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ANDALUCIA AMAZING MIGRANTS TOUR REPORT 5th-12th SEPTEMBER 2016

Participants:- David Bosworth, Helen Coe, Tony Herbert, Richard Horton, Peter Leach, Maurice Local & Marian Wootton

Tour Guide for Norfolk Birding – Chris Mills





Accommodation

We returned again to the wonderful accommodation and hosts at Huerta Grande! Its geographical location is very close to the raptor watch-points. The migration overhead set in the beautiful woodland, with passerine migration outside the chalets are all great reasons for using this as our accommodation.

The accommodation consists of a lovely set of houses, rooms and timber lodges set in 7 hectares of a forest of Laurel and Cork Oak trees.

All rooms were en-suite or with separate private bathrooms plus each came with a small lounge area a kitchenette complete with a fridge, plus tea and coffee facilities. The rooms are clean and simple with modern comfort. There is a 20 metre pool where you can cool down and then look upwards and watch the migration above you!

Food

Each morning we were treated to cereal, muesli, juices, bread, toasts, jams, tea & coffee! A real, filling & healthy breakfast! Plus early breakfasts were prepared for us on two mornings.

Packed lunches were generally, a selection of cheese, Iberian meats, egg, tomatoes in French sticks, crisps and lots of wonderful fruit plus cereal bars & juice.

Evening meals were taken at Huerta Grande on five evenings. They provided us with an excellent range of three course meal with a glass (or more!) of wine for 15 euros. Other evenings we ate in nearby restaurants.

Trip Report

The following trip report is an overview of the locations and wildlife. An extensive bird systematic list is included at the end of the report.

If you are interested in joining the trip or visiting Andalucia, please feel free to drop me an email at chrismills@norfolkbirding.com. We can also put you in contact with local birding guides if you are just interested in one or two days birding.



5th September Day One

I collected the group from Gibraltar airport, their plane arriving slightly early & we soon had everyone and their luggage in the minibus heading for the accommodation at Pelayo just West of Algeciras. Having arrived 3 days previously and witnessed two days of full on raptor migration, I was a little concerned that maybe the group might have missed "the full throttle" experience, how wrong I as proven to be!

On arrival at the accommodation we just started to unload, but soon aborted this task as a nice line of birds passed straight over our heads! **Around c100 Honey Buzzard, 10 Short-toed Eagle, 20 Booted Eagle, Peregrine**, also a small flock of **Bee-eater** alarm called as a **Peregrine** rushed past them! Welcome to birding in the Straits of Gibraltar!!

We got everyone unloaded and into their rooms, had a nice lunch and then had a nice leisurely afternoon raptor watching. We first headed to the westerly migration watchpoint of Cazalla. The passage was steady, with a few lower birds and an ideal introduction for the group to the less familiar raptors, **c50 Egyptian Vulture, 2 Griffon Vulture, 4 Black Stork, 50+ Booted Eagle, 10+ Short-toed Eagle, 50+ Honey Buzzard, c150 Black Kite**. Later in the afternoon we headed down on to one of the coastal roads, where we had some nice closer views of the raptors, particularly **Booted & Short-toed Eagles**, along with a superb juvenile **Montagu's Harrier**. We finished with another hour and half at the easterly migration watchpoint of Algarobbo, where we had great views of low flying **Bee-eaters** and **Pallid Swift** also another **c100 Honey Buzzard** passed south. A great start to the trip, we headed back to the accommodation and enjoyed a lovely three course evening meal with a glass of wine.

6th September Day Two

After breakfast we headed for the dunes and beach area of Playa de Los Lances. Immediately obvious were several **Zitting Cisticola & Crested Lark**. We were heading for a hide, but were diverted after being told by birders of a **Dotterel** that was present nearby in the dunes. A short walk and we were soon watching a superbly, confiding juvenile **Dotterel** showing down to a few metres, a scarce migrant in Andalusia. As we admired the **Dotterel**, it was soon accompanied close by several **Short-toed Larks** and **2 Tawny Pipit**, plus several more **Crested Lark**. Also small groups of our first proper views of **Spotless Starling**.



