

Portugal – The Algarve at Christmas

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd – 30th December 2023



Crested Tit by Tom Barclay



Kingfisher by Tom Barclay



Black Redstart by Tom Barclay



Little Bittern and Shoveler by Mark Groothuis

Tour report by Neil McMahon



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Tour participants: Emily Richens and Neil McMahon and 12 guests

Summary

In contrast to the wind and rain of the UK, the eight day tour to Portugal for the Algarve at Christmas tour enjoyed warmth, lots of sunshine and barely a whisper of wind for the whole period - and not a single drop of rain. Beginning the festive period in the east of the Algarve, our first day provided super views of Little Bittern, Western Swampheh and a variety of vibrantly plumaged waterfowl. Our second day saw us exploring the plains around Castro Verde with distant views of Little and Great Bustards, Common Cranes and a variety of raptors with roosting Long-eared Owls and a wonderful lunch out at Helena's perhaps being the highlights!

Gentler days on Christmas Days and Boxing Day were still full of wildlife which included a spectacular Bonelli's Eagle, lots of waders, stunning Bluethroats and much more. Our last few days in the west of the Algarve yielded Stone-curlews, Short-toed Eagle, Rock Bunting, an exciting view of a Goshawk being mobbed by Kestrels and Black-winged Kites and the spectacular views of the breakers and cliffs of the West Atlantic coast. Oh, and also throw in a Eurasian Eagle-Owl, an Osprey catching a fish (one of 15 species of raptor we recorded), a wintering Wryneck, outstanding cuisine and those soooo fabulous sunrises!

Day 1

Saturday 23rd December

For the majority of us, the morning was about travelling to Faro from a number of UK destinations. Leaving the airport, the tour leaders picked up two minibuses, a white Citroen with two sliding doors and a Vauxhall (also white) with only one sliding door. We quickly loaded our vehicles and a short introduction to Portuguese birding was made at Praia de Faros with a boardwalk scan across the estuary at high water. A pool unaffected by the high tide provided close views of Eurasian Spoonbills, Little Egrets, Greenshank, Common Snipe and Sanderling. A Caspian Tern flew by and Great Egret and White Stork were the pick of the bigger birds. Small birds around the car park included House Sparrow, Crested Lark and Chiffchaff. Whimbrel, Grey Plover and large gulls provided more distant views.

We drove along the causeway to the coastal strip with a platoon of more Spoonbill standing together on a vegetated island. We enjoyed a Portuguese lunch at a traditional seafood restaurant which I think was appreciated by all participants after the early starts that most of us had suffered! The sky was blue, the sunshine warm with very little breeze and we enjoyed the 15/16°C temperature. After lunch we watched several distant fishing Gannets over the sea and reboarding our vehicles we drove around to Quinto do Lago. En route we enjoyed close verge-side views of Hoopoe, Iberian Magpie, Meadow Pipit and Black Redstart.

Clambering out of the buses, two Corn Buntings flew past us and lines of Cormorants and flights of big gulls headed east. A quick check of the smaller birds added Chiffchaff, Crested Lark, Serin and Stonechat to our lists, with Cetti's Warbler and Sardinian Warbler chattering from nearby vegetation. Ducks in excellent plumage and showing closely in the lagoon included Pochard, Shoveler, Wigeon, Teal and Pintail and a couple of huge and very colourful Western Swamphehens showed well. A couple of Kingfishers raced around but for many, a pair of Little Bittern showing nicely were the choice birds. These very small herons were vocal and clambering around in the reeds. Brief views were had of more Hoopoes, Mediterranean Gulls and Sardinian Warblers and some splashing

in the water proved to be two Iberian Water Voles chasing each other. An Osprey showed a couple of times and waders on the saltmarsh included Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Turnstone and Oystercatcher with yet more Spoonbills! We saw numerous pond turtles sun-bathing around the lagoon which appeared to include both Spanish and European Pond Turtles.

With the sun setting we made our way to the Quinta do Marco hotel, some forty minutes away, arriving there at dusk. There was time for organising our room allocation and freshening up ahead of our 7pm evening meal followed by a briefing for the days to come and completion of our checklists. Having had a long day and in anticipation of another long day on the morrow, it was time to retire for the evening, with two vocal Tawny Owls hooting from the nearby wooded hillside.

Day 2

Sunday 24th December

At least one of the Tawny Owls was heard calling again before first light. Then the waking Blackbirds, their pitch quite different to the UK birds, was the next bird-sound, followed by a variety of smaller birds pitching in; finches are always a feature around this hotel with a large flock of Chaffinch flying over plus active and vocal Common Waxbills, Greenfinches, Serins and a Siskin. Blackcaps were on show and Song Thrush slipped over the citrus fruit orchards. We enjoyed our 7am breakfast, an hour earlier than the hotel usually serve it, just for us, as we needed to make an early start for the day's excursion.

