

Portugal - The Algarve at Christmas

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd – 30th December 2025



Hoopoe



Rock Bunting



Long-eared Owl



Beetling cliffs

Tour report by Neil McMahon



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Summary

The ever popular 'Portugal - The Algarve at Christmas' tour followed a similar itinerary to previous years, staying first at a delightful hotel in the hills near Tavira, and then latterly at a four-star hotel in Sagres in the far south-west of Portugal. Two half days of wet and windy weather were in complete contrast to the settled, warm and sunny conditions for the majority of our eight-day festive wildlife expedition. On arrival in Faro, we were quickly into the birds around the coastal reserve near the airport and the superb lagoon and surround of Quinta do Lago. We enjoyed super views of wintering Little Bitterns, Western Swamphens, a variety of waterfowl, Crag Martins, Swallows, House Martins and ridiculous numbers of fly-catching Chiffchaffs. We enjoyed our first views of Hoopoe, Iberian Magpie, Black-headed Weaver and Booted Eagle, before heading off to check in at our hotel.

A highlight for many, our first full day was spent exploring the plains around Castro Verde, a stunning landscape and with plenty of birds on view. Three roosting Long-eared Owls were very special and we went on to see Iberian Grey Shrikes, several Hen Harriers, Calandra Larks and even a couple of gorgeous Black-winged Kites. Our afternoon was pretty special with Spanish Imperial Eagles, Little Bustards, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Merlin, more Hen Harriers, distant Great Bustards and a wonderful bugling fly-past from a flock of Cranes.

Our next couple of days were gentler affairs, but twenty species of waders at Tavira salt pans were wonderful, and we also encountered Greater Flamingo, Glossy Ibis, Spoonbill, Osprey, Bluethroat, Audouin's and Slender-billed Gulls. Penduline Tits were a surprise, and three Hoopoes were with a flock of Common Waxbills on the same verge.

Our adventure around Sagres yielded Stone-curlews, Red-billed Choughs and Peregrines, with night time viewings of Red Fox and Iberian Hare. We explored the summit of Monchique, the Alvor Estuary and the spectacular west coast near Aljezur, finding Rock Bunting, Goshawk, Crested Tit, and even a pair of Eurasian Eagle-Owls at dusk.

We may not have seen Father Christmas, but our forays and comfortable stay in the south of Portugal provided fine warm weather, peace, great company and plenty of wildlife.

Day 1

Tuesday 23rd December

The majority of our party met up at Gatwick ahead of the EasyJet flight to Faro. As is often the way, many flights from across the UK seemed to arrive within an hour of each other in the morning at Faro, but with additional inbound flights from Newcastle and Luton and meeting one person at Faro we were eventually all assembled and with the correct luggage. The minibuses were organized, and there was time for a little birding not far from the airport on the excellent coastal saltmarsh at Prai de Faro before lunch.

In sunshine, but with a stiff breeze, the birds came thick and fast right from the outset. Two Caspian Terns loomed over the minibuses as we were parking, and came past a few more times, providing good views. House Sparrows, Chiffchaffs, Crested Larks and Zitting Cisticolas were around the car park, and Blackcaps and Sardinian Warblers fidgeted in low-lying bushes.

Waders were plentiful, with Whimbrel, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Sanderling, Redshank and Greenshank quickly spotted, and a couple of Black-tailed Godwits and Turnstones also joined the party. Inland, quite a number of White Storks were soaring around, and raptors included Marsh Harrier, pale-morph Booted Eagles, Kestrel and a couple of Ospreys. Spoonbills and Little Egrets were feeding out on the marsh, and we saw our first Stonechats, Serins, White Wagtails and Black Redstarts of the trip. With Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls loafing around us, it was time for some lunch!

We visited a nearby restaurant on the seafront, and for many this was the first substantial meal of the day. Although it was primarily a sea-food restaurant, there was a reasonable selection of other dishes.

