy of trees. What an earth were they watching? A Mediterranean Chameleon!

Soon both the leaders' telescopes were pointed in the same direction, trying very hard to pick out the brilliantly camouflaged reptile as it climbed stealthily toward the top of the tree. Eventually, everyone gained decent views,

and some of us even managed a photo. The hide overlooking the pond yielded some new ducks for the tour, namely Gadwall and Shoveler, with Moorhen, Coot, Little Grebe, and a few remaining Little Egrets at the heronry completed the cast list.

We had had a busy morning and it was 12.45pm before we realised that we really ought to be preparing lunch, so with a spring in our step we returned to the vans and laid out a substantial picnic for all concerned. The clients were most impressed, but by the time we had finished and cleared away the picnic, it was after 2.00pm. At the prospect of spending another hour in the van to gain only a relative short time at a location with similar habitat (namely Castro Marim), we felt the better option was to linger here, giving some of the group the opportunity to relax around the picnic tables in the shade, in order to gain better views of the Iberian Magpies which had been sneaking around us all lunchtime, or to get a glimpse of the Wryneck that had briefly called during lunch, setting off a couple of Little Owls in outraged response. Crested Larks were also flying around the picnic area, issuing their “swissy swissy” calls.

Only a few of us made the afternoon walk down to the tide mill, where we found a small amount of shade and a sea breeze to keep us reasonably cool, while observing a few of the same wader species that we had seen in the morning, some giving exceptionally good views. The most amusing moment of the day was when a Little Egret caught a substantial flatfish, which it then attempted to swallow several times, but eventually gave up. We rejoined the rest of the team back at the picnic spot, by which time it was 4.15pm, so we set about a slow drive back to the hotel, giving the option of a quick wander through the scrub up to the beach.

However, most of the clients, having had a day in bright sunshine, significant heat and a substantial lunch, were quite happy to retire!

Day 3

Wednesday 17th September

Castro Verde and banquet

Clients were advised not to breakfast too heavily. They were also asked to be ready to leave at 8.30am, in order to make the most of time in the field, with a long journey to and from Castro Verde, for the now-legendary traditional Portuguese buffet, laid on by Helena at her home. It would be our only opportunity to look for birds on the plains of Alentejo, so making the most of the time could add some new and maybe prestigious names to the species checklist.

The leaders benefited from not having to shop for a picnic, and enjoyed a relatively laid-back breakfast with the clients. We hit the road, impressively, at 8.28am! The salt pans served up the usual briny treats, but we were keen to get moving so we could reach the plains as the first thermals started to lift the raptors off the ground.

It was quite a while before we saw any raptors. Corn Buntings, Stonechats and several Iberian Grey Shrikes showed first, with the latter being fairly skittish and unwilling to pose for photos. Quite a few immature Northern Wheatears were more confiding. Adam radioed through that he had spotted a couple of Griffon Vultures ahead. We found a suitable place to pull over, and found six Griffons at various ranges. Shortly, another large raptor was spotted quite close through the trees. I had to lean over to see it, but it was clearly an eagle. Yep – it was a Spanish Imperial! It was a really smart immature bird, dappled with pale brown, soaring quite low at only a couple of

hundred metres range. We all had time to get out and fill our boots, with wonderful views of this charismatic young bird, with some reasonable photos for souvenirs.

Soon enough, we reached the impressive high point at Ermida de Nossa Senhora de Aracelis, with several more Northern Wheatears lining the track on the way up. By this time, the weather was incredibly hot, with the temperature in the minibus showing as 41°C! This heat bounced off the paving on the patio in front of the small chapel, so we set up the scopes for a scan. There was a faint haze in the distance in the still conditions, but soon enough, one or two Griffon Vultures were found. Adam then found a Cinereous Vulture being chaperoned from above by a pair of Ravens. A medium-sized raptor came from behind and flapped over our heads. Another Common Buzzard to go with the one seen earlier? No: as it eventually banked around and gave us a side view, it revealed itself to be a dark-morph Honey Buzzard. Then, another distant, long-winged eagle appeared: a juvenile Bonelli's! This had been a good haul of raptors, with the scope even deployed for views of Red-veined Darters found by two clients.