Our two buses rolled out of the entrance just after 8am and we contended with some early morning mist, a very heavy dew and even saw some fog bows on our journey north to Castro Verde. White Stork, Spotless Starling, Crested Larks and a singing (but not seen) Woodlark were the best birds on offer at the services south of the town. We saw the first of many Red Kites and Ravens plus Common Buzzard and Carrion Crow before entering the traditional small rural town. We sought out a previously discovered Long-eared Owl roost and found four of these fabulous birds that paid us virtually no attention whatsoever! In fact they were so sleepy they didn't want to look our way at all and it was a job to make out their fabulous amber eyes, but at least the feather detail was there. Iberian Magpie, Spotless Starling and Siskin and Blackcap were in the same trees. We toured minor roads north of Castro Verde for open-country birds, seeing plenty of Corn Buntings, Stonechats, Zitting Cisticolas, Meadow Pipits and White Wagtails. Crested Larks were common, and the very green conditions and warm temperatures had stimulated many Calandra Larks to sing and row through the air conducting their impressive flight displays. Kestrel and more Common Buzzards and Red Kites preceded a small flock of Little Bustards which flew behind a ridge, never to be seen again. Iberian Grey Shrikes (formerly known as Southern Grey) were alert and active and vocal but didn't permit close approaches and both Rabbit and Red-legged Partridge made it onto the day list. Flowers were in bloom everywhere and it felt more like spring than winter!

We next ventured east of Castro Verde, trying a quiet country road with good habitat and an opportunity to scan quite a distance. A Peregrine initially perched on some rocks and then briefly on a telegraph pole, putting up all the larks in the field which included Skylarks, Crested and Calandra Larks. A Little Owl was perched on a closer cairn-like structure. A little further up the road there was a Common Buzzard, a Peregrine and lots of Red Kite and a large, distant eagle perched on a concrete telegraph pole which proved on closer inspection to be an immature Spanish Imperial Eagle. It was easier to confirm the identification when it flew – unfortunately in the opposite direction. Rather distant views of Black-bellied Sandgrouse were in the same airspace. We drove further down the road to turn around only to see up to 40 more Black-bellied Sandgrouse in an adjacent field, some already flying.

It was a case of being late for lunch as we clambered out of the minibuses to 'scope the remaining birds in the field.

Afterwards, we drove back to Castro Verde and sat down for one of Helena's amazing traditional Portuguese lunches with a range of classic regional dishes to sample – always simply delicious and always way too much to eat!! After waddling out of Helena's we had a look at the traditional windmill in front of her house and took the obligatory group photos!

Leaving the town we again struck out to the east towards Mertola and after a while took a farm track which provided a great vista for scanning the countryside below. We disembarked from the buses to view a hunting adult male Hen Harrier only to flush 12 Little Bustards which had been hidden in the profusion of flowers. A female Hen Harrier quartered the same field and ridiculous numbers of Calandra Larks were rowing through the air and singing loudly. Yet more Black-bellied Sandgrouse made their curious gurgling calls and continued on their way in small flocks. Stephen had seen four large birds disappear into a field but despite walking along a nearby farm track, we couldn't find them. Small Tortoiseshell and Painted Lady butterflies were busy flitting around chasing each other, with more distant viewings of Iberian Grey Shrike, Corn Bunting, Skylark and Stonechat. Another flock of about 15 Little Bustards landed in a field and simply melted into the green vegetation.

Still with no Great Bustard sightings, we upped stumps to our final destination of the day – a chapel on the summit of a small hill overlooking the plains from which we quickly located a large flock of Common Cranes feeding in some fields to the east and a family group a little closer below us. We picked out various other birds including Black Redstart, Common Buzzard and Emily spotted a flying Great Bustard which landed relatively close to the cranes and began wandering about. Richard located yet another flock of Little Bustard but at long range, and Ann located a small group of Great Bustards under some trees – all very good telescope work. Sadly, none of these birds were close at hand, but we had successfully managed to see most of the special birds of this region before we had to leave. With another lovely sunset developing, we drove away and back towards Castro Verde – only to have an immature Spanish Imperial Eagle fly across the road in front of us and land in a tree.

The remainder of the journey back to the hotel was uneventful and we were back by 7pm for our 7.30pm meal. With the restaurant full of people celebrating Christmas, we delayed our Naturetrek checklist until the following evening and retired.