After some relaxation and appropriate food, we then made our way to another venue which has always proved popular with clients: Quinta do Lago. We parked our minibuses and again the birds were plentiful. Hoopoe, Black-headed Weaver and Iberian Magpie made their presence felt, and the waders on the saltmarsh were similar to those we had seen earlier, with the addition of a Bar-tailed Godwit. We saw Osprey and Booted Eagle again, plus Common Buzzard. There must have been plenty of small insects over the freshwater lagoon, as there were spectacular numbers of Chiffchaffs and some White Wagtails flycatching from the margins, and two Swallows, a House Martin and a number of Crag Martins hawking over the water. The normally elusive Sardinian Warbler provided a nice view as it bathed in a puddle. And there were indeed plenty of puddles and standing water, as this part of Portugal had endured some heavy rain during the last few days, with a few showers when we first touched down.

We had close views of wildfowl in stunning nuptial plumage including Pochard, Wigeon, Shoveler, Teal and Pintail, but probably the most enjoyed birds were some Little Bitterns showing nicely in the reed fringes of the lagoon, and a few giant, purple Western Swamphens! A couple of Glossy Ibises showed on and off, and we picked out our first Audouin's Gulls of the trip. It was a question of 'where to look next', with Kingfishers sprinting around and Cetti's Warblers shouting at us from dense vegetation.

It was almost too much for our first day, so with the daylight beginning to wane, we boarded our minibuses and headed for our hotel in the hills north of Tavira for our three-night stay. We checked in and were shown our rooms, and there was time to relax and unwind before our 7.00pm dinner. We were served each evening by our usual hard-working, enthusiastic waiter who ensured that wine glasses were rarely empty!

After a long day of travel for the majority, fatigue was kicking in, and after a briefing and the checklist, it was time to retire and sleep ahead of an early start the following day.

Day 2

Wednesday 24th December

The promised early start began with a 7.00am Christmas Eve breakfast, in preparation for a journey west and then north to explore the plains around Castro Verde. We were away just after 8.00am, having noted Black Redstart, Jay, Serin and Blackcap around the hotel. Our ninety-minute drive was interrupted by a comfort break at some services, where keen eyes picked up Iberian Grey Shrike, Spotless Starling, White Stork, Siskin, Serin, Crested Lark and a couple of distant Woodlarks. By the time we had reached the traditional little town of Castro Verde, we had also seen quite a few Red Kites and a couple of Ravens.

In a suburban environment, we checked some small trees (apparently Peruvian Peppertrees) in the hope of finding some special roosting birds, and we were delighted to find three day-roosting Long-eared Owls. They pretty much ignored us as we peered up at them and took photos. Two of them seemed very sleepy and couldn't keep their eyes open! All owls are fabulous, but this species is up there with the best but. For some this was already 'bird of the day', and we had barely started. After watching these dapper birds and checking out a few of their pellets on the ground beneath the trees, we headed out to check the open fields and remnant steppe plains to the north.

Numerous small birds included Stonechats, House Sparrows, Corn Buntings and Skylarks, and Kestrels were on view nearly all the time. The first of several adult male Hen Harriers showed distantly, quartering a field, and spiralling Red Kites and watchful Common Buzzards provided yet more raptor interest as we scanned fields for local specialties. It was great to see reasonable numbers of Lapwings feeding on the wet fields, and after turning off the main track we headed down to the (closed) headquarters of the LPN, an organization seeking to promote the conservation of the special birds of the area, developing projects associated with agriculture in synergy with conservation. From here, we scanned the immediate and more distant terrain. The only Jackdaws of the trip were here, and there were flocks of small birds dominated by Corn Buntings, Linnets, Skylarks and lumbering Calandra Larks. Two adult male Hen Harriers chased each other briefly, and one perched up to provide telescope views. A Little Owl was perched on some farm machinery, and there were even a few Rabbits hopping about. A female Merlin made a dramatic entry, causing mayhem as all feathered creatures endeavoured to move out of her way. Spotless Starlings, more Lapwings and several vocal Iberian Grey Shrikes helped set the scene, but a flock of about thirty distant Little Bustards outpaced us and only a couple of people managed to see them before they pitched down and vanished.

