

Autumnal Algarve

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Trip Report

6th - 13th October 2022

Led by Lara Broom from SPEA/BirdLife Portugal



A couple of ravens and a Spanish Imperial Eagle, Castro Verde (Richard Somers Cocks)

Day 1

Richard and Jane arrived earlier than planned, at 13h, and not long after we were exploring the saltpans south of the Faro airport. A common kestrel was the first bird saw, after getting the binoculars from the bags. Soon after, Lara spotted an osprey sitting on a pole quite far away, but later on, another osprey gave us very close views. Northern wheathers were plenty, and spotted flycatchers as well, migrating through in force at time this time of year. further on, a few flamingos kept us company, as well as the beautiful black-winged stilt or 'pernilongos' (long legged in Portuguese). A few dunlin kept us on our toes, whilst we debated if they were dunlins or curlew sandpipers. The conclusion was that it was a mix. A kingfisher sat perched far away for the whole time we were there. Further on, we went to do a little walk up to the marsh, and we saw 2 beautiful caspian terns. Redshanks and greenshanks were about as well, and a bird that made us doubt between greenshank and tereks sandpiper. In the end it flew and it was a greenshank after all.

We headed back to the hotel, where we arrived to a very warm evening, and with the sky filled with sand that had come from the Sahara a few days ago.

Day 2

After a lovely breakfast out in the veranda, we headed to Rocha da Pena a limestone massif. The first bird seen was a blue rock thrush, high up at the top. The walk was filled with Sardinian warbler chitting away, and a female blue rock thrush appeared this time on a tree! Along the path we could see fig trees, carob trees, mastic trees. We kept on walking up, but the birds were quiet. We met up with a group of german walkers who wondered what we were doing up there. A nuthatch was singing, and we could hear a bird of prey, but we never saw it. We decided to come down, and have a coffee at the Bar das Grutas where the owner started chatting to Lara and told her his name and his life story!

In the afternoon, we headed to Fonte da Benémola, the only fountain in the Algarve that does not dry. Soon after we started, a booted eagle showed very well over us. Continuing on, we saw blackcaps, robins, and some nice pomegranate trees. We finally reached the fountain, and indeed there was water coming up from the ground. Close by, there were some picnic tables and we settled down for lunch. Before that, Richard spotted a common darter, and we saw an invasive florida turtle. A grey wagtail later appeared. After lunch, we kept going just a little bit further on, to an information board that explained the differences between invasive turtles and native turtles, and how the former are bad for the local wildlife. We doubled back, and passed some nice autumn squill, and had very good views of a pied flycatcher. it was time for a last stop in Barranco do Velho. Here there is a biodiversity station set up by a local environmental NGO. Along a 1km path, there were several information boards talking about the local butterflies, flowers, and other wildlife. Red-veined darter were everywhere, as well as spotted flycatchers. further on, we saw 3 species of tits: long-tailed tits, blue tits, and crested tits. We kept going a little bit further on, and spotted a woodlark and two ravens. Langs-short-tailed-blue were spotted along the path. It was time to come back to our hotel for another lovely evening meal.



Booted eagle (light phase), Fonte da Benémola (Richard Somers Cocks)

Day 3

Today we headed east to the Castro Marim Natural Park, a reserve that sits on the border with Spain. We parked and walked up a track, one side water, the other side scrub. Dozens of coots showed well, as well as 2 sandwich terns fishing. We stopped at a bird observatory for a good look around and saw 1 osprey, as well as 3 crested grebes, and dozens of flamingos. Walking back, our attention was on the scrub, which produced 1 dartford warbler and 1 whitethroat. We decided to wander back, and headed to nearby saltpans. Here, the black-winged stilts kept us company as well as quite a few black-tailed godwits. We left and had lunch at the picnic tables close to the reserve interpretation centre. But before that, managed to have a good look at a ruff at one of the lagoons, and a stunning hoopoe near the main building. After lunch, we went for a walk, and saw again many black-tailed godwit, ringed plover, spoonbills, among others. We had coffee at a local bar, and headed to our last stop of the day, the saltpans in Tavira. A kingfisher kept us company, and we saw a ringed redshank, which Richard photographed. Back at the hotel, he found out that bird had been ringed in Norway just a couple of months ago, in August! A great way to celebrate World Migratory Day! Two oystercatchers, a ruff, and grey plovers, some in breeding plumage, bide us goodbye.



Castro Marim Nature Reserve (Lara Broom)

Day 4

Today we headed to the Alentejo, more specifically, Castro Verde, the stronghold for great bustards (and many other great birds). As soon as we arrived we started seeing red kites, in fact, they would keep us company throughout the day. We started scanning the roads west of Entradas, but had no luck for the great bustard. We passed some hunters, and decided that we would not be seeing any bustards in that area so moved on. Going into Entradas, we headed towards the cemetery, and decided to explore the area around it. As soon as we left the car, Lara noticed a flock of about 8 huge birds – it was them! They landed a little bit far

away, and so we decided to drive slowly closer to them. It was already quite warm, around 27 degrees, and the heat haze was strong. We went around the ridge, and stopped the car quite close to them. What an excitement to see the biggest flying bird in Europe!