Day 3

Monday 25th December

Christmas Day, and after two long days of travelling, this was to be a much gentler affair, starting with a 7.30am breakfast followed by a walk around the hotel grounds in an effort to see what was on offer. Pond Turtles were present in the small ponds, one or two Red Foxes were running up and down the slopes below the hotel and birds heard calling, but not seen, included Short-toed Treecreepers, Great Spotted Woodpecker and a distant Iberian Green Woodpecker. Common Buzzard, Kestrel and lots of Collared Doves were perched up and ever-moving finches again included Chaffinches, Linnet, Goldfinch, Siskin, Serin and Greenfinch. Blackcaps, Sardinian Warblers and Chiffchaffs were glimpsed as they moved around in the bushes.

We left the hotel at about 9.30am and headed down to Tavira Saltpans for a productive session looking for water birds. A Common Sandpiper was trotting around the roundabout by the track entrance and our initial stop/start

strategy quickly yielded Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Black-winged Stilt, a variety of common waders, Red-legged Partridge and Little Owl. Walking along the track through the salt pans to the saltmarsh at the end added a couple of Marsh Harriers, Kingfisher, Slender-billed Gulls, Mediterranean Gulls, Sardinian Warblers, a close male Bluethroat, Little Stint and a Spotted Redshank. Feeding Spoonbills were close and a few small groups of strung-out Great Flamingos were mostly in flight.

At the flooded saltmarsh there was a mobile Water Pipit, two more Bluethroat, Hoopoe, Whimbrel, Oystercatchers, Sandwich Terns and distant Gannets. We then headed back towards Tavira, with more close views of Spoonbill and Slender-billed Gulls, and utilised the facilities at a fuel station there. Next door, something in a gated barn was attracting insects with an attendant Green Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper and several Chiffchaffs sallying from the metal barn doors into the barn itself.

We headed east and took a slow drive along the track to Castro Marim reserve, seeing common waders, Hoopoe and Iberian Grey Shrike and a large flock of Linnets. At the car park we ditched our minibuses and ate our packed lunches at the picnic benches there with Chiffchaff dancing around the bushes. Osprey and a few Marsh Harriers were also observed as we ate. We then took a stroll around the reserve, but the glaring sunshine made it difficult to view Avocets and Greater Flamingos on salt pans not too far away. A couple of Marsh Harriers continued to work the saltmarsh and white butterflies included Large White, Southern Small White, Green-striped White and Bath White. Meadow Pipits seemed to be in reasonable numbers together with White Wagtails and common finches. An eagle flew into view and flew around the nearby hillocks before departing to the north-east. It's distinctive profile and quite ponderous wing-beats belied the speed of its flight as this immature Bonelli's Eagle wowed us all.

After a short drive down to the other end of the reserve we picked up on some nice birds new to the trip which included House Martin, Spanish Sparrow, Stone-curlew, Curlew Sandpiper, Sparrowhawk and a confiding Dartford Warbler. With the sun still shining, we took a gentle drive back to our hotel in the hills and enjoyed the rare treat of veranda birding which provided distant views of a Blue Rock Thrush on a rocky outcrop and some audible but not visible Crested Tits.

There was time to relax ahead of our evening meal and we dutifully completed our checklists for the last two days and held a briefing. Our meal took longer to be served than formerly, but it was most enjoyable when it did arrive. Then there was time to relax prior to retiring for our last night at Quinta do Marco.

Day 4

Tuesday 26th December

Following breakfast, we packed the minibuses and left at about 8.45am for a return to the Quinta do Lago lagoon and the surrounding area. The manicured lawns of the mansions around the golf courses were checked for interesting small birds en route. At one little hotspot there were Iberian Magpies showing rather well which we stopped to admire. Some finch/sparrow-like birds descended on the grass and these proved to be Black-headed Weavers in non-breeding plumage. Whilst watching the weavers, a bird foraging around the base of a palm tree and hidden to some of us, showed itself to be a wintering Wryneck!! The angles made it difficult viewing and it flew to the other side of the road and vanished into the vegetated borders; a couple of Serin showed well on the ground too.

On arrival at the lagoon parking area, we decamped and almost straightaway saw two Ospreys. A gentle walk to the lagoon yielded similar birds to those we found on our first day, including Little Bittern, Western Swamphen and plenty of ducks. A Ferruginous Duck with the Pochard quickly avoided detailed scrutiny by hiding in the reeds on the opposite side of the lagoon and a distant soaring Black Stork was interacting with quite a number of pale-phase Booted Eagles. At about this time one of our number suffered a medical episode which resulted in one minibus taking them straight to Faro Hospital. Thus the group was split, and the remaining minibus and its group waited here for Neil's minibus to return before moving on. The casualty was admitted and after undergoing checks was kept in for surgery two days later, resulting in a departure from the tour for this couple, which was very unexpected and their presence in the group was sorely missed.