We drove back to Castro Verde and had just enough time for a jaunt to the east of the town to check more roadside fields and hilltops. Here, we encountered our first Black-winged Kite of the trip, not a species guaranteed on every tour. This grey and black bundle of energy hovered and circled over a field, intent on finding rodent prey. A Spanish Sparrow perched in a bush in front of the vans, and the second van managed good views of Spanish Imperial Eagles: somehow the occupants of the first van failed to connect! It didn't matter, because one of these birds (or maybe a third) was a little further up the road. A distant flood attracted a couple of Glossy Ibises and a flock of Egyptian Geese, and temporary pools were good enough for Greenshank and Green Sandpiper. Two Black-bellied Sandgrouse gave flight views only, and a flock of Golden Plovers shimmered overhead. We realized we had got a little carried away, and that we would be a little late for our lunch appointment, so back to Castro Verde we went and arrived at Helena's for lunch at about 1.10pm.

This is biannual event in the Naturetrek diary when we are in the area; Helena is an exceedingly good cook and specializes in creating traditional Portuguese dishes, particularly those associated with the Alentejo region. And with a huge choice of starters, main course and sweets, there was plenty to choose from! While we were busy eating, a Robin and a couple of Chiffchaffs were in the back garden, and a Black Redstart was on the rooftop.

About an hour or so later, we waddled out and thanked Helena and her family for a wonderful lunch. We had a quick look at the still-working windmill outside, and then struck out eastwards from Castro Verde to see what we could find. It was a productive time, with an unprecedented four flocks of Little Bustards, two or three Spanish Imperial Eagles (including a juvenile perched in a tree), two Merlins, two or three adult male Hen Harriers, two Black-winged Kites, small flocks of Black-bellied Sandgrouse, more flocks of Calandra Larks and a few Painted Lady butterflies. After getting our breath back, we drove to a little chapel on a hill with breathtaking views of the

plains below. Initially, it seemed quiet for wildlife but some careful scanning produced some distant feeding Cranes in the fields. In another direction, a field held both Little and Great Bustards, which provided a sigh of relief as the bigger of the two species is becoming harder to find each year. While we were counting them and appreciating the size differences, some bugling calls announced the arrival of a large flock of Cranes as they flew below us and around the viewpoint to land in a field nearby: fabulous!

With the beautiful winter sunshine beginning to subside, we started our long drive back to the hotel, again with a comfort stop en route. I'm not sure how hungry people were that evening, but despite the very large lunch the evening, dinner soon disappeared too! Perhaps a long day, copious wine, plenty of fresh air and quality birding had something to do with it. After dinner, the checklist and the briefing for the following day, Rob set up his telescope to look at Jupiter and its moons in the night sky. After that, our Christmas clients were finally allowed to go to bed!

Day 3

Thursday 25th December

After two long days, everyone deserved a slower and quieter day, and after all it was Christmas Day. So, we took our breakfast at a more leisurely 7.45am! Afterwards, we took a wander around the hotel grounds where common birds included a variety of finches, including Siskin and lots of Serins. Warblers in the bushes comprised Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps and Sardinian Warblers, and a Swallow flew through. A Hoopoe flew past distantly, and other birds included Jay, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Meadow Pipit, and plenty of Song Thrushes and Blackbirds. A few Robins and Blue Tit and Great Tit were reminders of home.