Elated, we moved on, and started making our way to the picnic stop, not before stopping to have a good luck at the cattle egrets, and at a nearby bridge over a little bit of water (despite the long drought). A common sandpiper flew away as soon as he saw us, and so we entertained ourselves with the dragonflies (migrant hawk and red veined darter). Continuing on, we arrived at the picnic lunch spot, a church with sits atop a hill, with a 360 view of the fields around. We sat down at the picnic tables, whilst observing a pied flycatcher. After lunch, we found quite a few swallowtails, and even more spectacular than that, the beautiful two-tailed pasha. Two individuals were circling us, and in fact, one landed on Richards' hat! We had one last look at the view, and headed down for coffee at a nearby café known to Lara. The owner was extremely nice and showed us all the feathers he picked up around the area – great bustards and lesser kestrels. After coffee, we started making our way to the other side of Castro Verde, when all of the sudden Lara spotted some griffon vultures. We stopped by the side of the road and quickly realised there were other things above us – red kites, 2 ravens, 1 cinereous vulture and 1 spanish imperial eagle! It was a raptor fest! we then moved on, and stopped further on, to see another interesting raptor, a montagu's harrier. The day finished at the old train station of Casevel where we spotted red kites, buzzards, and talked about the fact that both lesser kestrels and rollers breed in that spot in the spring. It was time to head back, and on the way, had very close views of 3 hoopoes.



The group watching great bustards in Castro Verde (Lara Broom)



Two-tailed pasha, Castro Verde (Richard Somers Cocks)

Day 5

Today we drove to Quinta do Lago, a place known for its villas and luxurious hotels, but with surprisingly good birding. As soon as we parked, and had a look over the marsh we spotted a few audouins gulls. Further on, we saw 2 med gulls. The fiddlers crabs were abundant and we watched them for a while. The path then split into two, and we ventured left towards the small lagoon at the back. There, we saw a couple of ferruginous ducks, 1 lonely glossy ibis and 2 purple swamphen. This area has quite a few birdwatchers and we were told a little bittern was showing well in front of the observatory. Indeed, we went in, and after a little bit of searching saw it right in front of us! We decided to double-back and walk along the boardwalk. But not before, having a look for chameleons, which unfortunately we did not see. Along the boardwalk, we spotted a few Kentish plovers, as well as the ubiquitous flamingos, black-tailed godwits and one Caspian tern. We settled in for lunch at a shaded bench. Continuing on our walk, we saw a few dozen shovelers on the salt pans. Leaving Quinta do Lago, we decided to have a look at a nearby small wetland in another well-known holiday town. There, we saw one marsh harrier, a few house martins, among other things. It was time to head back to Alte.



Saltpans in Quinta do Lago (Lara Broom)

Day 6

Today we headed to southwest tip of Portugal – the Sagres peninsula. We arrived at a misty Cape St Vincent, but soon the clouds were gone and we pointed our scopes towards the sea. We saw dozens of gannets going past as well as 2 rafts of cory's shearwaters. On one of the rafts we later realised (with the help of a local birder) that there were 2 great shearwaters (distinguishably by their dark beak and black cap). Next stop was the raptor viewpoint where we saw an array of different raptors – goshawk, sparrowhawk, booted eagle, Bonelli's eagle among others. Lara went down for a wander and soon came back with the news of having found a caterpillar of the death's-head hawkmoth! When things calmed down raptor-wise we walked down to have a look at the caterpillars and realised there were actually 3 in the same Sodoms apple bush! It was time for lunch, and we headed to Ponta da Atalaia where we enjoyed the views, whilst watching gannets and little egrets go past. After a lovely coffee at a local Italian place, we went to Budens marsh. As we approached we could see very dark clouds and rain surrounding us. The walk was quiet bird-wise but we still managed to see a peregrine make a fast fly-by, as well as a big raptor that caused many doubts but ended up being a Bonelli's eagle. Autumn crocus and autumn lady's-tresses were also found along the way. Coming back, the rain started falling but we still managed to have a good view of a black-winged kite.



Cabo de São Vicente, Sagres (Lara Broom)



Death's-head hawkmoth caterpillar in Cabranosa, Sagres (Lara Broom)

Day 7

Today we headed north-west to visit the highest point in the Algarve – Fóia which sits at 902m above sea level. We had a good wander and saw many kestrels, buzzards, blue rock thrushes and one male ring ouzel. After a coffee at the local café place (and a slice of cake), we unfortunately came back to a flat tyre! Lara started making calls and whilst she dealt with that, we managed to spot a booted eagle flying away, a brimstone butterfly and an ocellated lizard. It could be a worse place to sit for a few hours waiting for the recovery assistance! After a while our car was fixed, we picked it up from the local garage, and started making our way to the hotel, as there wasn't much time left on the day. On the way, we made a couple of stops, and Diane found a beautiful praying mantis on the first stop. The second and final stop of the trip was overlooking a reservoir and we spotted grey herons, white and grey wagtails, cormorants, little egrets, and could hear an Iberian woodpecker around us. It was unfortunately time to head back for our last supper.

