



ANDALUCIA AMAZING MIGRANTS TOUR REPORT 3rd – 10th SEPTEMBER 2018

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Carol Shepherd & Graham Weaver**

Tour Guide for Norfolk Birding – Chris Mills

Migration, lots of migration and then even more migration!



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!

The food was excellent, our hosts Katrin, Juan Carlos, Juan Julien, & Miguel the resident bird guide provided us with brilliant food, birds and drinks. Also thanks to Simon Tonkin and Nicky for up to date local information as well.

Food

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

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 six evenings. They provided us with an excellent range of three course meal with a glass (or more!) of wine for 15 euros.

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.

Day One - 3rd September

I collected the group from Gibraltar airport, their plane arriving on time and we soon had everyone and their luggage in the minibus heading for the accommodation at Pelayo just West of Algeciras.

As we passed the harbour area the first **Yellow-legged Gulls** were noted, plus as we headed west, we enjoyed roadside **White Storks** atop nests and several groups of **Spotless Starlings** were seen.

As we reached Algeciras, I could see a cloud of birds – time to divert and pull over! We tumbled out the minibus on some rough ground and everyone stood looking skywards – a superb bit of aerial migration to greet the group! A spiral of **c250 White Storks**, plus several **Honey Buzzard**, also **Short-toed Eagle**, **10+ Booted Eagle**. I took the decision to head up to the watchpoint at El Algarroba, this proved a great idea. There had been a massive movement of Honey Buzzard, with some 10,000 birds passing through in the first 4 hours of the day. We were happy to watch the tail end of this amazing migration, over the next hour we had **500 Honey Buzzard**, **50 Short-toed Eagle**, **5 Sparrowhawk**, **20 Egyptian Vulture** plus some nice groups of **Bee-eaters**. A lovely start to the trip.

We reached the accommodation around 1pm, had some cold drinks and headed everyone off to their rooms and got luggage unloaded. **Bee-eaters** and raptors still passing overhead!

We then headed out for a nice leisurely afternoon raptor watching. We headed to the westerly migration watchpoint of Cazalla. The passage was great, with quite a few lower birds and an ideal introduction for the group to the less familiar raptors. There were two lovely flocks of migrating totalling around **c500 White Storks**, a constant steady funnel of **Black Kites**, which slowly built into a circling cloud of around thousand birds.

Later in the afternoon we headed down on to one of the old coastal military roads, where we able to get very nice close views of the raptors, **c20 Egyptian Vulture**, **20+ Booted Eagle**, **6+ Short-toed Eagle**, **5+ Honey Buzzard**, **c800 Black Kite**, a **Marsh Harrier**, **20+ Sparrowhawk**. Also small groups of **Barn Swallows** went dashing past heading out south, and several noisy flocks of low flying **Bee-eaters**, affording stunning views and sounds!

The day was neatly rounded off with a juvenile **Montagu's Harrier** passing along the valley. Though back at Huerta Grande those around the pool were able to watch another **c200 Honey Buzzard** heading south at 530pm.

A great start to the trip, we all then relaxed over a lovely three course evening meal with a glass of wine.

Day Two - 4th September

Several of us awoke to calling **Tawny Owls**. Post breakfast we had a walk around the grounds of Huerta Grande. It started off slowly, though several **Firecrest** showed really well.

We headed out into the open wooded area above the accommodation and we hit a nice hour of birding, with birds appearing in front of us regularly with a bit of encouragement via my "pishing" and "squeaking".

A nice mix, several **Sardinian Warbler**, several flocks of **Spotless Starling**, a nice mobile flock of **c10 Serin**, also **Greenfinch**, **Goldfinch**, **Chaffinch**, **Blackcap**, the last one perched out at the top of a tree. We eventually teased out **2 Short-toed Treecreeper** after several brief views, it gave good views in front of us. Then a **Crested Tit** showed well if briefly, plus **Nuthatch**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and eventually fantastic views of **Firecrest**.

A nice flock of **c40 Bee-eater** flew over and also overhead were **Griffon Vulture**, **Booted Eagle** and a **Short-toed eagle**.

We then headed to the Algarroba watch-point, we had a cracking couple of hours, 2 flocks of **320 and 45 White Stork**, **10+ Egyptian Vulture**, **100+ Booted Eagle**, **25+ Short-toed Eagle**, **20+ Honey Buzzard**, **100+ Black Kite**. More notable species were **2 Marsh Harrier**, an **Osprey** flying distantly east, a juvenile **Montagu's harrier**, **Peregrine** and the real crowd pleaser a juvenile **Bonelli's Eagle** that gave good scope views overhead.