We headed back to the screen overlooking the coastal lagoon and added a nice selection of waders. It has to be said, the disturbance by dog walkers and the lack of any enforcement of this protected area is disappointing. However, our early visit ensured this wasn't too bad and we managed a good selection of birds, our first views of the attractive **Audouin's Gulls**, plus many **Yellow-legged Gulls**, **c100 Sanderling**, **c100 Great Ringed Plover**, **c30 Dunlin & Bar-tailed Godwit**. By late morning it was getting quite hot and we retired into a local bar for soft drinks & coffees. We were halfway through our refreshments, when from the bar window, I noticed a whole load of **White Storks** flying south. We rushed outside and marvelled as a fantastic and huge migrating flock of **c2000 White Storks** moved low, flapping and moving south.

We decided that lunch and the next couple of hours might be best from Cazalla watchpoint, this proved an inspired decision! In fact the afternoon proved to be one of the best sessions I have ever witnessed over the last 8 years. Over three hours **10,000+ Honey Buzzard**, **c5000 Black Kite**, two more flocks of several hundred **White Stork**, **4 Black Stork**, **Booted & Short-toed Eagle** passed over our heads, along with some beautiful low trilling flocks of Bee-eaters. The atmosphere was electrifying stood with 60+ other birders marvelling at the masses overhead.

We finished off a fantastic first full day with a late afternoon, early evening to the wetland and rice fields of La Janda. The wetter areas of one rice field had formed a nice pool, proving very attractive to many migrants. Scanning through masses of **c500 Glossy Ibis**, **c1000 White Stork** and **Little Egrets** also produced **40+ Spoonbill**, **20 Black-winged Stilt**, **a Squacco Heron**, **2 Ruff**, **10 Green Sandpiper**, **Common Sandpiper** and **2 Wood Sandpiper**. Further on the bushes and fields held huge flocks of **Sparrows and Goldfinches**, certainly thousands of Sparrows. We soon picked out some smart male **Spanish Sparrows**. Also around **c25 Turtle Doves** alighted on the wires and bushes, whilst several **Marsh & Montagu's Harriers** danced over the fields behind and a **Purple Heron** flew low over the fields. After a little searching we've eventually located a **Black-winged Kite**, albeit a little distant!

We arrived slightly late back, though we had had a great days birding and we tucked into a lovely three course meal and wine, before heading off for a well known earned rest!

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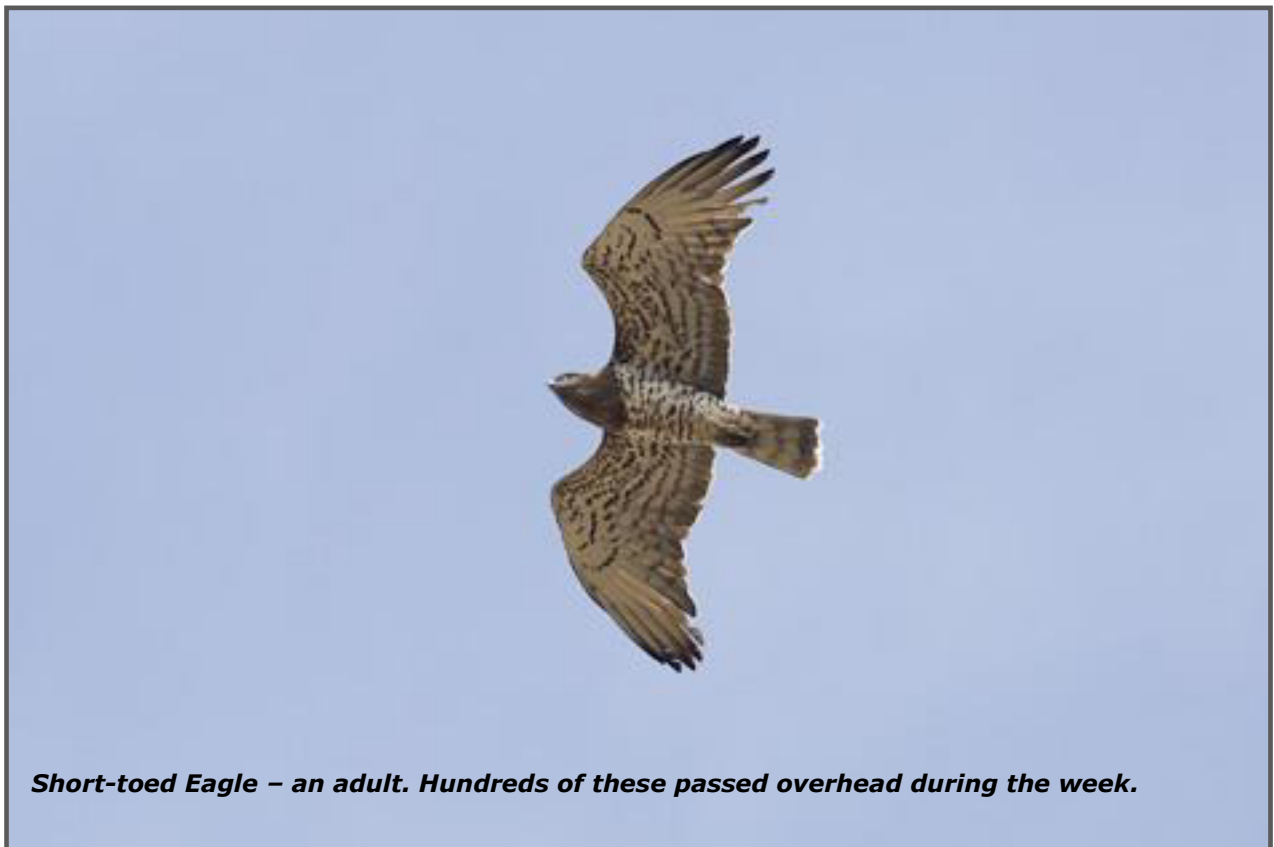
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Booted Eagle – an adult. Hundreds of these passed overhead during the week.