We had earned a slap-up lunch and boy, were we going to get one! We arrived bang on time, and were pleased to find both Helena and her daughter, Elodie, on duty. Some rather red faces blanched a little when they saw the quantity of food laid out. No, no-one else was coming!

On the way back, we moved at leisurely pace, as the vans were more heavily laden than on the outward journey! Ponds on the way back featured Little Ringed Plover, Green and Common Sandpipers, Marsh Harrier and Lapwing. We passed the Spanish Imperial Eagle's nest I had found in the spring (to find no-one at home) and then went to a lovely reservoir in the middle of an olive plantation: it produced Greenshank, Green and Common Sandpipers, Black-winged Stilts, one Tufted Duck and Marsh Harrier. Red-legged Partridges at last presented themselves well at the water hole at the end of the track (which was almost totally evaporated) with Corn Buntings, a juvenile Yellow Wagtail, two Green Sandpipers, Linnets and loads of Iberian Water Frogs all eking out some moisture. We returned at 6.25pm, after a long but rewarding day in the field.

Day 4

Thursday 18th September

Transfer day

Our drive from Tavira to Sagres would require roughly two and a half hours. This would allow us a generous amount of time to stop by at Quinta do Lago, where we would have lunch in the little bandstand beside the car park if it was free. After that, if there was time, we would visit the lagoons at Salgados.

We were away from the hotel promptly at 9.00am, but didn't linger for very long at the salt pans, as there was nothing new to enjoy. We arrived at Quinta do Lago before 10.00am and elected first to give people the opportunity for a toilet break, by taking the boardwalk across the estuary to the dunes, where there was a cafe with a toilet. There was a decent selection of waders from the boardwalk, including Turnstone, Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Dunlin, Sanderling, Whimbrel, Curlew and Greenshank. There was also a decent selection of gulls, namely Mediterranean, Black-headed, Yellow-legged, Slender-billed and Audouin's. The scrub between the estuary and the cafe didn't hold much, but other waterbirds kept us entertained on the way back: Spoonbills, Cormorants and a splendid Caspian Tern, with its huge red bill glowing in the sun light, giving crippling views to the advance party.

The walk along the boardwalk to the hide yielded a Whinchat and a couple of Common Waxbills, and the usual Sardinian Warblers. Adam glimpsed a rather peachy-looking warbler, which may have been a female Subalpine, but it didn't emerge. We also had an early sighting of a female and juvenile Black-headed Weavers. We could see some Glossy Ibises perched on an area of flattened reeds right in front of the hide. Once in the hide, there was a feast of birds.

First, a Western Swamphen appeared from the reeds, keeping company with a pair of Gadwalls. Later, not one but two Little Bitterns emerged from the reeds to show quite well, for as long as it took to spear some unfortunate sprats from the water. Audouin's Gulls regularly flew over the hide and occasionally settled on the lake, while Kingfishers commuted across on a regular basis. Small, bright yellow shapes began to show on distant reeds, and eventually came closer to reveal themselves as splendid male Black-headed Weavers. We picked up a distant Marsh Harrier, and as we left the hide to go for lunch, an Osprey flew over. At least two more Caspian Terns were seen on the way back to the bandstand, where we ate another fine picnic, before we left at around 2.00pm.

Some unfortunate performance from the satnav had us going the wrong way a couple of times, but on both occasions this was corrected fairly swiftly, such that we arrived at Salgados with at least an hour and a quarter before we had to leave.

Broad Scarlet dragonflies, together with Lesser Emperor and Iberian Bluetail damselfly were the rewards some got for examining the wet margins to the lagoon, while on the lagoon itself we saw more Kingfishers, another Western Swamphen, several Glossy Ibises, two Marsh Harriers and numerous Yellow Wagtails flying around calling. A Reed Warbler preened itself in the nearby tamarisk. The only Little Tern of the day was patrolling the lagoon where the initially distant Spoonbill was now closer in, tempting some of us into a walk to the shallow end of the lagoon. When we reached the far end of the lagoon we looked across the field where, in a nearby tree, two Turtle Doves were roosting with the more numerous Collared Doves. On the ground were more doves, a pair of Linnets, Yellow and a Grey Wagtails, plus up to a dozen Greater Short-toed Larks. We had stayed for longer than the half an hour we had suggested, so we hurried back to the vans in order to leave on time. We arrived at the Memmo Baleeira in Sagres, just on time at 5.30pm.

