

Autumnal Algarve

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Trip Report

6th - 13th October 2023

Led by Hugo Sampaio from SPEA/BirdLife Portugal



Castro Marim Nature Reserve (Hugo Sampaio)

Day 1

Denise, Peter and Sheila were the first to arrive. We went to Faro Beach to have a cold drink and chat, while enjoying the sea view. When the time came, we returned to the airport to pick up Linda and Owen. We went around the airport and got to Ramalhete salt pans. The tide was not the best and there were few birds. Just a few Redshanks, a Common greenshank and a Black-winged stilt. Further ahead we were able to stop and enjoy a flock of Greater flamingos, a Little egret and Eurasian spoonbills. Then, suddenly two ospreys passed right above us! Just at the right time, as Paul arrived in the meantime and we headed to the airport again.

With the whole group together, we headed to the hotel. Once we arrived, we still had time to rest and enjoy the beautiful landscape and the sunset, before having a very nice welcome dinner.

Day 2

This day was spent near the hotel, exploring the Algarve Barrocal. In the morning we went out to walk at the base of Rocha da Pena limestone massif and admire the traditional agricultural fields with mixed fruit trees and some of the most characteristic native vegetation. The countryside was in dire need of the first autumn rains, so there wasn't much bird activity apart from Sardinian warblers. It looked like there was one in every bush! Two Ravens and a Common buzzard flew over us and a family of long-tailed tits hopped between the branches of a Holm oak tree. Some butterflies were also around, such as Wall brown and a beautiful Swallowtail.

In the afternoon we walked from the hotel to the beautiful village of Alte. We went along a dirt road and on our way we were able to observe a Short-toed eagle looking for food, as well as Red-veined darter and a Two tailed pasha. Arriving at the village we had great views of Blue rock thrush and as we walked through the narrow streets we were able to appreciate the traditional Algarve architecture, the whitewashed houses with their original chimneys.



Rocha da Pena limestone massif, settled in the Barrocal region (Hugo Sampaio)

Day 3

We dedicated this day mainly to observing water birds in two protected areas, Ria formosa Natural Park and Castro Marim Natural Reserve. The first stop was at Forte do Rato salt pans in Tavira, where we saw some waders very close by. Mixed flocks that allowed us to compare and distinguish several species, such as Dunlin, Sanderling, Little stint and Curlew sandpiper. Grey Plover, Common ringed plover, and Bar-tailed godwit were also around.

We then headed to Castro Marim Nature Reserve, where we saw interesting species in the saltmarsh and salt pans, such as Osprey, Common shelduck, Black-tailed godwit and Glossy ibis. It was lovely to watch the two Ospreys calling to each other with high-pitched calls. We also found a Moorish gecko hidden inside a well and there was a Dartford warbler calling from a bush, but we were not so lucky with that one.

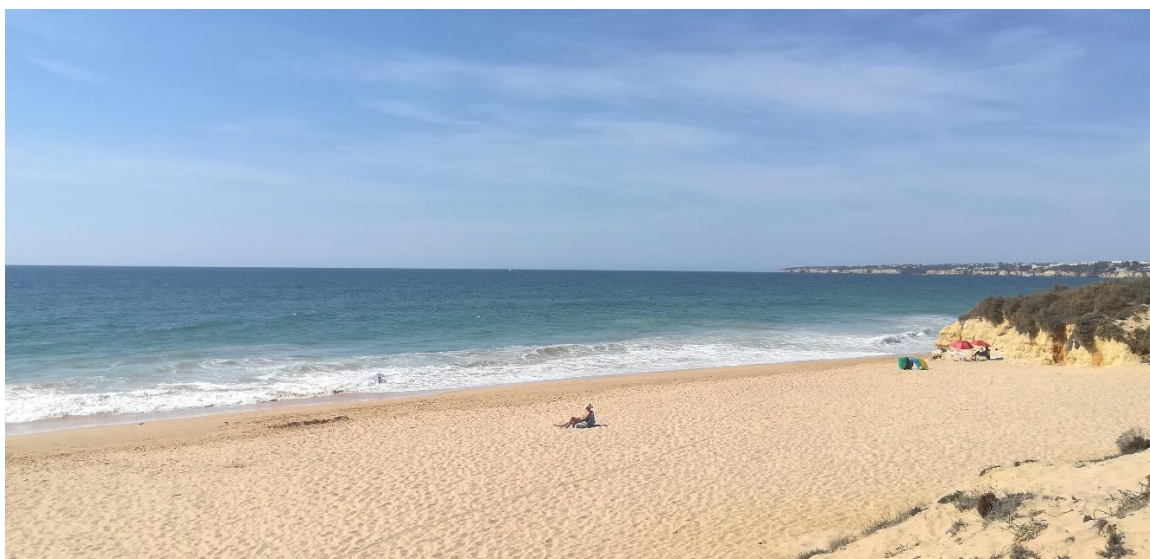


Castro Marim Nature Reserve (Hugo Sampaio)