Short-toed Eagle – an adult. Hundreds of these passed overhead during the week.

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Bee-eaters regular parties of 40-60 passed overhead daily at the start of the trip.



A flock of migrating Bee-eater.



7th September Day Three

Today was forecast as an exceptionally hot day, so we headed off early into the mountain region of Sierra de la Nieves. It did prove very hot and even high up the temperature was touching 29c by late morning! However, we still did very well! An **Iberian Grey Shrike** was the first bird to greet us we arrived in the valley. Further up in my favoured area, we eventually had really nice views of **4 Black Wheatear, 2 Black Redstart** and very good views of **Dartford Warbler & 2 Short-toed Treecreeper**. In the shadier areas we had a group of **c10 Rock Bunting**, plus several commoner woodland tits and finches. A high adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was scoped and watched doing a couple of displaying dives and a **Crossbill** was heard briefly flying over.

We lunched near a water trough area, which in the arid conditions and heat proved very attractive, several **Iberian Chiff-chaff, Whitethroat, Great Spotted Woodpecker** and a very obliging **Western Bonelli's Warbler** and numerous tits coming to drink.

We then headed down the mountain and the temperature increased, so we stopped off for cold drinks in a bar, amazingly another **Black Wheatear** appeared just outside the bar on the rocks!

We stopped off at viewpoint in Caceres and enjoyed the **Griffon Vultures** overhead, though **Blue Rock Thrush** proved elective in the heat! We then headed down into Rio Genal valley, a couple of stops proved products Clive. The first by some small pools that were still present, **4 Little Ringed Plover, 2 Green Sandpiper, Little Egret, White Wagtail, Crested Lark** and a flock of **Corn Bunting**. Another stop in some greener fields with livestock also proved attractive, with reasonable numbers of migrants here - **c40 Blue-headed "flava" type wagtails, 2 Whinchat, 2, Tawny Pipit** and **4 Hoopoe**. Also **c100 Corn Bunting**, plus **Booted and Short-toed Eagle** and a juvenile **Montagu's Harrier** overhead.

We arrived back at the accommodation late afternoon and several of the group enjoyed a cold beer, whilst others took to the pool either were a remedy for a very hot days birding!

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A juvenile migrating Egyptian Vulture – a good year with a day count of over a hundred!



A migrating Griffon Vulture – plenty of birds close overhead!

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A juvenile migrating Red Kite!



A Bald Ibis part of a flock of 38 seen.



8th September Day Four

We were thankful to awake to brisk '*poniente*' west wind, that had freshened the air and temperatures more moderate today. Just after breakfast as we were preparing to leave we were treated to the fantastic sight of **c1000 Alpine Swifts**, they were high overhead but could be picked out as their white bellies glinted in the sunlight.