Day 5

Friday 19th September

Pelagic boat trip

The day started with overcast conditions. The previous evening, when asked what kind of conditions we might expect and the type of boat we would use, four people dropped out. By the morning, there were only eight of us left, including the leaders.

There was a slight rush to get everything organised, as one of the electronic van "keys" stopped working temporarily and with breakfast only served from 7.30am, we would struggle to get ready to leave for the quay at 8.40am. At least we only needed one van!

It had begun to spit just a little by the time we drove down to the quay. The office was open and we were greeted by Luana and taken down to the boat, where we were introduced to the skipper, Ricardo. Soon, we were speeding out toward the Atlantic continental shelf edge, and within a couple of kilometres the first Cory's Shearwater and a

European Storm Petrel were spotted. From his slightly elevated vantage point at the wheel, Ricardo spotted a large flock of feeding birds some distance away, and made a beeline for them but before we arrived, we came across another couple of rafts of birds, the first of which were Cory's Shearwaters. Then there was another raft, which also featured a Great Shearwater and several storm petrels, of which up to half a dozen were Wilson's! To our great delight, these delightful little birds came very close to the boat, exhibiting all of the key features: longer wings, longer legs with yellow webbing on the feet, all-dark underwings and the apparent ability to walk on water! Then we had some more excitement, as a loud puff was heard and a spout of vapour was seen, followed by a very long body and a pointy dorsal fin. The identification at the time was as Bryde's Whale, but close examination of the photos and consultation with Naturetrek HQ later suggest that it was more likely a Sei Whale.

Ricardo managed to pick up the track of the whale and we were eventually treated to close views of it as it left behind several footprints of flat water. By then, we had seen several Common Dolphins, which had given a great show of coming alongside and bow-riding, but the whale was in a different class!

Having enjoyed the whale, we started searching some of the nearby rafts of birds, finding a Sooty Shearwater to add to the single Balearic Shearwater we had seen earlier, to give us all four shearwater species we might have hoped to find.

We ventured further out to sea, and soon noticed another large flock of feeding seabirds. As we closed in, in the midst of the flock, some pointy objects were sticking out of the water. We realised one of the pointy objects was circling around the others, and that the stationary pointy bits were the fins of a dead Marlin. The fin moving around it was clearly interested in feeding from it. Hammerhead Sharks were known to be in the area but this thing seemed to be quite a large shark. As we manoeuvred around the dead Marlin the fin, unperturbed, passed closely by, revealing itself to belong to a three-metre long Mako Shark! A couple of times it grabbed at the carcass and pulled it underwater, giving it a little more purchase to bite off a chunk of it. In twenty years of doing the job Ricardo had never seen a Mako Shark in these waters! We enjoyed it for several minutes, but then further on, we stopped at another raft of birds, beyond which there was another triangular object that seemed to be moving. A rather smaller fin was meandering behind it. This one was a Smooth Hammerhead shark! Wow!

Our tour finished at 11.30am, and we were soon back at the hotel. While I was chatting to the hotel manager to try to straighten out some dietary issues, Adam had started to lay out the picnic lunch on the balcony outside the restaurant. We agreed to meet in the foyer at 2.10pm for a drive along the track to the heath at Cabranosa. The cloud cover of the morning had now cleared to blue skies, and we hoped that raptors would be on the move.

We stopped only briefly on the track to the mound for both Spotted and Pied Flycatchers, and we made the short walk to the top of the hill, greeting some Welsh people birding from the shade on the way up. They had enjoyed a good smattering of Honey Buzzards, Booted Eagles, Black Kites, Short-toed Snake Eagles and Sparrowhawks. Over the next hour or so, we enjoyed the same, with some fairly nice views, plus a couple of Marsh Harriers. Small birds around the scrub were not as plentiful, but we did briefly see a Nightingale by the pond, and a Melodious Warbler in nearby bushes on the top of the mound. The sun was now quite hot, so after observing the area around the pond for fifteen minutes, people were starting to feel a little overheated!