After the minibuses were reunited, we ate a rather late lunch at some motorway services and then motored on to Salgados Lagoon which was pretty full of water with minimal marginal habitat but was good for plenty of Pintail and other ducks. Greater Flamingos, Cormorants and Spoonbills were present too and a single Glossy Ibis flew in. Although everywhere looked very green in the Algarve during this winter trip, the area itself was suffering from a lack of meaningful rain and this was clearly affecting the numbers of some species. Avocets, Common Sandpiper and Lapwing were the only waders in numbers but we enjoyed super views of Marsh Harriers, a swimming Water Rail, a couple of showy Bluethroats and low-flying Crag Martins and a couple of Swallows. Other sightings included Spanish Sparrows, Western Swamphen, Kingfisher and fly-over Audouin's and Mediterranean Gulls.

It's always hard to wrench yourself away from this place but unfortunately it was time to move on and progress to Sagres. We said good-bye and thank-you to Anne Stroud who had been with us for much of the day and helped with the hospital run. We arrived at the Memmo Baleeira Hotel at about 6pm and received a warm welcome and were shown to our rooms. The evening meal was at 7.30pm and we accomplished the logistics of picking up the patient's partner from the hospital at Faro and returning to Sagres that evening. The checklist was held over to the following night and there was time to relax a little before commencing our exploration of the Western Algarve the following day.

Day 5

Wednesday 27th December

We began our day with a bright sunrise from our balconies and the breakfast room. The hotel here has a very impressive diversity of food choices for breakfast and very attentive staff. Despite having to make difficult food choices, everyone was on time for our 8.30am muster prior to our morning excursion. Just west of Sagres we looked for and found a wintering flock of Stone-curlew numbering at least 20 birds and one of two Chough nearby was very vocal and showed nicely. Plenty of small birds included the obligatory Sardinian Warblers, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and Stonechats. We moved on a little further and visited the 'Sacred Valley' with scanning opportunities over fields and scrubby grassland. Finches and larks and Corn Buntings were present in good numbers but the raptors took a little while to materialise with Kestrel, Merlin and two Peregrines watching over the bird flocks. A little further up the valley two more Peregrines were perched in small trees and barn structures were home to two pairs of Little Owls. White Stork, pure Rock Doves, Red-legged Partridges and plenty of White Wagtails and Meadow Pipits were more birds of this open habitat.

We drove from here to the valley of Boca da Rio which was very dry and consequently missing many of the target species. The fields were dry, the stream very weak and the valley slopes quite arid and we didn't find the hoped-for Ring Ouzels that have been wintering here and seen on the last few tours. A Blue Rock Thrush was atop a

barn at the north of the valley and the small stream attracted Grey Wagtail and Green Sandpiper. Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler and just a few each of Wren and Black Redstart inhabited the steep valley slopes with a few Thekla's Larks and Meadow Pipits on the areas of level ground. Wintering Blackbirds and Robins called from the ground-hugging vegetation and Crag Martins scythed overhead. We meandered back to the minibuses after seeing Emily misjudge a wave and end up with swamped boots. A possible Dolphin sighting proved to be a scuba diver! Gannets, a couple of Shags, Audouin's and Yellow-legged Gulls were the best birds on offer looking out to sea. A picnic site nearby served us well for our first picnic of the tour!

Afterwards we drove to Martinhal and said goodbye to Blair as he was conveyed back to Faro by Emily. Birds at Martinhal included Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, White Wagtail and Meadow Pipit working the small wet saltmarsh there. Scanning out to sea the rocky islands provided views of some very distant unidentified shearwaters, more Audouin's Gulls, Shags and Cormorants. Flowers around the sand dunes attracted Clouded Yellow and Wall Brown butterflies and we tracked down a busy and buzzy flock of Common Waxbills feeding on some grass fronds. Standard birds included Black Redstart, Stonechat, Serin, Blackcap and Sardinian Warbler plus tail-dipping Chiffchaffs. The one minibus then shuttled the party to the tip of Cape St Vincent where birds on view included Blue Rock Thrush, Thekla's Lark, Gannet, Audouin's Gull and typical small birds of the tough Mediterranean-style scrub. Unfortunately there were plenty of tourists there too, many unhappy that the Centre at the end of the Cape was shut (a Café, the Interpretation Centre and the toilets have seemingly been shut since August 2023).