Also a few more **Bee-eaters**, a **Red-rumped Swallow** plus **Common** and mainly **Pallid Swift**.

Now we headed up towards the Vulture colony near Bolonia. En-route we passed several large flocks of **c200 Cattle Egrets**

Up on the beautiful cliffs there was at least **100 Griffons**, some circling and some perched, quite a few still feeding youngsters. There was a lot of activity and over lunch and a short walk we enjoyed watching the sights and sounds as adults fed their begging young. There was also some migration above, with a super male **Montagu's Harrier**, **c40 White Stork**, **2 Marsh harriers**, **6 Booted Eagles** and **10 Honey Buzzards** all heading south. On the way back down the valley, we encountered a few **Bee-eaters**, including our first perched bird, which was conveniently catching bees and returning to the same spot.

It was now late afternoon and I decided we should head to **Playa de los Lances** a beach and dune area just north of Tarifa.

There is a screen overlooking a coastal lagoon and a nice dune system. Disturbance by dog walkers and some kite-surfers and a lack of enforcement of this protected area is still a problem, however it wasn't too bad today and we managed a good selection of birds (the boardwalk damaged in the Spring storms is now fully repaired!).

On the walk out we stopped to check out the grazing fields and were rewarded with a lovely flock of **c70 Calandra lark**, also **Corn Bunting**, **White wagtail** and **Spotless Starling** in this area.

Once at the viewing area we had our first views of the attractive **Audouin's Gulls** plus **3 Lesser black-backed Gulls**, hundreds **Yellow-legged Gulls**, **Oystercatcher**, **c30 Sanderling**, **20+ Great Ringed Plover**, **Redshank**, **4 Kentish Plover** and **4 Dunlin**. The dunes held **5+ Tawny Pipit**, a single **Short-toed lark**, **Crested Larks**, several **Zitting Cisticola** gave very close views, plus good scope views of several "**iberia**" **Yellow Wagtails**. Raptors were still passing and we had quite a few **Swallow** and **Sand Martins**.

We retired then to Huerta Grande for a nice evening meal and a few glasses of wine.

Day Three - 5th September

Today we had breakfast and then headed to Tarifa, where we going to head out into The Straits aboard a boat tour from Tarifa. Firstly we bumped into our friends Paul & Rachel Eele and we headed over to the castle in the port area. From here we were able to enjoy great perched and flight views of **c14 Lesser Kestrel**, including several adult males with peachy breasts, unmarked upperparts and blue wing panels.

Out on the boat we didn't have to wait long at all before **getting** nice views of **Cory's Shearwater** and we saw at least **c25 Cory's Shearwaters** during the time out on the sea. Paul also had a Balearic Shearwater though the rest of us missed this, we did get lovely views of an adult **Pomarine Skua** flying by, not a species I see here at this time of the year regularly. Soon the boat was heading in the direction of a nice pod of **Striped Dolphin**, and soon everyone was afforded gr4eat views, including several bow-riding on the waves of a bigger boat opposite us. Not too faraway was a group of the resident pods of **Pilot Whales**, and again we got nice and close with good views of **20+ Long-finned Pilot Whales**.

Next up we had several Bottle-nosed Dolphins, but these refused to come quite so close, but it had been a great couple of hours, with virtually non-stop action and we headed back to the harbour very happy!

We had a coffee break in Tarifa and then headed up to Cazalla watch-point for lunch and migration. Lunch struggled to get underway, as on arrival there were many Vultures circling low overhead. It became apparent that there was a carcass somewhere just below us out of view, and there was now a steady stream of vultures. At least **100 Griffon Vultures** were in the area and it did seem just a matter of time before a Ruppell's appeared, a few minutes later I spotted the first one, but very soon we were unbelievably watching at least **4 Ruppell's Griffon Vultures**, an unprecedented number on any of the previous trips, including two on the ground. Overhead there was also a light passage of other raptors, including **3-4 Egyptian Vulture**, **20+ Booted Eagle**, **10+ Short-toed Eagle**, **20+ Honey Buzzard**, **100+ Black Kite** and a **Marsh Harrier**.

With an early start in mind for the next morning we headed back a little earlier, and people chilled for a couple of hours around the pool or birded around the wooded area of Huerta Grande.



Honey-Buzzards – adult males © Chris Mills Norfolk Birding



Booted Eagles – © Chris Mills Norfolk Birding



Short-toed Eagle 2nd cal year & Black Kite juvenile © Chris Mills Norfolk Birding

Day Four - 6th 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 at 630am with Miguel Gonzalez Perea the camp birding guide joining as usual for this element of the tour.