I was reminded by more than one client that we had promised a trip to the ice cream parlour; so the intention was to provide exactly that, after a short diversion along a track to the farm and the campsite. We came across some

fields on the left, where I explained to both groups via the intercom that this area is where we had seen Little Bustards in the spring, when the males are less camouflaged. With the parched grass now appearing to offer brilliant camouflage, we didn't really expect to find the bustards, so I drifted on at a steady pace, intending to look more intently for Greater Short-toed Larks on the far side of the same field and, possibly, Red-billed Choughs and Little Owls around the farm.

As it turned out, Adam called over the intercom that he had seen a Little Bustard! With slight irritation that I had missed seeing it, we did a seven-point turn on the narrow road and headed back towards Adam, pulling up nose-to-nose where he appeared to be looking on the opposite side of the track to where we'd always seen the bustards before. He quietly mentioned on the radio that one bird was no more than twenty metres away! To our astonishment, the bird was walking around completely unbothered by us, so we could take photographs of the four birds, one still showing signs of its spring plumage. Adam and his group were so focused on watching the birds that they didn't see motorists creep up behind and get out of the car, wondering whether there had been a crash between the two vans! We took the hint, and exited! Adam's group decided to go as far as the farmhouse before turning around to go back in to Sagres for ice cream. They were gone for several minutes. The reason came via a simple message on the WhatsApp group: "Little Owl and Choughs".

We weren't turning back now; people had got attached to the idea of an ice cream, so we didn't double back down the road to meet Adam's team, but instead radioed through a hurry-up call, in case the parlour closed before 5.00pm. It didn't. So, in we trooped to sample some high-quality ice cream, with nearly twenty different flavours to choose from, celebrating a fantastic day of sightings.

Day 6

Saturday 20th September

Quinta da Rocha

The staff at the A Rocha centre kindly permitted us to use their garden for our picnic lunch, so we were definitely going there (to Quinta da Rocha), but first, we had a quick whizz around some of the sites west of Sagres.

We started at the derelict old Fort (Forte do Beliche) halfway out to the lighthouse, where on previous tours Black Redstart and Blue Rock Thrush have been found. On this occasion it was no different, with probably a couple of families of Black Redstart showing very well and regularly; the Blue Rock Thrushes were a little distant to be ideal. A sea mist was billowing around the lighthouse, but we went there anyway, in the hope that the mist might clear in short order.

It was not to be. We did find Gannets and Cory's Shearwater flying quite close to the shore below us, but not much else, so we ticked the box to say we'd been there, and quickly diverted back down the road towards Sagres, from where we took the track out toward the farmhouse and beyond. Unbelievably, we found the Little Bustards again, even closer to the road this time; they were lit up by the morning sun. Adam also found a Tawny Pipit nearby, which was unfortunately walking through the vegetation, appearing and disappearing to such an extent that not everyone got onto it. While there were no Whinchats lining the road this time, we did hear Skylark for the first time, and as we got nearer to the farmhouse there was a large number of birds feeding near the cattle: Spotless Starlings, Rock Doves, House Sparrows, the odd Corn Bunting and Crested and Greater Short-toed Larks.

I was watching the clock, keen to be on time getting to Quinta da Rocha, so once we drove through the farmhouse and past a closely-cropped meadow, where there were several Crested Larks (but sadly no Thekla's), there was really only time for a quick walk through the woodland at the top of the hill. During half an hour we observed both Spotted and Pied Flycatchers, plus Southern Brown Argus and Common Blue butterflies. A small brown skipper butterfly failed to settle for identification. The paw tracks that we saw on the sandy track were reckoned to be those of a Beech Marten.

We briefly returned to the hotel, but enthusiasm for Quinta da Rocha was such that everyone was back at the vans ten minutes later, and we arrived bang on time at 12.40pm. During lunch, Iberian Water Frogs were observed in the long-redundant swimming pool at the A Rocha centre, and a Large White butterfly which flew through the garden was the only one of the tour. Clouded Yellow and Swallowtail were also seen, and after a fine picnic we foisted some leftover food on the staff centre and dropped some contributions into their donation tin.