0610202 2	Afternoon	1	Faro saltpans and marsh (Ria Formosa NP)
0710202 2	Morning	2	Rocha da Pena
	Afternoon	2	Fonte da Benemola, Barranco do Velho
0810202 2	Morning	3	Castro Marim RN
	Afternoon	3	Tavira (Salinas)
0910202 2	Morning	4	Castro Verde
	Afternoon	4	
1010202 2	Morning	5	Quinta do Lago e Ludo
	Afternoon	5	Cançal de Vilamoura
1110202 2	Morning	6	Sagres
	Afternoon	6	Budens
1210202 2	Morning	7	Fóia (Monchique)
	Afternoon	7	Barragem de St Clara

Checklist Number 1 Birds

1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			x	x	x										
2	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			x		x										
3	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>						x									
4	Great Shearwater	<i>Ardenna gravis</i>						1									
5	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>						x									
6	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	x		x		x	x	x								

7	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>					1										
8	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>			1	x	x	x	x								
9	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	x		x	1	x	x	x								
10	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	x		x	1	x		x								
11	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>					x										
12	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	1				x	x									
13	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>					x										
14	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	x		x	x	x										
15	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	x		x		x										

16	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>					x										
17	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			x	x	x		1								
18	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>					x										
19	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>					2										

	Black-winged kite						1										
20	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>				x											
21	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>				x											
22	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				1											
23	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	2				1	x									
24	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>						x									
25	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				1											
26	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>						x									

27	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>						x								
28	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			1	x		x	x							
29	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila (heliaca) adalberti</i>				1										
30	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		1				x								
31	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>						1								
32	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	2		3											

33	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2		1	x	x	x	x							
34	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>						1								

35	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			2	x										
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36	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			1	x	x									
37	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>					2									
38	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			x		x									

39	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				8										
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40	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			2											
41	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	3		x	x	x									
42	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			x											
43	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	x		x	2	x									
44	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>					x									
45	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	2		x		x									
46	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				x										
47	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	x		x		x									
48	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			x											
49	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	x													
50	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	x		x		x									
51	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>			2		x									
52	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				1										

53	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			X ?		X ?										
54	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	x				x										
55	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>					x										
56	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>			1												
57	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	x		x		x										
58	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	x		x		x										
59	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	x		x	1	x		1								
60	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	2				x										

61	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>					x										
62	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	x		x		x										
	Audouin's Gull		1				x										
63	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			1		x										
64	Yellow-legged Herring Gull	<i>Larus (argentatus) cachinnans</i>	x		x			x									

65	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	2		2		x										
66	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>			x		x										

67	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		1	x	x		x									
68	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			1		x										
69	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		x		x	x		x								
70	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>						x									

71	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		H													
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72	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>						3									
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74	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1		1												
75	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			1												

76	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridus</i>								H							
77	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1													

78	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	x		x	x	x	x									
79	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		2					X								
80	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				1											

81	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonopragne rupestris</i>		x													
82	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>					x										
83	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>					x										

84	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		1		1		1	X								
85	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			1	1			X								

86	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		x		1			X								
87	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochuros</i>		x					X								
88	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		x													
89	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>			x			1	X								
90	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	X								
91	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	x	x	x	x		x	X								
92	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		3					X								
	Ring ouzel								1								
93	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		x	1		x	x	X								

94	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>					2										
95	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>							X								
96	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			1												
97	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	x		x		x	x	X								
98	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			1				1								
99	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		x													

100	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		x												
101	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				1										

102	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	x	x												
103	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		x		1		1	1							

104	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		x												
105	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>		x												
106	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>		x				X								
107	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		x												
108	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		1												

109	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>L. excubitor meridionalis</i>			x	x										
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110	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		x					X							
111	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>	x		x	x	x	x	X							
112	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	x		x	x	x	x								
113	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>				x		x								
114	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2		x										
115	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		x	x	x	x	x	X							

116	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	x	x	x		x	x	X							
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	Common waxbill				X		x									
117	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>							X							
118	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		x			x	x	X							
119	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>				x										

120	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>				x										
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Checklist Number 2 Butterflies

<i>Papilionidae</i>																
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>				x		1	1								

<i>Pieridae</i>																
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		?													
Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>				1											
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>						1									
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>							1								

<i>Lycaenidae</i>																
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>		x					x								

<i>Nymphalidae</i>																
Two-tailed Pasha	<i>Charaxes jasius</i>				2											
Painted Lady	<i>Cynthia cardui</i>						1									

<i>Satyridae</i>																
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>		x				1									

Dragonflies																
Red veined-darter		x	x		x		x									
Common darter				x												
emperor					x											