We then headed to the nearby easterly migration watchpoint of Algarrobo. It was a much steadier experience than the intense masses of Day two, but it was ideal for studying the raptors as many slowly moved overhead, some quite low in good light.

Over the period of the morning, we were treated to **c500 Honey Buzzard**, **c25 Short-toed Eagle**, **c50 Booted Eagle**, **2 Black Stork**, plus smaller numbers of more **Alpine Swift**, several nice and close. These were accompanied by mixed parties of both **Pallid** and **Common Swift**. Our first **Red-rumped Swallows** passed south alongside both **Swallows**, **Sand** and **House Martins**. A beautiful male **Golden Oriole** splashed black and yellow across the scene as it briefly banked and disappeared into the trees.

After lunch we headed towards Tarifa, to take our afternoon boat trip out on to the seas of The Straits. We dropped Maurice and Tony off, as both were much happier on "terra-firma". The boat trip produced excellent views of several **Cory's Shearwater** and we saw at least twenty of these, we had distant views of **Black Tern** and very nice views of many **Striped Dolphin**, but unusually we missed out on the resident pods of Pilot Whales. The sea was a little quiet bird wise, and on collection, Maurice and Tony were very pleased to tell us they had fine views of **2 Ruppell's Vultures**, plus a **Bonelli's Eagle** and **Montagu's Harrier!** Slightly gripped we headed for an afternoon meal in Tarifa

We had a nice meal in Tarifa and then headed for an evening's birding at La Janda, the rice fields and pools held similar waders, although a flock of **10 Wood Sandpiper** was significantly more, also more White Storks with around c2000 roosting in the fields. Just prior to dusk we explored the areas to the north east which we had not reached on our previous visit. We soon noted Woodchat Shrikes, and had nine in the dry fields. As the light faded, we headed to our final vigil of the day - a brilliant half an hour rounded the day off as 2 Little Owls appeared, several Stone Curlew were heard with one flying past us and finally point blank views of 2 Red-necked Nightjars! There was just time for a quick cold beer before heading off to bed.

Day Five - 9th September

Today was an early start as we headed north to Bonanza salinas and the edge of the Coto Donana park. We had an early breakfast and left 630am. We arrived at the salinas after quick coffee stop at 830am. Thankfully it was still



cool and the low level that was excellent for birding the get salt pans. The birds were soon coming thick and fast - **1000+ Greater Flamingo**, **c20 Black-necked Grebe**, great views of an **Osprey** flying to its perch complete with prey, **Common Shelduck**, **Spoonbill**, lots of **Great Ringed Plover**, but also good numbers of **Kentish Plover**, single **Grey Plover**, **2 Knot**, **2 Turnstone**, **Sanderling**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **flocks of c100 Black-tailed Godwit**, **Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Ruff**, **Dunlin** and also small numbers of Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint. Many **Yellow-legged** and **Lesser black-backed Gulls**, but alongside them also **c50+ Slender-billed Gulls** a few sporting no a beautiful pinkish hue. The bigger pools hosted **3 Caspian Tern**, plus a few **Little Tern**. One of the more sought after species was also found, **c10 Lesser short-toed Lark** with 2 showing well and providing good scope views.

We then headed to several freshwater pools, providing good views of several more target species! Great views of **White-headed Duck**, **2 Purple Swamphens**, **Shoveler**, **c20 Black-crowned Night Heron**, several Kingfisher and **c20 Marbled Duck** and a vagrant **Ruddy Shelduck**. The nearby bushes also provided a few **Pied Flycatchers**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Common Chiff-chaff** and a **Western Bonelli's warbler**.

We found a shaded spot and enjoyed a slightly late picnic lunch. We then headed to Chipiona. We didn't have to wait long at all at this location, we were treated to real close views of several **Little Swift** as they flew in and out of the colony.

The final stop of the day was around an hours drive back towards our accommodation. We stopped near Barbate and were soon enjoying good views of **38 Bald Ibis**, nearby the lagoons also gave us hundreds of **Yellow-legged Gulls**, plus **c220 Audouin's Gulls** and a **Stone Curlew**. We arrived back at the accommodation at around 6pm, a wonderful days birding with 90 species recorded in the day and several specialities.

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White Stork a closer individual on migration



A convincing looking Iberian Chiff-chaff!