We drove the short distance down to the lagoons, where the light was now hazy with overcast conditions, keeping us reasonably cool for the walk. Common Sandpipers were stuttering low over the water, and the odd Sandwich Tern was patrolling off the beach. Sanderlings were flying in and out of the lagoons as the rising tide pushed more birds our way. Roosting on an island that was yet to be submerged were some 250 gulls, the vast majority of which were Audouin's. A little further round there was another flock of probably 300 more. The total number of Audouin's on the lagoons seen during the day was in excess of 1000 birds. A few Greater Flamingoes graced the first lagoon, but it was soon obvious that the main flock was on the further lagoon. Whimbrels occasionally announced their presence.

As we got to the second lagoon we stopped at the junction with the causeway between them and observed Sanderlings, Ringed and Kentish Plovers and Dunlins, a few Black-winged Stilts and some Redshanks. The intention was to walk some of the way round the lower lagoons, which were less full of water. up to pair of metal containers, where another pair of bird watchers appeared to be doing a survey. As we skirted the second lagoon, we were delighted to see a number of male Broad Scarlet dragonflies hunting on the sea wall close to us. We scanned through each lagoon for different waders, but it wasn't until we reached the containers that the first Little Stint eventually showed; frustratingly, it was walking along the far shore of a bund, behind which it disappeared from view. I escorted the group down to the containers, from where we eventually saw the stint as it emerged. The tide was still not at its high point, so a number of waders were still coming into the lagoons, giving us plenty of interest. A pair of Avocets was seen and another Little Stint showed before suddenly all of the gulls took to the air: an adult male Peregrine crashed through the lagoons. They soon settled, but were again disturbed by an Osprey. Two more Ospreys briefly showed over and beside the lagoons. A short squall of rain forced the less hardy clients to take shelter in the containers, while the rest of us toughed it out, looking for more birds. More Whimbrels flew past us, and some Grey Plovers dropped in. On the way back, we scanned through hundreds of assorted waders at roost on the saltings at the far end of the second lagoon. No new species were seen, but it was nevertheless a pleasure for us to be around such a good quantity and variety of birds.

As we neared the car park. a Little Owl appeared on the roof of one of the derelict buildings; it made the short hop onto a dead tree and posed for photographs. As we drove back out along the track, we saw a Whinchat perched up on the wires, and a Spotted Flycatcher in the same spot, but as we pulled away from Adam, we missed out on four Hoopoes feeding close to the van.

We arrived back in Sagres at 5.30pm, giving clients more than an hour to relax before a 7.00pm checklist, during which there was a short discussion about what we could do in the morning in the time we would have before leaving for the airport.

Day 7

Sunday 21st September

Homeward bound

In the grand tradition of Naturetrek trips, we worked out that we had around an hour and forty-five minutes for a mop-up session, during which we would hope to find better views of Red-billed Chough, Greater Short-toed lark, Little Owl and Blue Rock.

We decided to start at the furthest point; the oasis at Cabranosa. The winding track there didn't feature too many distractions, so we were quickly in place to watch the oasis from a spot close by. We waited a couple of minutes before getting out to observe the oasis from a slightly elevated position. Almost straight away, a Thekla's Lark showed well beside the small pond; it was joined by another, allowing all the clients to get great views of the key features.

Our next port of call was what we now referred to as "the bustard track". Once again, we found the four birds within a hundred metres of the road, and stopped to admire them one last time. As we headed nearer to the farmhouse, there was an area of hay laid out for the cattle, as well as a variety of birds: Rock Doves, some Spotless Starlings and half a dozen Red-billed Choughs. Whilst watching this mixed flock, a small toffee-coloured bird flew in and settled within the flock and eventually showed itself well in a place where it was easy for us to direct the clients: a Greater Short-toed Lark.

We completed the drive around the bend and past the closely-cropped meadow where the small flock of Crested Larks was still feeding. As we spun around, a pair of Red-billed Choughs flew over the vans, and another pair briefly cavorted over the farmhouse.

A slow trundle battle on the track revealed nothing new, and so we headed for the Forte do Beliche for a quick vigil. Having threaded ourselves through the doorway behind the ramparts, it turned out to be a pleasant sun trap out of the wind, and we stood at the top of the cliff. Soon, various members of the Black Redstart families started appearing, with rufous, quivering tails nicely backlit. As on the previous visit, Blue Rock Thrushes flew tantalisingly across below us, giving fleeting views. Eventually, a juvenile bird sat patiently on top of the ramparts, allowing us all to train optics and cameras on it. A male Peregrine chased Rock Doves across the bay, challenging photographers to get a clean shot.