Day 4

Today we started at Salgados Lagoon, one of the most famous birdwatching sites in the Algarve. For years, SPEA and other environmental associations fought to protect this lagoon and the extensive fields next to it, preventing the construction of more hotels. We are finally seeing some response from the Portuguese state, with the creation of a nature reserve in this precious area now on the way. Shortly after arriving we were able to briefly see an Ocellated lizzard, which quickly hid in a bush. In the lagoon we saw several interesting species but the most popular was the Hoopoe, which was on the wish list of some participants. We saw hundreds of Glossy ibis, and other species, such as Northern pintail and Bluethroat, and a graceful Red admiral passed by us. After we crossed the extensive dune cordon and went to the beach to stare at the sea.

Then we went to Fóia, in Monchique, the highest point in the Algarve - 902m above sea level. We were able to appreciate well-developed cork oaks used for cork extraction. On our short walk we saw several Northern wheatear and Stonechat. We also made good observations of Blue rock thrush, Dartford and Sardinian warblers. Only Rock bunting didn't show so well, it just flew over us, calling.



Praia Grande beach next to Salgados Lagoon (Hugo Sampaio)

Day 5

We travelled north to the dry plains of Alentejo. We headed to the village of Entradas, from where we began to explore the agricultural fields. It didn't take long until Denice found Great bustards, one of our main objectives for this day. We were busy observing these magnificent birds, when a pair of Ravens caught our attention. Very close by was an immature Spanish imperial eagle, which the corvids promptly attacked, causing it to move away. We continued along the dirt road towards Monte do Salto and shortly afterwards we saw two Black-bellied sandgrouse taking flight. We got out of the van and soon realized that they were part of a flock of almost 40 birds that was feeding on the fields nearby. Wonderful to see this beautiful species, calling while flying around us. We continued on our way and as we passed the Cobres stream, we stopped to see Iberian pond turtles and Peter soon spotted a Common kingfisher.

After a stop for coffee, we headed to the chapel of Our Lady of Aracelis, located on top of a hill and with superb views over the plains. There we had picnic while watching Griffon and Cinereous vultures. On the way down we saw another immature Spanish imperial eagle! In the afternoon, the heat didn't let up but we were still able to observe a flock of hundreds of Calandra lark. We made one last stop in Guerreiro but the only observation worth mentioning was a Common yellow scorpion.



Castro Verde drylands (Hugo Sampaio)

Day 6

Today we headed to the southwest tip of Portugal – the Sagres peninsula. We started in the fields between Vila do Bispo and Sagres, waiting for the weather to warm up so gliding birds could start flying. It didn't take long until we saw 2 Short-toed eagles hunting. We also saw Theckla lark and Corn bunting, as well as countless aestivating snails waiting for the first rains to come out of their sleep. Further ahead we saw Little Owl in a ruined house, it was magnificent and everyone was able to appreciate this lovely bird.

We continued our way to Cape Saint Vincent to admire its high cliffs. Below, Northern gannets flew over the blue sea. We spent some time enjoying this inspiring place and then headed to the Cabranosa raptor observation post. As soon as we arrived, we saw seven Black storks gaining height in a thermal to move away, which were joined by three Black kites. Common kestrels, Common buzzards and Short-toed eagles were also around. We had our picnic there and then headed to Sagres, to eat some good artisanal ice cream.

It was almost time to leave but we decided to give the dirt road to Vila do Bispo another chance because we hadn't seen the Red-billed choughs yet. There we went and as someone who doesn't give up deserves to be rewarded, we finally found them. There were 52 birds in a field very close to the road. We made great observation of these graceful birds.

Even more satisfied, we continued our journey and made one last stop at Budens Marsh. Upon arrival we were able to observe our first Booted eagle, which stayed there for a long time, so everyone could observe it. We followed the trail and found what we were looking for, the delicate autumn lady's-tresses as well as *Colchicum lusitanum*. With this we ended another full day and returned to the hotel for another great meal.