Our last venue for the day was the harbour which hosted many Yellow-legged Gulls at very close range, a Great Black-backed Gull, three Turnstones, a Purple Sandpiper, a Sandwich Tern and a Spider Crab that had been landed by Scuba fishermen. We noted a colour-ringed adult Yellow-legged Gull here and research afterwards indicated it had been ringed in September 2015 when a juvenile and taken into care and then rehabilitated. This eight-year-old gull has been recorded in south Portugal on four more occasions during the intervening years and illustrates the value of caring for sick/injured birds where there is a potential of recovery back into the wild population.

We trundled back to the nearby hotel and Emily arrived back from Faro at about 6.30pm, some extra provisions for the following day's picnic were purchased and then it was time to sit down for our evening meal at 7pm. A briefing for the following day and the Naturetrek checklist was completed after our excellent dinner together.

Day 6

Thursday 28th December

There was an absolute stunning sunrise with an extensive vermillion wash across a latticed cloud bank as we selected our breakfast options. Meadow Pipits, Chiffchaffs and House Sparrows inspected the vegetation outside the restaurant windows. Our itinerary for the day was to visit the 900-metre summit above Monchique, the highest point of the Algarve, which on a fine day offers stunning views across this coastal region. We travelled north-east and then north and stopped close to a small White Stork colony with birds in attendance on the more distant nests. We took a short walk to a stream with plenty of finches which included flocks of Serin and Common Waxbills. Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Hoopoe, Crested Lark, Jay, Grey Wagtail and Long-tailed Tit were all seen here.

We ascended further by minibus with examples of still-harvested mature Cork Oaks by the roadside and navigated through the traditional hill town of Monchique and arrived at the top. Coffee and cake at the café were next but this was rudely interrupted when a Rock Bunting flew into view, fidgeted around and then flew off without being

seen again. In the meantime our not-quite-finished coffee and cake had been cleared away by the over-efficient staff who thought we had finished – they clearly don't service the needs of naturalists that frequently!!

A wander around the bushes and buildings at the summit added Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart, Meadow Pipit, Great Tit, Chaffinch, a couple of Dartford Warblers, Sardinian Warbler, Chiffchaff, Serin and Crag Martin. A pair of close Girt Buntings were a lovely treat and proved to be the only ones we saw all tour. Back on the buses we descended back through Monchique and stopped for our picnic lunch at a pleasant setting next to a small church with a flowing stream in light woodland. Siskins were all around and coming to drink and a stunning adult male Black Redstart was singing and strutting his stuff. Our picnic comprising salads, cheeses, cold meats, breads and assorted snacks, sweet items and fruit kept us going, with some fruit juices and wine all part of the hydration strategy. The weather remained warm and sunny with barely any wind.

After lunch we drove down to sea level again and there appeared to be sufficient time for a quick visit to the nearby Alvor Estuary. En route we saw a Black-winged Kite perched on an overhead wire. We turned onto some rustic tracks and stopped to look at a Little Owl perched on a barn roof. A hawk flew across the track and away from us, being mobbed by two hesitant Kestrels – the adult male Goshawk flew into a tree, flushing a Woodpigeon as it touched down. This flurry of activity attracted the attention of two Black-winged Kites, one of which mobbed the fierce accipiter as it remained hidden from view in the tree – exciting stuff. We waited a while, but the hawk didn't reappear, so we moved down to the saline lagoons where we had time for some scanning. Grey Herons, Spoonbills and Greater Flamingos occupied the farther lagoons with Common Redshanks and Greenshank much closer. Distant waders in flight included Black-tailed Godwits and gulls on a couple of sandbanks including many Audouin's. Emily spotted an Osprey and as it flew closer it was obvious it was in hunting mode. As we watched the big raptor dipped down and splashed into the water and brought out a relatively small fish which it carried off. Another Black-winged Kite appeared before we again climbed into the minibuses and headed west for our final venue for the day. This was a narrow-sided valley with a rocky gorge which is the potential site for a Eurasian Eagle-Owl. Lots of roosting birds were shouting from the bushes including Blackcaps, Sardinian Warblers and Robins. A Ring Ouzel was glimpsed and the Eagle-Owl called a couple of times. We couldn't see it but a large bird later glimpsed in flight when dusk was falling was assumed to be the bird. Not the best end to our day, but it was only 25 minutes away from the hotel, so we were soon back with 30 minutes to spare before our 7pm evening meal. After our checklists and briefing we retired for the evening in anticipation of our last full day of the tour.