At about 10.00am we left for Tavira Saltpans, our regular venue on Christmas Day. Probably half of the people we found along the track through the pans and out towards the beach were British, also taking in some festive sunshine. Waders dominated our early sightings, with twenty species on show, some of them nice and close. New species for the trip were Avocet, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Spotted Redshank, Ruff and Kentish Plover. Lots of overflying birds included numbers of Cormorants, Grey Herons and Spoonbills, and from the other direction plenty of gulls were dominated by Mediterranean Gulls. A Water Pipit showed nicely, and we had brief views of Bluethroats skulking around the pan edges. Distant Gannets were diving in the sea, and a gap in the bushes provided us with good views of a variety of common wildfowl and pink Greater Flamingoes. Singles Caspian and Sandwich Terns and an Audouin's Gull added more variety. Most of the other birds were repeats of previous days, but we enjoyed telescope views of Whimbrel and Bar-tailed Godwit too. Those back at the minibuses first enjoyed close views of another Black-winged Kite.

After a comfort stop, a change to the programme took us into the centre of the historic town of Tavira, with its cobbled streets and tiled houses. A historic bridge spanning the river added a touch of culture, and bonus birds were a single Slender-billed Gull, close Whimbrel and Common Sandpiper, and a gathering of large gulls.

With the rumble of stomachs apparent, it was time for a rather late Christmas Day lunch, so we headed east to the Spanish border and drove into the Castro Marim reserve. Crag Martin, Common Buzzard and Little Grebe were seen en route, and the little track to the visitor centre provided views of a couple of Iberian Hares before they loped out of view.

Once we reached the visitor centre, it was time for our hotel-provided packed lunch, the picnic tables providing a pleasant setting. Distant views of Marsh Harrier and Osprey were had, and a Bluethroat popped up briefly. Baguettes, croquettes, cake and fruit consumed, it was time for a little walk around. Passerines included the ever-present Chiffchaffs, Crested Larks and Black Redstart, and bigger waterbirds included Spoonbill, White Stork and Greater Flamingoes. Roughly a hundred each of Avocets and Black-tailed Godwits were feeding on the old salt pans, albeit rather against the light, and a couple more Marsh Harriers were quartering the saltmarsh. Butterflies included Painted Lady and some unidentified whites, and a large dragonfly showed briefly and appeared to be a Vagrant Emperor.

Following our little circuit, we trundled back along the entrance track, seeing Red-legged Partridge and Little Owl, and drove a short distance to some saltpans at the other end of the reserve. Here, the hoped-for Stone Curlews were absent, but there were close views of Little Stint and Kentish Plover if you were tall enough to see over the bankside vegetation! Two Little Owls were partly hidden in a broken-down hilltop building, and other waders on the pans included a few Ruffs, Curlew Sandpipers, Sanderlings and Grey Plovers.

We then took a casual drive back to our hotel, arriving at about 4.30pm on a pleasant sunny afternoon; everyone relaxed and took some time out on Christmas Day. A Grey Wagtail and a Peregrine flew over shortly after we disembarked.

We sat down for our dinner at 7.00pm: Christmas Day coincided with one of the clients' birthday too, so it was a low-key double celebration! We finished our day with a briefing, and of course duly completed our checklist before lights out.

Day 4

Friday 26th December

Boxing Day was transfer day to our second hotel at Sagres. After our 7.45am breakfast, it was a case of packing the two minibuses, collecting our packed lunches, and driving away in sunshine. Our first venue was a return to the area around Quinta do Lago, and this time we were able to take a slow drive around the very grand houses and manicured lawns adjacent to the golf courses on our way to the lagoon. We had good views of a Hoopoe and Black-headed Weavers feeding on the lawns, as well as the usual House Sparrows, Robins and Blackbirds.

At Quinta do Lago, we stepped out for a quick look over the saltmarsh, and then filed down to the lagoon. Distinctive, high-pitched calls indicated that Penduline Tits were close at hand, and five of these tiny birds were found exploring the reed heads and non-native grasses around the edge of the lagoon. This was possibly a species not previously encountered on this tour. The little flock was mobile as they continued on their food quest around the lagoon, and was soon out of range. Four Little Bitterns were vocal, and one showed well. Western Swamphens also performed, and similar birds to last time were on view, including three species of hirundines, Kingfishers, Hoopoe and a multitude of waterfowl.