We arrived at an area of lagoons to the north of the Salinas, Codo de la Esparraguera. It was still comfortably cool and we started with great views of **Spectacled Warbler**, shortly followed by several **Lesser Short-toed Lark**, a **Hoopoe** and a hunting adult female **Hen Harrier**. Along the hedgeline we also had nice views of several **Common Waxbills**.

The first of the lagoons gave nice views of **Whiskered Tern** and **Little Terns**, plus a **Garganey** flew past. Now the birds were coming thick and fast, the nearby pools held – **Little Grebe**, **300+ Greater Flamingo**, **20+ Spoonbill**, **250 Black-winged Stilt**, **100+ Avocet**, **Common Shelduck**, **Spoonbill**, lots of **Great Ringed Plover**, **20 Grey Plover**, **2 Knot**, **2 Turnstone**, **Sanderling**, a flock of **c250 Black-tailed Godwit**, **Redshank**, **2+ Greenshank**, **4 Spotted Redshank**, **3 Green Sandpiper**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Ruff**, **Dunlin**, **Sanderling** and **Snipe**!

We then headed around to the main saltpans, we were greeted with lines of **Yellow-legged** and **Lesser black-backed Gulls**, but alongside them also **c50+ Slender-billed Gulls** a few sporting a beautiful pinkish hue. We also noted a migrant **Black Stork** and 2 **Osprey**. The main northerly salina lagoons, had good numbers of waders **2 Little Stint**, **3 Curlew Sandpiper**, **200+ Kentish Plover** plus **flocks of c100 Black-tailed Godwit**, **Redshank**, **2+ Greenshank**, **Ruff**, **Dunlin**, **7 Curlew** and **Common Sandpiper**.

We sought an area of shade for lunch after a great bird filled morning. We then headed to one more lagoon, here we had good views of **6+ Black-necked Grebe**, **Shoveler**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Squacco Heron** and **c20 Marbled Duck**.

The nearby bushes also provided a few **Spotted Flycatchers** and **Sardinian Warbler**

We then headed to Chipiona where we didn't have to wait long before we were treated to real close views of a **Little Swift** as it flew into the colony, we had several more with probably around **12 Little Swifts** being seen

We headed off for coffees and tea before starting the journey back to Huerta Grande and had a good journey managing to arrive back by 6.30pm after a very full day out!

Day Five - 7th September

Today we had a slightly early breakfast with the full intention of heading to a White-rumped Swift, immediately after breakfast. As always, migration can play havoc with plans and it pays to be flexible! It was as we were passing Algarroba at 8am we noticed quite a large number of Honey Buzzards already thermalling in the skies. We decided we should turn around and at least see what was happening.

The next four hours slid by effortlessly, with the skies just filled with wave after wave of migrant raptors, a truly phenomenal sight as **10,000 Honey Buzzard and 1000 Black Kite** appeared on the horizon, kettled up and then passed overhead, brilliantly caught and edited on to this video by Miguel <https://youtu.be/5-Ln8j3D-Tk>

This morning there was also several flocks of **Yellow Wagtail**, more **Bee-eaters** and **Swallows** moving through.

We then headed to a local Spanish bar where we had a lovely lunch. This lunch time meal was as we were heading out for the afternoon and evening, so packed lunch for later!

After the lunch we headed up to Barbate, there was thousands of **Yellow-legged Gulls**, at least **100+ Auduoin's Gulls** and we had nice views of **12 Stone Curlew**. Along the hillside there was **5 Northern Wheatear** at the end of the track we found **3 Caspian terns** and a perched **Osprey**. We then explored from the other side of the lagoon, we had a few more nice birds - **3 Marsh Harrier, Common Sandpiper** and **Greenshank**.

We now headed to La Janda it was still hot and we made several productive stops. On arrival there was a nice group of **100 White Stork** and several flocks of **Glossy Ibis**!

Passerines were flitting along the fenceline and we got out to scan through them, several **Corn Bunting**, several **Crested Lark, Zitting Cisticola** and a large flock of Sparrows, with several **Spanish Sparrow** amongst them, the rice fields also held several **"Iberie" Yellow Wagtails**.

Further on there was a small number of **Turtle Doves** whilst several **Marsh & Montagu's Harriers** danced over the fields.

After some scanning I managed to locate **2 Black-winged Kites**, albeit they were very distant! The next target proved even more difficult and after fifteen minutes of scanning we still hadn't located our prize evening bird. Then with some more careful searching Miguel our Spanish guide, located the bird and we then had stunning views through the scope of the beautifully patterned and wonderfully camouflaged **Red-necked Nightjar**. Everyone took turns to enjoy this super bird. We then headed on along the field edges, catching nice views of **2 Hoopoes** en-route.