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Hoopoe - always a favourite, several migrants were seen during the tour



A Little Swift heading back towards its nesting site.

**Day Six - 10th September**

We had a slightly later start after a couple of busy days and after breakfast we explored two tracks and nearby farmland areas close to the accommodation. The first produced excellent views of **5+ Cirl Bunting**, several migrant **Pied Flycatcher**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Firecrest** and small numbers of **Serin** and **Linnet**. The second area was good for migrants, the bushes and fences along the field edge produced **6 Common Redstart**, **3 Pied Flycatcher**, **2 Whinchat**, **3+ Wheatear**, **Blackcap**, **Whitethroat**, **6 Yellow wagtail** and good close views of **Spotless Starling** and **Sardinian warbler**.

We had lunch and then headed for Algarrobo watchpoint we were treated to a similar mix of raptors as we had seen earlier in the week, but very good views of **Honey Buzzard**, **Short-toed Eagle** and **Booted Eagle** and best views of **Egyptian Vulture**, plus a **Peregrine** and a good passage of **Red-rumped Swallows**.

We finished the afternoon searching a known location for White-rumped Swift, but for the first time in 3 years we were unable to locate this species. There was plenty of other swifts in the area with good numbers of **Pallid**, **Common** and **Alpine Swifts**. Also overhead an amazing concentration of **c500 Griffon Vulture**.

Another good day rounded off with another excellent evening meal



A juvenile Montagu's Harrier heading south.

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Cory's Shearwater several were seen during our boat trip into the Straits.



A Black Stork migrates through with a group of Honey Buzzards

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Adult female Honey Buzzard - soaring



Adult male Honey Buzzard in active flight



Day Seven - 11th September

We started the final day of the trip with a visit to the Palmones river estuary area. We headed there straight after breakfast and the area was quiet from disturbance and the birding was good. From the west shore, we noted **12 Grey Heron**, good views of a perched **Osprey**, **2 Spoonbill** flew over, **c60 Great Ringed Plover** were on the high tide roost alongside **2 Kentish Plover**, a **Grey Plover**, **12 Dunlin**, **2 Snipe**, **6 Bar-tailed Godwit**, **2 Greenshank**, **25 Redshank**, a **Common Sandpiper** plus wonderful views of a point blank **Whimbrel** asking past at 5m! The sandbank also held **12 Mediterranean Gulls**, **10 Sandwich** and a **Caspian Tern**.

We made a quick coffee stop and then headed up the Rio Jenal to check the area again for migrants. A similar mix of species but many more **Yellow "flava" Wagtails**, the majority being '*flavissima*', but also a candidate for '*thunbergi*'. Nice perched views of a really smart male **Lesser Kestrel**, a **Peregrine** sent all the **Yellow wagtails** dashing for safety. Other different migrants to our previous visit were **3 Woodchat Shrike** and a **Greater short-toed Lark**. There was also **10+ Pied Flycatcher**, **3+ Common Redstart**, **5 Wheatear**, **Whinchat**, **2 Whitethroat** and **Spotted Flycatcher**.

We then headed higher up and in much cooler conditions than 3 days ago. We soon located 4 Blue Rock Thrush, with lovely close views. Looking down the mountain we marveled at soaring Griffin Vultures, awesome, let alone the amazing view ten miles towards the Straits. It was a great end to the birding on a brilliant trip. We had a lovely final meal back at the accommodation, rounded off with a nice sweet sherry.

Day Eight - September 12th

After breakfast we loaded up the minibus and dropped everyone to Gibraltar airport at 930am ready for their late morning flight back to the UK.

Final Overview

This was another fantastic trip to Andalucia, our 7th year. We recorded a total of 157 species. Though species numbers are a minor part of the experience, the truly fantastic migration that passes through this region is nothing less than a truly spiritual experience for keen birdwatchers!

**Thanks**

I would like to say a special thanks to Katrin at Huerta Grande, Javi Elorriaga and Yeray Seminario from Birding The Strait, Andres de Cruz and Alejandro Onrubio from Fundacion Migres for their assistance and help. Also thanks to the group of clients who joined me, you were a great group and it was a pleasure to share so many great spectacles!