We boarded our minibuses and again took it slowly as we exited the 'Beverly Hills district'. We found three Hoopoes feeding on a grass verge, and a little flock of the well-established Common Waxbills almost alongside. It's not often possible to watch a Hoopoe feeding for a lengthy period of time, so we took the opportunity to watch them without disturbing them, by staying in the vehicles. The little red-billed finches also showed nicely, giving our only sustained views of this species during the tour.

After finding the dual carriageway, we took a comfort/coffee stop at the services, it being about forty minutes to our next venue as we gently headed south-west. Our next site was Salgados Lagoon, an area of water just inland from a coastal sand dune system. On this occasion, the water level was high, and the usual variety of birds was somewhat reduced. We consumed our lunch around the minibuses and went for a wander. Four Marsh Harriers were hunting around the edges of the lagoon, and there were plenty of Pintails and Cormorants. A Bluethroat showed briefly and flew around us, and other birds included Zitting Cisticola, Serin, and both House and Crag Martins. Common and Green Sandpipers were both noted, and a Black-headed Weaver was the first noted here on this tour, and may represent something of a range expansion. Common Carp were wallowing in the shallows.

We moved on from Salgados, and with some time in hand before arriving at Sagres, took a quick diversion to look at the lovely little valley at Boca do Rio. A short walk around the beach area provided close views of a Whimbrel (with an injury), a Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstarts, Grey and White Wagtails, and Common Sandpiper. Paperwhite Narcissi were in flower at the edge of the meadow, and distant seabirds included Gannet, Cormorant and Audouin's Gull.

We made our way back to the minibuses and completed the short journey to Sagres, where we checked in at our next hotel at about 5.00pm, and organized our evening meal for 7.00pm. The weather forecast suggested a major shift in the weather, with strong winds and heavy rain for the following day and part of the day afterwards: this was not something we were looking forward to! After our customary briefing and checklist, it was time to retire. We would assess the conditions in the morning.

Day 5

Saturday 27th December

The fierce storm arrived in the night, with wind whistling around the hotel and the rain lashing down. At our 8.00am breakfast rendezvous there was a very strong wind from the east-south-east and heavy rain, and not surprisingly many opted out of the morning excursion; we made rough plans to meet back at the hotel at 1.00pm. In the meantime, we enjoyed the huge buffet breakfast on offer. The hotel had an indoor swimming pool and other attractions, well-used by the people not wanting to go out in the storm. The remainder left in the minibuses at 9.30am and headed to Cape St Vincent, the most south-westerly point of mainland Europe. The very inclement conditions meant we weren't able to see very much, and unfortunately the centre and café at the very end of the peninsula remain closed (as they have been for the last couple of years). We drove into the nearby 'Sacred Valley' and explored a series of tracks running through agricultural land. We saw bedraggled birds which we were just able to identify as Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Woodlark, White Wagtail, Corn Bunting, Common Snipe, Golden Plover and Lapwing. There were even two Little Owls out and about in the awful weather.

With birdwatching very restricted and from the minibus only, we drove back to Sagres and tried the harbour area. Two Shags were fishing in the harbour with Cormorants, we obtained close views of Common Sandpiper, and the small quarry there sheltered a flock of Crag Martins, a Kestrel and a Blue Rock Thrush. A flying and fleeing Feral Pigeon was no doubt trying to avoid the Peregrine that flew low and fast in front of us!

We then returned to the hotel, and by 1.00pm had secured an area at the hotel where we were permitted to have our indoor picnic. It certainly wasn't the day to have one outside! With lunch consumed and packed away for another day, we made arrangements to try an afternoon excursion at 3.00pm. We left in very heavy showers, which then miraculously ceased, and the late afternoon turned pleasant with reduced wind and even some sunshine.