We rounded off a great day with a lovely roost of around **15 Montagu's Harriers**.



Hoopoe & Bee-eater © Chris Mills Norfolk Birding



Scarce Swallowtail & Cardinal butterflies – ©Owen Cole



Black-eared Wheatear & Glossy Ibis © Owen Cole



Ruppell's Griffon Vultures – © Chris Mills Norfolk Birding

Day Six - 8th September

After breakfast we headed to a White-rumped Swift location en-route to Laguna de Medina. The **White-rumped Swift** showed within a few minutes of arrival, but didn't hang around and most of the group missed it, after 45 minutes further it hadn't returned, so we headed off with the idea of dropping back in our return journey.

Laguna Medina was absolutely filled with wildfowl and we spent around 4 hours looking from the viewpoint and the hide. There was masses of Coot, around **c2000 Common Coot, Little Grebe, Great Crested grebe, 30+ Black-necked Grebe, 100+ Greater Flamingo, 20 Gadwall, 50+ Shoveler, 100 Red-crested Pochard, 50+ Common Pochard, 100+ Glossy Ibis** and **20 Black-winged Stilt**. Careful searching paid dividends, there was at least **20+ White-headed Duck, 12+ Ferruginous Duck** a juvenile **Purple Heron**. Undoubtedly, the most tricky birds were found by a very helpful Spanish birder in the hide, he pointed out **2 Red-knobbed Coot!**

We headed back and stopped off again at the "Swift" location. Whilst waiting we had **c20 Greylag Geese, Osprey, 6 Alpine Swift** and lovely views of several perched **Red-rumped Swallow**. Eventually one of the **White-rumped Swifts** appeared, it wasn't easy to start with, but a second bird appeared and eventually we had good views as both birds glided up and along the bridge.

We finished the day with another lovely evening meal at Huerta Grande.

Day Seven - 9th September

We had an early breakfast and then headed off into the mountain region of Sierra de la Nieves. We headed for the location I have found to be so reliable in past years and yet again it provided a bounty of the mountain species.

We started off in the open area near the stone eagle. It was an excellent hour with a nice selection of birds – **2** stunning **Black-eared Wheatear**, **6+** **Common Redstart**, **6+** **Woodlark**, **Iberian Chiff-chaff**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Hoopoe**, a really smart **Iberian Grey Shrike** plus a juvenile **Woodchat Shrike**.

We then moved further up the valley, starting with the cliff slopes and were soon watching **4-5 Black Wheatear**, **5+ Black Redstart** and **2-3 Rock Bunting**. A nice group of **Crag Martins** skimmed by overhead. A few **Jays** moved from tree to tree, a **Nuthatch** showed well, a **Mistle Thrush** showed briefly.

We then moved on to the scrub and lower shrubs, after a bit of effort we had very good views of **Dartford Warbler**, we also had brief of **Spectacled Warbler**. There were more **Dartford Warblers** and plenty of **Stonechat**, plus a group of **9 Chough** were located high in the skies.

We walked further up the track and a large Eagle was seen briefly heading down valley, it then reappeared and it was a nice adult **Golden Eagle**. Also overhead a few migrant **Honey Buzzards**, plus **5+ Booted Eagle** and **2 Ravens**.

We stopped off for some lunch then headed up into the more densely wooded area, we had a flyover **Crossbill** plus good views of a **Great spotted Woodpecker** and a pair of **Grey Wagtails** flew over.

We stopped off on the way back down the valley for coffee and ice creams, and amusingly found another **Black Wheatear** just opposite the bar! We arrived back late afternoon, giving everyone time to sort out packing before departure the next morning.

We had a lovely last evening, a great week with a great group and some of the best migration I have seen.

Day Eight - September 12th

After breakfast we loaded up the minibus and dropped everyone to Gibraltar airport at 900am ready for their late morning flight back to the UK.



Griffon Vultures – adult above, juvenile below © Chris Mills Norfolk Birding



Slender-billed Gull & Curlew Sandpiper adult © Chris Mills Norfolk Birding



Egyptian Vulture- juvenile & Red-necked Nightjar © Chris Mills Norfolk Birding



Egyptian Vulture - adult & Little Swift © Chris Mills Norfolk Birding

Thanks

I would like to say a special thanks to Katrin at Huerta Grande and Miguel Gonzalez Perea the local guide.

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!

Final Overview & Systematic Bird List

This was another fantastic trip to Andalucia, our 7th year.
We recorded a total of 160 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!