Day 7

Friday 29th December

It was a cloudy, still and humid day with only the occasional glimpse of the sun. We started with the excellent buffet breakfast and left in our two minibuses a little after 8.30am. We drove to an area of heathland and scattered woodland on something of a plateau near Vila do Bispo. Iberian Grey Shrike, Kestrel and Common Buzzard were perched up on posts and wires and fidgety larks showing briefly were Thekla's and Woodlarks. Corn Buntings were singing and finches flying around included Chaffinch, Serin and Siskin. Small birds were hidden in the trees but we eventually spotted a couple of Crested Tit, Nuthatch and the obligatory Chiffchaff. A couple of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were noisy. We tried another area on the opposite side of the road finding Mistle Thrush and Short-toed Treecreeper almost straight away. More Siskins and Serin and a small party of tits were also noted.

Next was a 35-minute drive to the West Atlantic town of Aljezur where we stopped for a coffee and an opportunity to look around a small indoor market with fresh fish, honey, vegetables and much more. The little river there

attracted two Kingfishers, a Grey Wagtail, Chiffchaffs and one of the few Wrens we found on the trip. White Storks and Cattle Egrets were in the small tilled fields here. Suitably refreshed, we drove a short distance along a track down to the beach at Praia da Amoreira with a few stops en route. Some flooded fields provided waders - Black-winged Stilt, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper and Common Snipe with Mallard and Teal in attendance too. A Water Pipit was calling but remained mostly hidden behind some trees. Initially the only raptor was a Kestrel, but an Osprey perched on a post was spotted and we watched a Peregrine cruising along a ridge dominated by some expensive-looking houses. At the beach, we watched the breakers curving over just before they crashed onto the sand and rocks. A few gulls, Gannets and a Balearic Shearwater or two were rather distant beyond the breakers. A Whimbrel stood on a rock and we had brief views of both Swallowtail and Clouded Yellow butterflies plus a very large weevil which appeared to be a Red Palm Weevil. Like everywhere else in coastal Algarve, there were volumes of the invasive Hotentott Fig.

We decided to have our last picnic of the holiday here, with the requirement to eat as much as we could to finish our supplies up!! Suitably full, we packed away what little remained and travelled back along the track, espying a 'ringtail' Hen Harrier en route. After a quick comfort stop in Aljezur, we drove a little way south to the little headland of Ponta da Atalaia. We parked the buses in the small car park there, seeing another 'ring-tail' Hen Harrier cruising by and walked towards the cliffs. Black Redstart, Stonechat and Sardinian Warblers lined up for viewing. A Thekla's Lark and a few Meadow Pipits were a little further on and at the cliffs we scanned out to sea and beyond a rocky island to see Balearic Shearwaters on the move plus Cormorant, Shag, Gannet and three species of gull. Below us a pair of White Stork were occupying their nest on the cliff with other pairs on columns of rocks a little further south – seemingly the only place in Europe where this occurs.

Returning to the car park, options included returning to the hotel or attempting to see the Eagle-Owl at the same venue as the previous evening. With several wishing to return to the hotel, we split forces, with Emily leading the charge to try and obtain views of the owl and Neil and the remainder heading back to Sagres. On arrival at the owl venue, Stephen heard the owl calling and Emily located him/her on the side of the gorge. Everyone in the group managed good views before the big-eared wonder flew off and out of view – leaving the group ecstatic!! Another 'ring-tail' Hen Harrier showed very well for this determined group too.

Later, with everyone safely back at the hotel, we enjoyed our last evening meal together at 7.30pm, completed our checklists and reminisced about the events of our fabulous week in the Algarve.

Day 8

Saturday 30th December

Our last day was all about driving to Faro and flying back to the UK. We left the Memmo Baleeira at 7am and enjoyed a trouble-free journey to the airport. The main group said goodbye to those travelling on different flights and the tour came to a natural conclusion.

Yet again, we had been lucky with the weather and again birds proliferated with some 147 species being recorded – not bad in Europe at Christmas. Other types of wildlife were somewhat limited, but the warm, sunny conditions had provided a reasonable diversity of insects and a great many flowers. Until the next time . . .



