

Autumnal Algarve

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

UK to Faro and then Alte

Our entire holiday is based at the beautifully situated Alte Hotel. We should have some time in the afternoon of our arrival day to explore the surroundings. The birdlife is very good indeed right around the Alte. Those lovely Azure-winged Magpies are sure to be popular and we'll see Hoopoes from time whilst Sardinian Warblers scold from the thicker scrub.

Day 2

Rocha da Pena & Benemola Spring

These two places are located in the heart of the Barrocal, a mixed farming system typical of the Algarve and comprises, or used to comprise a mosaic of cereal and pastures interspersed with almond, olive, carob and fig trees. These fields are now largely abandoned.

The Rocha da Pena is a limestone massif rising to 500 m above sea level. We can expect to see more Azure-winged Magpies, as well as Woodlarks, Thekla Larks, Blue Rock Thrushes, and the handsome Rock Bunting. Clouded Yellows still populate the terraces and we'll see other later season butterflies such as Painted Ladies, and possibly Long-tailed and Lang's Short-tailed Blues. Strawberry Trees, of which the Portuguese make an alcoholic drink called 'aguardente' or fire water, will have fruits and we will be able to try them! Dwarf fan palm, One of only two palms native to Europe dominates the low vegetation.

The afternoon will be spent at the Benemola Spring, one of the few permanent springs in the Algarve. We may see some late dragonflies here, such as the Migrant Hawker, Red-veined Darter and Epaulet Skimmer. There's also a good chance we'll find Autumn Lady Tresses.

Day 3

Castro Marim and Tavira

Today we will drive east to visit the Castro Marim Nature Reserve, which sits on the Guadiana Estuary, right next to the Spanish border. We will use the morning to explore the marshes and salt pans, which hold a high variety of waterbirds and waders, such as Greater Flamingos, Black-winged Stilts, Avocets, and many Spoonbills. Ospreys and Marsh Harriers are often seen here, and we may even have a glimpse of a Kingfisher. Several species of gulls will be present, including Mediterranean Gulls, and we'll also look for Caspian Terns. Autumn Squill will be in flower, as will be *Narcissus serotinus*. After lunch, a small drive west will take us to

Tavira, which is inside the Ria Formosa Natural Park, and also holds a variety of waterbirds. We will be on the lookout for Audouin's Gull amongst others.

Day 4

Castro Verde

The plains of the Alentejo offer some superb birdwatching. We will explore the dry grassland area looking for the impressive Great Bustard. We'll look for cryptically marked Little Bustards, always much more obvious on the wing, and we'll hope to see Black-bellied Sandgrouse, or at least hear their lovely purring calls. Several species of larks will be seen over the open landscapes, and every electricity line seems to have an Iberian Grey Shrike. Raptors are quite a feature with Red Kites abundant and we'll look to for the lovely Black-winged Kite! We'll likely disturb a Stone Curlew or two and sitting on piles of stones will be the occasional Little Owl. Griffon and Cinereous Vultures will be flying overhead, and with luck we'll come across the endangered Spanish Imperial Eagles. The delicate *Merendera filifolia* will be in flower decorating the steppe with its starry pink blooms. Small Copper, European Swallowtail and Red Admiral are a few of the butterflies we may encounter. We'll be on the lookout for Moorish Geckos hard to spot as they lay concealed in cracks in the mortar in the walls of local houses.

Day 5

Quinta do Lago (Ria Formosa Natural Park)

We will take a full day to visit one of the most important wetlands in the Algarve, the Ria Formosa complex of tidal lagoons saltmarshes and saltpans. After breakfast we will drive 40 minutes south to the Quinta do Lago area. Here among plenty of egrets, waders and gulls we will look for Little Bittern, Red-crested Pochard, Purple Gallinule, Audouin's Gull and Caspian Tern. Different wetland habitats (fresh water lagoon, mudflats, saltmarsh, saltpans, dunes, etc) will produce a huge diversity of birds. But not only birds will make our day. In the Mastic Trees we might find the amazing European Chameleon or the colourful Horseshoe Whip Snake.

Day 6

Salgados Lagoon & Monchique Mountain

First we will visit the most popular birding place in the Algarve, the Salgados lagoon. Here we will hope to find a nice selection of waterbirds, with plenty of Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard, Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, and many other waterbirds.

In the afternoon we will drive to Monchique, at 1000m, the highest mountain in the Algarve. Green Woodpeckers and Firecrests inhabit Cork Oak woodlands. In the meadows of Foia we can expect to find Ring Ouzels, Northern Wheatears, Dartford Warblers and Rock Buntings. There's a good chance we'll see groups of migratory raptors enjoying the thermals produced over the mountain ridge and these are likely to include Griffon Vulture, Hobby and both Short-toed Eagle and Booted Eagle.

Day 7

Sagres Peninsula

The last day will see us driving an hour to the west in order to visit the peninsula of Sagres. The arid western tip of the Algarve is well known among birdwatchers at this time of year. Huge concentrations of migrating raptors can be seen here, among them, Booted, Short-toed and Bonelli's Eagles, harriers and storks, and three species of vulture. Migrant passerines are also seen here such as Northern Wheatear and Pied Flycatcher. From land it is possible to see Cory's and Balearic Shearwaters and hundreds of Gannets. Red-billed Chough will also be around, and we'll very likely see Peregrines skimming past the cliffs. We will take time to explore the inland farmlands where we may see Little Bustard, Golden Plover and Stone Curlew. Plants we may find in flower include Common Smilax, Lesser Calamint, Flax-leaved Daphne and Sea Squill. We'll enjoy the sight of the local form of autumn crocus, *Colchicum lusitanicum*, decorating the coastal headlands and probably we'll find some Autumn Lady's Tresses too.

Day 8

Faro to UK

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

To Book a on this Holiday please fill in the booking form which you can download from www.greentours.co.uk (also found in the Greentours brochure) and post to Greentours, 8 Eliot Close, Armitage, Rugeley, WS15 4UP, UK. Tel +44 (0)1298 83563. After booking your place you'll receive a confirmation letter and a detailed information pack will be dispatched twelve weeks prior to departure. Flower, bird and butterfly checklists are available.