We tried Cape St Vincent again and in clear conditions could marvel at the efforts of cliff fishermen trying to catch fish in the surf, hundreds of feet vertically down! Passing seabirds included plenty of Gannets, a Great Skua and gulls, including Audouin's. Shags were flying around the base of the cliffs.

Next was another short excursion into Sacred Valley, where plenty of birds were out and about now that the weather had improved. Two Hen Harriers were hard to beat, but there were several Kestrels and a Peregrine too. A couple of different Little Owls were on view, and we encountered the local flock of Red-billed Choughs, perhaps numbering twenty birds, as they tumbled through the air and pecked around not far from the track.

We finished the afternoon foray at nearby Martinhall, which yielded several Common Sandpipers, Sanderling, Dunlin, White Wagtail, Stonechat and of course more Chiffchaffs desperate for some insect food prior to roosting. We were back at the hotel just after 5.00pm and with supplements added to our picnics for the next couple of days, it was then time for our dinner at the hotel and the (rather short) checklist! We subsequently tried a night drive, which unfortunately was wet and windy again, and saw many creatures providing eye shine, the majority being Red Foxes, but we also saw Iberian Hare.

Day 6

Sunday 28th December

We began our day with a grand 8.00am breakfast; again it was wet and windy outside. However, the forecast suggested things would subside, and it proved to be the case: it was still and sunny by mid-morning. We left the hotel at 8.45am and headed to some heathland and woodland not far from Vila da Bispo. Our first stop was quiet, but we found a small flock of Cirl Buntings which showed nicely, with a few Chaffinches accompanying them. At our second venue in the same habitat, we teased out some woodland birds, including a couple of Crested Tits, Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Woodlark and Great Spotted Woodpecker. An open grassy area was good for several Mistle Thrushes and Song Thrush, and with the improving weather we found White Wagtail, Stonechat and Black Redstart.

Next was to drive north up the west coast, to try an area around the historic town of Aljezur. En route, we lurched to a halt as a male Goshawk had struck down a Feral Pigeon in the adjacent field and was mantling it on the ground. The hawk didn't like the look of us, and lost grip of its prey, flew up, then glided and soared away, much to our disappointment. This is only the third time we have encountered this species during the last ten years of running this trip.

At Aljezur there was time for a comfort stop and coffee in the café, with a Grey Wagtail along the swollen river and the usual feral geese and Muscovy Ducks present in all their finery. We took the track down to the beach at Praia de Armoreira and looked for wildlife on the way. The best birds were a perched Osprey, a Marsh Harrier, a Peregrine, Kestrels, Iberian Grey Shrikes and a couple of Common Sandpipers actively feeding at the trackside. Blackcaps and Sardinian Warblers were very vocal and occasionally showed themselves alongside the easier-to-see Stonechats, Linnets and Meadow Pipits. At the end of the track, we scanned the impressive beach and coastal area, picking up on tame Crested Larks and a Kentish Plover, and passing Gannets.

After driving back up the same track, we stopped off at our usual picnic spot where we were finally able to enjoy a picnic out in the open air! A Grey Wagtail flew up and down the stream while we ate. Marsh Harrier, Common

Buzzard and Kestrel hunted the hills around us. A revisit to Aljezur for another comfort stop yielded a Kingfisher along the river, and three White Storks in a field.

Next was a visit to a headland sticking out into the Atlantic at Ponta da Atalaia, a very scenic spot which permits long-distance views both north and south along the beautiful Portuguese coast. A Thekla's Lark near the car park was our only confirmed one all trip, and two Ravens were on view. At the end of the headland, we looked down on an island with a monstrous but empty White Stork nest, and there were a couple more on the cliffs to the south: this is apparently the only place in Europe where they nest on coastal cliffs. Yellow-legged Gulls and Shags were active below us, and Gannets passed by further out. A Curlew called as it flew along the rocks, and a small group of Turnstones was assembled.