View from Chapel by Ann Corner

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

| Common name | Scientific name | December 2023 | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| | | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| Common Shelduck | <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Gadwall | <i>Mareca strepera</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Mallard | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Northern Pintail | <i>Anas acuta</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Northern Shoveler | <i>Spatula clypeata</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Eurasian Teal | <i>Anas crecca</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Common Pochard | <i>Aythya ferina</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Red-legged Partridge | <i>Alectoris rufa</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | H | | |
| Balearic Shearwater | <i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i> | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Little Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Greater Flamingo | <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| Black Stork | <i>Ciconia nigra</i> | | | | 1 | | | | |
| White Stork | <i>Ciconia ciconia</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Glossy Ibis | <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> | | | | 1 | | | | |
| Eurasian Spoonbill | <i>Platalea leucorodia</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| Little Bittern | <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i> | ✓ | | | 2 | | | | |
| Western Cattle Egret | <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H |
| Great Egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Little Egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Northern Gannet | <i>Morus bassanus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| European Shag | <i>Gulosus aristotelis</i> | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Great Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Western Osprey | <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | 3 | ✓ | 1 | 1 | |
| Black-winged Kite | <i>Elanus caeruleus</i> | ✓ | | | | | 3/4 | | |
| Booted Eagle | <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i> | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Spanish Imperial Eagle | <i>Aquila adalberti</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Short-toed Eagle | <i>Circaetus gallicus</i> | | | | | 2 | | | |
| Bonelli's Eagle | <i>Aquila fasciata</i> | | | 1 | | | | | |
| Eurasian Sparrowhawk | <i>Accipiter nisus</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Goshawk | <i>Accipiter gentilis</i> | | | | | | 1 | | |
| Western Marsh Harrier | <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Hen Harrier | <i>Circus cyaneus</i> | | 2 | | | | | 3 | |
| Red Kite | <i>Milvus milvus</i> | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | |
| Common Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Short-toed Snake Eagle | <i>Circaetus gallicus</i> | | | | | 2 | | | |
| Great Bustard | <i>Otis tarda</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Little Bustard | <i>Tetrax tetrax</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Water Rail | <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> | | | | 1 | | | | |
| Western Swamphen | <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | H | |
| Common Moorhen | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Eurasian Coot | <i>Fulica atra</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Eurasian Stone-curlew | <i>Burhinus oediconemus</i> | | | 2 | | 20 | | | |
| Eurasian Oystercatcher | <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Black-winged Stilt | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Pied Avocet | <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Northern Lapwing | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |

| Common name | Scientific name | December 2023 | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| European Golden Plover | <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Grey Plover | <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Common Ringed Plover | <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Kentish Plover | <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Common Snipe | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| Black-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa limosa</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| Bar-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa lapponica</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Whimbrel | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Curlew | <i>Numenius arquata</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Spotted Redshank | <i>Tringa erythropus</i> | | | 2 | | | | | |
| Common Redshank | <i>Tringa totanus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| Common Greenshank | <i>Tringa nebularia</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Green Sandpiper | <i>Tringa ochropus</i> | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Common Sandpiper | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Ruddy Turnstone | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Purple Sandpiper | <i>Calidris maritima</i> | | | | | 1 | | | |
| Sanderling | <i>Calidris alba</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Little Stint | <i>Calidris minuta</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Curlew Sandpiper | <i>Calidris ferruginea</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Dunlin | <i>Calidris alpina</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Slender-billed Gull | <i>Larus genei</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Audouin's Gull | <i>Larus audouinii</i> | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Mediterranean Gull | <i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Great Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus marinus</i> | | | | | 1 | | | |
| Yellow-legged Gull | <i>Larus michahellis</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus fuscus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Caspian Tern | <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i> | ✓ | | 1 | | | | | |
| Sandwich Tern | <i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | | 1 | ✓ | | |
| Black-bellied Sandgrouse | <i>Pterocles orientalis</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Rock Dove | <i>Columba livia</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Common Wood Pigeon | <i>Columba palumbus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Collared Dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Eurasian Eagle-Owl | <i>Bubo bubo</i> | | | | | | H | ✓ | |
| Long-eared Owl | <i>Asio otus</i> | | 4 | | | | | | |
| Tawny Owl | <i>Strix aluco</i> | H | H | H | H | | | | |
| Little Owl | <i>Athene noctua</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | 4 | 1 | | |
| Common Kingfisher | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | H | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Hoopoe | <i>Upupa epops</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Eurasian Wryneck | <i>Jynx torquilla</i> | | | | 1 | | | | |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i> | | ✓ | H | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Iberian Green Woodpecker | <i>Picus sharpei</i> | | | H | | | | | |
| Common Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Merlin | <i>Falco columbarius</i> | | | | | 1 | | | |
| Peregrine Falcon | <i>Falco peregrinus</i> | | ✓ | | | 4 | GO | 1 | |
| Iberian Grey Shrike | <i>Lanius meridionalis</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Jay | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Iberian Magpie | <i>Cyanopica cooki</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Magpie | <i>Pica pica</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Red-billed Chough | <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> | | | | | 2 | | ✓ | |
| Western Jackdaw | <i>Coloeus monedula</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Carrion Crow | <i>Corvus corone</i> | | ✓ | | | 1 | | | |