The systematic list follows:-

1	Little Grebe
1	Little Grebe
2	Great Crested Grebe
3	Black-necked Grebe
4	Cory's Shearwater
5	Northern Gannet
6	Great Cormorant
7	Grey Heron
8	Purple Heron
9	Night Heron
10	Little Egret
11	Cattle Egret
12	Squacco Heron
13	Black Stork
14	White Stork
15	Greater Flamingo
16	Mallard
17	Gadwall
18	Marbled Teal
19	Northern Shoveler
20	Red-crested Pochard
21	Common Pochard
22	White-headed Duck
23	Ferruginous Duck
24	Garganey
25	Egyptian Vulture
26	Ruppells Vulture
27	Griffon Vulture
28	Golden Eagle
29	Bonelli's Eagle
30	Booted Eagle
31	Short-toed Eagle
32	Osprey
33	European Honey-buzzard
34	Black Kite
35	Red kite
36	Marsh Harrier
37	Hen Harrier
38	Montagu's Harrier
39	Black-winged Kite
40	Common Buzzard
41	Eurasian Sparrowhawk
42	Lesser Kestrel
43	Common Kestrel
44	Peregrine Falcon
45	Pheasant
46	Red-legged Partridge
47	Moorhen
48	Common Coot
49	Red-knobbed Coot
50	Purple Swamphen
51	Glossy Ibis
52	Eurasian Spoonbill
53	Black-winged Stilt
54	Avocet
55	Stone Curlew
56	Great Ringed Plover
57	Little ringed Plover

58	Kentish Plover
59	Northern Lapwing
60	Grey Plover
61	Sanderling
62	Little Stint
63	Curlew Sandpiper
64	Dunlin
65	Oystercatcher
66	Ruff
67	Snipe
68	Black-tailed Godwit
69	Common Redshank
70	Greenshank
71	Green Sandpiper
72	Common Sandpiper
73	Ruddy Turnstone
74	Pomarine Skua
75	Audouin's Gull
76	Yellow-legged Gull
77	Lesser Black-backed Gull
78	Black-headed Gull
79	Slender-billed Gull
80	Whiskered Tern
81	Mediterranean Gull
82	Gull-billed Tern
83	Common Woodpigeon
84	Little Tern
85	Collared Dove
86	Eurasian Curlew
87	European Turtle Dove
88	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon
89	Monk Parakeet
90	Little Owl
91	Tawny Owl
92	Red-necked Nightjar
93	Alpine Swift
94	Common Swift
95	Pallid Swift
96	White-rumped Swift
97	Little Swift
98	Common Kingfisher
99	European Bee-eater
100	Hoopoe
101	Wryneck
102	Great Spotted Woodpecker
103	Sand Martin
104	Barn Swallow
105	Crag-Martin
106	House Martin
107	Red-rumped Swallow
108	Crested Lark
109	Calandra Lark
110	Short-toed Lark
111	Lesser Short-toed Lark
112	Tree Pipit
113	Tawny Pipit
114	White Wagtail

115	Blue-headed Iberian wagtail
116	Grey Wagtail
117	Spotted Flycatcher
118	Black Redstart
119	Common Redstart
120	Common Stonechat
121	Black Wheatear
122	Northern Wheatear
123	Wren
124	Robin
125	Blue Rock Thrush
126	Blackbird
127	Mistle Thrush
128	Zitting Cisticola
129	Cetti's Warbler
130	Reed-Warbler
131	Iberian Chiffchaff
132	Blackcap
133	Spectacled Warbler
134	Common Whitethroat
135	Dartford Warbler
136	Sardinian Warbler
137	Firecrest
138	Crested Tit
139	Great Tit
140	Eurasian Blue Tit
141	European Nuthatch
142	Short-toed Treecreeper
143	Iberian Grey Shrike
144	Black-eared Wheatear

145	Woodchat Shrike
146	Eurasian Jay
147	Red-billed Chough
148	Eurasian Jackdaw
149	Common Raven
150	Spotless Starling
151	House Sparrow
152	Spanish Sparrow
153	Chaffinch
154	Greenfinch
155	Goldfinch
156	Linnet
157	European Serin
158	Common Waxbill
159	Rock Bunting
160	Corn Bunting
Other wildlife recorded	
Scarce Swallowtail	
Cardinal	
Red Deer	
Red Fox	
Long-finned Pilot Whale	
Bottle-nosed Dolphin	
Striped Dolphin	

Amazing Migrants Tour 2019

This tour will run again:-

Monday 2–10th September 2019

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

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