After a wander around and taking in the views, we returned to the minibuses and options were given: either return to the hotel, or try and spot an owl at dusk. One minibus travelled back to Sagres via the harbour, which provided sightings of Kingfisher, Shag and Common Sandpiper. The other minibus went on to a site on the south coast, where an evening vigil proved successful: two Eurasian Eagle-Owls appeared at dusk after some initial calling. Birds seen before the owls appeared included Blue Rock Thrush, Raven, Crag Martin and Black Redstart, and a Little Owl was seen briefly as we left.

We reunited at our 7.00pm dinner, and after the briefing and checklist a small team tried a night drive, which proved quiet apart from a Red Fox, a number of Iberian Hares and vocal Marsh Frogs, which had clearly been invigorated by the winter rain.

Day 7

Monday 29th December

A return to pleasant, sunny weather began with strong sunshine blinding us in the breakfast lounge as we fuelled up for another full day in southern Portugal. It was also Rob's birthday, and he had to cope with a little token cake for breakfast; he got a much bigger one to share in the evening!

The majority of us set off at 8.45am for a full-day itinerary, and it was a bit of a drive to head up to the hill settlement of Monchique and the summit above, the highest point in the Algarve. Before that, we checked out a site near to Sagres, which over the last few years has provided us with views of Stone-curlews. Initially, it seemed quiet, but then Rob found a single bird, and others began to materialize, either in flight or stepping out from behind boulders and the coarse Mediterranean vegetation. In the end, we estimated about twenty-five of these birds, which tend to gather in flocks outside the breeding season. With the sun up and already warm temperatures, the local Stonechats were singing their hearts out.

Moving on, we headed east and then north and stopped at the side of the road, where there is a White Stork colony close by. There was plenty of bill-clattering going on and White Storks atop nests, flying around and standing on various objects. These days, many of these big white and black birds remain in The Algarve during the winter, rather than migrating south. A short potter nearby provided brief views of Hoopoe, Common Waxbill, Crested Larks, Crag Martins, Jays, Grey Wagtail and, of course, plenty of fly-catching Chiffchaffs. Higher up, a comfort stop at a café on the outskirts of Monchique was also good for Nuthatch, Blue Tit and Siskin. Above the small town, a roadside stop next to some traditionally-managed Cork Oaks provided calling but unseen Short-toed Treecreepers and Iberian Green Woodpecker, plus Great Spotted Woodpecker and Jay.

Going higher, we arrived at the summit on a beautiful clear day, with hazy sunshine and magnificent views all around, but particularly towards the coastal area to the south. Thankfully, the café was open, and so after some hot beverages and a little quick retail therapy in a shop selling traditional Portuguese-made clothing, woollens, cork products etc., we took a little wander around. Birds this high up were few and far between. but there were the regular Stonechats, plus Blue Rock Thrush, calling Wrens, Chiffchaffs and Meadow Pipits, plus White Wagtail, Crag Martin and Kestrel. A male Dartford Warbler showed rather poorly and at range, but undoubtedly the best birds were a confiding pair of Rock Buntings feeding near to the radar station. They were very unobtrusive but calling occasionally as they fidgeted about on the ground.

After our pleasant summit experience, we drove back downhill via Monchique and stopped at Caldas de Monchique, for our last effort at demolishing the picnic produce. This spot was next to a small chapel and an upland stream which attracts Grey Wagtails and other birds. Over ripe olives littered the floor around us, and this light woodland setting and the nearby architecture were home to Black Redstart, tits and Siskin. After a pretty good job at demolishing the picnic, we packed away, visited a nearby café, and then descended to sea level.