| Common name | Scientific name | December 2023 | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| Northern Raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Wren | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | | | H | | H | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Coal Tit | <i>Periparus ater</i> | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| European Crested Tit | <i>Lophophanes cristatus</i> | | | H | | | | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Blue Tit | <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Great Tit | <i>Parus major</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Woodlark | <i>Lullula arborea</i> | | H | | | | | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Skylark | <i>Alauda arvensis</i> | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | |
| Thekla's Lark | <i>Galerida theklae</i> | | ✓ | H | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Crested Lark | <i>Galerida cristata</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Calandra Lark | <i>Melanocorypha calandra</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Barn Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | | 1 | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Eurasian Crag Martin | <i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i> | | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Common House Martin | <i>Delichon urbicum</i> | | | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Cetti's Warbler | <i>Cettia cetti</i> | H | | | | H | | | |
| Common Chiffchaff | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Zitting Cisticola | <i>Cisticola juncidis</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Blackcap | <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Dartford Warbler | <i>Sylvia undata</i> | | | 1 | | | 2 | | |
| Sardinian Warbler | <i>Sylvia melanocephala</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Nuthatch | <i>Sitta europaea</i> | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Short-toed Treecreeper | <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i> | | | H | H | | | ✓ | |
| Spotless Starling | <i>Sturnus unicolor</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Common Blackbird | <i>Turdus merula</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ring Ouzel | <i>Turdus torquatus</i> | | | | | | LO | | |
| Song Thrush | <i>Turdus philomelos</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Mistle Thrush | <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| European Robin | <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> | ✓ | H | ✓ | ✓ | H | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Bluethroat | <i>Luscinia svecica</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Black Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Blue Rock Thrush | <i>Monticola solitarius</i> | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| European Stonechat | <i>Saxicola rubicola</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Spanish Sparrow | <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Black-headed Weaver | <i>Ploceus melanocephalus</i> | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Common Waxbill | <i>Estrilda astrild</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Grey Wagtail | <i>Motacilla cinerea</i> | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| White Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Water Pipit | <i>Anthus spinoletta</i> | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| Meadow Pipit | <i>Anthus pratensis</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Common Chaffinch | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| European Greenfinch | <i>Chloris chloris</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Siskin | <i>Spinus spinus</i> | | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Common Linnet | <i>Linaria cannabina</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| European Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| European Serin | <i>Serinus serinus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Corn Bunting | <i>Emberiza calandra</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Rock Bunting | <i>Emberiza cia</i> | | | | | | 1 | | |
| Cirl Bunting | <i>Emberiza cirrus</i> | | H | | | | 2 | | |

Other vertebrates

| | | December 2023 | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Common name | Scientific name | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| Mammals | | | | | | | | | |
| Red Fox | <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Rabbit | <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Iberian Water Vole | <i>Arvicola sapidus</i> | 2 | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Reptile & Amphibians | | | | | | | | | |
| Stripeless Tree Frog | <i>Hyla meridionalis</i> | H | | | | | | | |
| European Pond Terrapin | <i>Emys orbicularis</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Spanish Terrapin | <i>Mauremys leprosa</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Moorish Gecko | <i>Tarentola mauritanica</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Iberian Wall Lizard | <i>Podarcis hispanica</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |

Invertebrates

| Common name | Scientific name | December 2023 | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| Swallowtail | <i>Papilion machaon</i> | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Large White | <i>Pieris brassicae</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Southern Small White | <i>Pieris rapae</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Bath White | <i>Pontia daplidice</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Clouded Yellow | <i>Colias crocea</i> | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Green-striped White | <i>Euchloe belemia</i> | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Geranium Bronze | <i>Cacyreus marshalli</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Small Tortoiseshell | <i>Aglais urticae</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Painted Lady | <i>Vanessa cardui</i> | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Wall Brown | <i>Lassiommatia megera</i> | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Hummingbird Hawk-moth | <i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i> | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Large dragonfly sp. | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Darter sp. | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Violet Carpenter Bee | <i>Xylocopa violacea</i> | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Mole Cricket | <i>Gryllotalpidae</i> sp. | | | | | | H | H | |
| Red Palm Weevil | <i>Rhynchophorus ferrugineus</i> | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Banded Garden Spider | <i>Argiope trifasciata</i> | | | | | ✓ | | | |