Cliffs from Cape Saint Vincent, Sagres (Hugo Sampaio)

Day 7

On our last day we went for a walk in the Ria Formosa Natural Park, near Quinta do Lago, well-known for its luxurious hotels and resorts. We started at low tide, in an area of mudflats, where we were able to observe a series of waders, such as Common greenshank, Curlew, Whimbrel, Redshank, Eurasian spoonbill, Grey plover, Kentish plover, Oystercatcher as well as many fiddler crabs. Everything was very lively, the birds could be observed up close and in great light. We continued walking and the habitat changed, we went to a freshwater lagoon, where Denise soon found a Purple swamphen. Meanwhile, a couple told us that there was a Spotted crane at the beginning of the lagoon. We went there to look and we were able to observe this rare species in Portugal very well. In the lagoon we could still see Glossy ibis, Northern shoveler, a flock of several dozen Little grebes and Azure-winged magpies. We had lunch there and when we were returning Sheila found the Little bittern that we had been looking for, well hidden in the reeds. What a sighting!

We walked back to the van and went back to the hotel early to pack our bags and say goodbye with another great supper. This time we had again the much appreciated wild boar stew. It was the end of a wonderful trip. The weather was a bit hot for the season but everyone managed to have a great week in the Algarve.



Ria formosa Natural Park near Quinta do Lago (Hugo Sampaio)

Day			Places visited
06/10	1	Afternoon	Ramalhete Saltpans (Ria Formosa Natural Park)
07/10	2	Morning	Rocha da Pena
		Afternoon	Around the hotel and Alte village
08/10	3	Morning	Forte do Rato (Tavira) Saltpans
		Afternoon	Castro Marim Nature Reserve
09/10	4	Morning	Salgados Lagoon
		Afternoon	Fóia (Monchique)
10/10	5	All day	Castro Verde
11/10	6	Morning	Sagres Peninsula
		Afternoon	Budens Marsh
12/10	7	Morning	Quinta do Lago and São Lourenço Lagoon

Bird Checklist

	Day		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				X			X
2	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>						X	
3	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			X	X			X
4	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>						X	
5	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>							X
6	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>			X		X	X	X
7	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	X		X	X			X
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	X		X	X			X
9	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>						X	
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	X		X	X			
11	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			X	X			X
12	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	X		X	X			X
13	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	X		X	X			
14	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			X				
15	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				X			X
16	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				X			
17	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				X			X
18	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>				X			
19	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				X			X
20	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				X			X
21	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>						X	
22	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>					X		
23	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>					X		
24	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>					X		
25	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circus gallicus</i>		X				X	
26	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	X			X		X	
27	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			X			X	

28	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		X		X	X	X	
29	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>					X		
30	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>						X	X
31	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	X		X	X			
32	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			X	X	X	X	X
33	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>					X		X
34	Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>					X		
35	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				X			
36	Spotted Crake	<i>Porzana porzana</i>							X
37	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				X			X
38	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>							X
39	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				X			X
40	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>					X		
41	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>							X
42	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	X		X	X			X
43	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			X				
44	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	X		X				X
45	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>							X
46	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			X				X
47	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			X				X
48	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			X				X
49	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			X				
50	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			X				
51	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				X			X
52	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			X				
53	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			X				X
54	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>							X
55	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>							X
56	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>							X
57	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	X		X				X

58	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	X						X
59	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			X				X
60	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				X			X
61	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			X				X
62	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>			X	X			X
63	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			X	X			X
64	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>				X		X	
65	Audouin's Gull								X
66	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>							X
67	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>				X			
68	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>					X		
69	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		X	X			X	X
70	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			X				X
71	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
72	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>							
73	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>						X	
74	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				X	X		
75	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	X			X	X	X	
76	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		X					
77	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>					X		
78	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		X	X	X			
79	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>					X	X	
80	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				X	X		
81	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>				X			
82	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonopragne rupestris</i>						X	
83	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>				X		X	
84	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>						X	
85	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>					X		
86	Blue-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>			X	X			
87	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				X			

88	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				X			X
89	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				X	X	X	X
90	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>					X		
91	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochuros</i>						X	
92	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>					X		
93	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
94	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			X	X	X	X	
95	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		X		X			
96	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	X	X	X		X	X	X
97	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				X			X
98	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			X	X		X	X
99	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			X	X			
100	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X
101	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>					X		X
102	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
103	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>					X		
104	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		X					
105	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>		X			X		
106	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		X					X
107	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				X			
108	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		X		X			
109	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>					X		
110	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>	X	X		X	X	X	X
111	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	X			X	X		X
112	Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>						X	
113	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>					X	X	
114	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		X			X	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	X
117	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		X					X

118	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>							X
119	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		X		X		X	
120	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		X			X	X	
121	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				X			
122	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>			X		X	X	