Our last venue for the tour was the Alvor Estuary, and we saw a variety of waders including Avocet, Black-winged Stilt and Kentish Plover, and larger birds such as Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill and Grey Heron. The gulls were mostly distant, but included the now familiar Audouin's and Mediterranean Gulls, and we also saw a single Caspian Tern, Red-legged Partridge and Crested Lark, and had brief views of Black Redstart and Bluethroat. With the light fading, we made our way back to Sagres and arrived back at the hotel at 6.00pm, providing time for some packing before our 7.00pm dinner.

We talked through the arrangements for our travel day the following morning, completed our checklists, and agreed that we had enjoyed our time in Portugal at Christmas very much. With no night drive, it was then a case of relaxing, sipping wine, eating birthday cake and retiring for the night.

Day 8

Tuesday 30th December

Sadly, our last day was all about travel: we left our hotel at about 6.20am and drove east to Faro, with a comfort stop en route and an opportunity to dive into our packed breakfast, supplied by the hotel. We arrived at Faro in plenty of time and returned the minibuses to the depot. With three different flights taking us home, we said our respective goodbyes and sauntered to our respective terminals for the journeys home, with happy memories of the festive period along the coastline of the southern Iberian peninsula.

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Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025							
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		✓						
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓				
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓		✓	✓				
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓		✓	✓				
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓				✓			
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓		✓	✓				
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓			✓			
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓				✓			
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓							
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓					✓
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>		✓						
Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>		✓						
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>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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>	✓				✓			
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		✓						
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			✓					✓
Eurasian Stone-Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>								25
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>	✓		✓	✓				✓
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓				✓		
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓		✓	✓				✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	✓		✓	✓				H
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓						✓	✓
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	✓		✓					
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓		✓					✓
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓					✓		✓
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓		✓				
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓		✓	✓				✓
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>			✓					
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓	
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>				✓				
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>				✓				
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025							
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			✓					
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	✓		✓				✓	
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓		
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>			1					
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>	✓		1	✓	✓	✓	✓	
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>					1			
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
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>	✓			✓				
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>	✓		✓			✓		
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			✓	✓				
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>	✓							
Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>			✓					
Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>						1		
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓			✓			
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			✓					
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓		
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>			3					
Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>						2		
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			H					
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>				2				
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>		✓						
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓		✓	✓		
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓					✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		H	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	H
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>						✓		
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓						
Carrión Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓						
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓				✓		

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025							
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>							✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>					5			
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			✓	✓		
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓		✓			
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>							✓	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓						
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓		✓	✓				
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓			✓				
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H			✓		H		
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	H	✓	✓	H	✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	H	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>								✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>							1	1
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>						H	H	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>							✓	✓
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				H			H	
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓		H	✓	✓	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓							✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	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>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓						
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Weaver	<i>Ploceus melanocephalus</i>	✓			✓				
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>			✓	✓	✓			✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>						1		H
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</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>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>								✓
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>						✓		

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025								
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓							
Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>			✓		✓	✓			
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>					✓	✓			
Stoat	<i>Mustela erminea</i>			✓						

Amphibians & reptiles

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025								
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Marsh Frog	<i>Pelophylax ridibundus</i>							H		
terrapin sp.	<i>Mauremys / Trachemys</i> sp.				✓	✓				
Spanish Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>	✓	✓							

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025								
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>								✓	
a white	<i>Pieris</i> sp.			✓			✓	✓		
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓		✓		✓			
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	✓			✓			

Other insects

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025								
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Dragonflies										
Vagrant Emperor	<i>Anax ephippiger</i>				✓					
Grasshoppers & allies										
a mole cricket	<i>Gryllotalpa</i> sp.		H						H	
cricket sp.	<i>Gryllidea</i> sp.								H	
Bees										
Honey Bee	<i>Apis mellifer</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓		

Selected plants

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025								
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Bridal Veil Broom	<i>Genista monosperma</i>					✓				
Friar's Cowl	<i>Arisarum vulgare</i>		✓	✓						
Paperwhite Narcissus	<i>Narcissus papyraceus</i>					✓				