Group picture in the grounds at Huerta Grande

Systematic List

Below is the systematic list of birds recorded during the group tour:-

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1	Little Grebe
2	Black-necked Grebe
3	Cory's Shearwater
4	Balearic Shearwater
5	European Storm-petrel
6	Great Cormorant
7	Grey Heron
8	Night Heron
9	Squacco Heron
10	Little Egret
11	Cattle Egret
12	Black Stork
13	White Stork
14	Greater Flamingo
15	Greater Canada Goose
16	Common Shelduck
17	Ruddy Shelduck
18	Mallard
19	Marbled Teal
20	Northern Shoveler
21	Common Pochard
22	White-headed Duck
23	Egyptian Vulture
24	Ruppells Griffon
25	Eurasian Griffon
26	Spanish Imperial Eagle
27	Bonelli's Eagle
28	Booted Eagle
29	Short-toed Eagle
30	Osprey
31	European Honey-buzzard
32	Black Kite
33	Marsh Harrier
34	Montagu's Harrier
35	Common Buzzard
36	Eurasian Sparrowhawk
37	Lesser Kestrel
38	Common Kestrel
39	Peregrine Falcon
40	Pheasant
41	Red-legged Partridge
42	Purple Swamphen
43	Moorhen
44	Common Coot
44	Bald Ibis

45	Glossy Ibis
46	Eurasian Spoonbill
47	Black-winged Stilt
48	Avocet
49	Dotterel
50	Stone Curlew
51	Great Ringed Plover
52	Little ringed Plover
53	Kentish Plover
54	Grey Plover
55	Knot
56	Sanderling
57	Little Stint
58	Curlew Sandpiper
59	Dunlin
60	Ruff
61	Snipe
62	Black-tailed Godwit
63	Bar-tailed Godwit
64	Whimbrel
65	Common Redshank
66	Spotted Redshank
67	Greenshank
68	Green Sandpiper
69	Common Sandpiper
70	Wood Sandpiper
71	Ruddy Turnstone
72	Audouin's Gull
73	Yellow-legged Gull
74	Lesser Black-backed Gull
75	Black-headed Gull
76	Slender-billed Gull
77	Mediterranean Gull
78	Little Tern
79	Caspian Tern
80	Black Tern
81	Sandwich Tern
82	Common Woodpigeon
83	Collared Dove
84	European Turtle Dove
85	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon
86	Little Owl
87	Tawny Owl
88	Red-necked Nightjar
89	Alpine Swift

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90	Common Swift
91	Pallid Swift
92	Little Swift
93	Common Kingfisher
94	European Bee-eater
95	Hoopoe
96	Great Sp. Woodpecker
97	Sand Martin
98	Barn Swallow
99	Crag-Martin
100	House Martin
101	Red-rumped Swallow
102	Crested Lark
103	Calandra Lark
104	Greater Short-toed Lark
105	Lesser Short-toed Lark
106	Tree Pipit
107	Tawny Pipit
108	White Wagtail
109	Blue-headed wagtail
110	Grey Wagtail
111	Spotted Flycatcher
112	Pied Flycatcher
113	Black Redstart
114	Common Redstart
115	Whinchat
116	Common Stonechat
117	Black Wheatear
118	Northern Wheatear
119	Wren
120	Robin
121	Blue Rock Thrush
122	Blackbird
123	Western Bonelli's Warbler
124	Willow Warbler
125	Common Chiffchaff
126	Iberian Chiffchaff
127	Blackcap
128	Garden Warbler
129	Dartford Warbler
130	Sardinian Warbler

131	Firecrest
132	Zitting Cisticola
133	Cetti's Warbler
134	Coal Tit
135	Crested Tit
136	Great Tit
137	Eurasian Blue Tit
138	European Nuthatch
139	Short-toed Treecreeper
140	Woodchat Shrike
141	Golden Oriole
142	Magpie
143	Eurasian Jay
144	Red-billed Chough
145	Eurasian Jackdaw
146	Common Raven
147	Spotless Starling
148	House Sparrow
149	Spanish Sparrow
150	Chaffinch
151	Greenfinch
152	Goldfinch
153	Linnet
154	European Serin
155	Common Waxbill
156	Cirl Bunting
157	Rock Bunting
158	Corn Bunting

Amazing Migrants Tour 2017

This tour will run again

Monday 4–11th September 2017.

If you are interested in joining contact us as soon as possible as this is a very popular trip.

Chris Mills – Norfolk Birding

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