And that was time, ladies and gentlemen. There was time enough, however, to drop by at the supermarket for last-minute retail therapy and lunches to go.

We arrived in Faro in good time, dropping one client off at her hotel, and arriving at the airport ten minutes later.

My hearty thanks go to a friendly and fun group of people, and Adam, whose ability, application and work ethic were all first class.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025						
		15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓				
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓		✓			
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓					
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓			
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓				
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓			✓	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>					4	4	4
Rock Dove (Fedral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>				12		✓	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H	✓					
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>				✓			
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓				✓	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			✓				
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓				
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	H		✓		✓	
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	✓						
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			✓				
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓	✓	✓	H		✓	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		✓					
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>						✓	
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>		✓		✓			
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	✓	✓		✓			
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>					✓		
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>					✓		
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025						
		15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>	✓			✓		1000	
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>					✓		
Wilson's Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>					12		
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>					40		
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>					200		
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>					1		
Great Shearwater	<i>Ardenna gravis</i>					10		
Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>					1		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>					200	✓	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>					✓	✓	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		✓		✓		✓	
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Little Bittern	<i>Botaurus minutus</i>				2			
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓			
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		3	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	✓						
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		✓	✓		30		
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>			✓				
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>			✓				
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			✓		4		
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>					10	2	
Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>			✓				
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>			✓				
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>					2	✓	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			✓	✓	✓		
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>					50		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			✓				
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		H			✓	✓	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		2		✓		✓	
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		H			H		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓				
Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>					H		
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>					✓	✓	✓
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>			✓	✓			
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓			✓		
Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>					20	2	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓				

Common name	Scientific name	September 2025						
		15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		H					
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓				✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		H		✓			
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>						✓	
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>					✓		✓
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>				✓			✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>				✓			
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	✓	✓	✓				
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓		✓		
European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H		H	H		
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>						✓	
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓	✓		
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>					✓	✓	
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Subalpine Warbler	<i>Curruca iberiae</i>					✓		
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓			✓	✓	
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>					✓		
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>					✓	✓	
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	✓				✓	✓	✓
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				✓	✓	✓	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Weaver - I	<i>Ploceus melanocephalus</i>				✓			
Common Waxbill - I	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>		✓		✓		✓	
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	H	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓			
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>					✓	✓	
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>						✓	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>					✓		
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓	✓	✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		H		✓	✓		
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>					✓		
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>			✓			✓	

Mammals

N = near-endemic		September 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓				
Granada Hare - N	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>			✓				
Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>			✓				
Short-beaked Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>					✓		
Sei/Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera borealis/edeni</i>					✓		
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			✓				
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓					

Amphibians & reptiles

		September 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Iberian Water Frog	<i>Pelophylax perezi</i>			✓			✓	
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	✓	✓		✓			
Mediterranean Chameleon	<i>Chamaeleo chamaeleon</i>		✓					
Red-eared Slider	<i>Trachemys scripta</i>				✓			
Spanish Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>				✓			

Fishes

		September 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
a mullet	Mugilidae sp.		✓					
a mako shark	<i>Isurus oxyrinchus/paucus</i>					✓		
Smooth Hammerhead (shark)	<i>Sphyrna zygaena</i>					✓		

Butterflies

		September 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>						✓	
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>						✓	
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>	✓	✓					
Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>	✓	✓					
Black-eyed Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche melanops</i>						✓	

Moths

		September 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Crimson Speckled	<i>Utetheisa pulchella</i>					✓		
Small Mottled Willow	<i>Spodoptera exigua</i>					✓		
a moth	<i>Cerocala scapulosa</i>						✓	

Damselflies & dragonflies

		September 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Iberian Bluetail	<i>Ischnura graellsii</i>				✓			
Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>		✓			✓		
Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>		✓		✓			
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>			✓			✓	
Broad Scarlet	<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	

Other invertebrates

		September 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
(red-tailed) parasitic fly	Tachinidae sp.						✓	
an antlion	Myrmeleontidae sp.					✓		
a fiddler crab	<i>Uca tangeri</i>	✓	✓					