

Southern Portugal

26 March - 2 April 2006

Trip Report

Leader:

Mike Read

The Diary

Sunday 26 March

On arrival at Faro, Jim, Joy & Mike (the others arriving on later flights) headed for Armacão de Pera having seen **House Sparrow & House Martin** around the airport complex. Other species noted included **Common Kestrel & Barn Swallow** during the journey plus **Yellow-legged Gull & Sandwich Tern** from the hotel bar!!

Once the whole group had assembled, we enjoyed a super dinner before a well-deserved night's sleep.

Monday 27 March

Our early morning walk began in a fair degree of darkness but just to the west of the hotel we found a **Crested Lark** singing from the top of a small bush and the first of many **Sardinian Warblers** chattered from nearby. A **Bat** of some sort fluttered around as **Yellow-legged Gulls** began their day. Further along the cliff-top walk we added about a dozen **Alpine Swifts** whizzing around in huge arcs while an occasional **Sandwich Tern** headed westwards over the sea. During the return walk we added **Iberian Chiffchaff, Blackcap, House Martins** and **Goldfinch**.

After a fine breakfast we headed to Quinta do Lago seeing a few birds as we went including **Azure-winged Magpies** and a **Red-legged Partridge** by one of the golf courses.

Once parked close to the Ria Formosa reserve, we began a gentle stroll along between the golf course and the mud flats. Almost immediately we found a quantity of wader species including **Ringed, Grey and Kentish Plovers, Dunlins, Greenshank, Redshank, a Sanderling** and a **Curlew**. A couple of **Little Egrets** searched for a meal and the open mud held numerous **Crabs**. On reaching the freshwater pool (Lago do São Lourenço) we were immediately seeing good birds with a **Purple Gallinule** very close to our side of the water. Ducks included **Mallard, Northern Shovelers**, lots of **Gadwall**, a few **Common Teal** a pair of **Common Pochards** and at least **20 Red-crested Pochards**.

A pool beyond the pines held a pair each of **Avocets** and **Black-winged Stilts** and in the distance we could see a two-storey **White Stork's** nest with both being occupied. Among the pines were perhaps a dozen **Azure-winged Magpies** and out on the freshwater pool, a **Glossy Ibis** was taking our attention. A male **Little Bittern** put in two brief appearances and at the second attempt, most of the group managed to see it. Our final 'new' bird here was something of a puzzle! A male **Weaver Bird** (probably a **Hooded Weaver**) seemed intent on building a nest in a Tamarisk bush on one of the islands despite the fact that a female was never seen. However, he did seem intent on driving away male **House Sparrows** and displaying to one inquisitive female!! Would the progeny of such a union be a house-proud sparrow-weaver that was very good at knitting?! Just wondering!

We had a super 'taverna' style lunch at the Dunas Douradas after which we wandered the short distance to a nearby lake. As we crossed the sand to get closer to the water, a couple of **Crested Larks** and **2 Kentish Plovers** were seen. The lake was not as good as in previous years due to the extensive building work that was happening nearby. However, we did

manage a few good birds here. These included a **Crested Tit** in the pines and a **Purple Heron, which** flew off as we approached. A **Rabbit** ran off as we wandered along, lots of **Terrapins** basked in the sunshine, **Azure-winged Magpies** worked their way across an open area while about a dozen **European Bee-Eaters** hawked around high above searching for insects. A fair number of **Cattle** and **Little Egrets, Swallows, House Martins** and a **Common Snipe** completed the birding line-up so we began the journey back to the hotel where we were relaxing soon after 5 p.m.

Tuesday 28 March

For the pre-breakfast walk today, we drove to the marsh at the far end of town. Mist was rising from the water areas in the coolness and soon **Cattle Egrets** were flying in to head for their feeding areas. A **Grey Heron** flapped lazily across the grassland and a **White Stork** flew overhead. Passerines included a couple of pairs of **Common Linnets**, a **Yellow Wagtail** feeding among the sparse reeds and a **Fan-tailed Warbler** zitting away in the distance. **Common Redshank** and **Common Sandpiper** were both seen and out near the beach a **Grey Plover** stood tall over nearby **Kentish Plovers**. Of the latter species there must have been at least 10 individuals.

After breakfast we began the drive towards Foia, the Algarve's highest mountain at 902 metres. Before reaching the main A22 road, we had brief views of a **Little Owl** perched on a pile of rubble and then as we neared our motorway exit at Portamão, there was a group of **Greater Flamingos** on the distant marshes.

During a coffee break between Caldas de Monchique and Foia, we saw a couple of **Common Buzzards** circling in the distance while in the trees around the restaurant, an unseen **Great Spotted Woodpecker** gave alarm calls while **Blue** and **Great Tits** were in nearby fruit trees. The strangest sighting here though was the lady of the house serving us while still in her pyjamas and bright pink dressing gown.

At the top of Foia we took a stroll long a road through typically short and sparse vegetation. Numerous **Red-rumped Swallows** flew around overhead while a few **Woodlarks** sang their lovely fluty song almost throughout our walk. A couple of male **Blue Rock Thrushes** seemed to be having a territorial dispute as they chased each other from one rocky outcrop to another making viewing a little awkward. **Wrens, Common Stonechats** and a couple of **Meadow Pipits** were easily seen though the **Dartford Warblers** were, typically, more elusive. In the distance a pair of **Booted Eagles** circled against the few clouds in an otherwise blue sky and in the valley a **Common Cuckoo** was calling. Flowers were abundant and of note were the masses of **Sand Crocuses, which** in Britain are known from just one location in Devon.

We had lunch at the same restaurant as our coffee and madame was now dressed! A **Serin** and a few **Goldfinches** put in an appearance but we saw little else so we soon set off for the Odelouca Valley. There had been considerable changes since my previous visit. No more did I have to walk across the dirt road to slow down dust-storm-producing speeding lorries; the road was now made up! As we paused beside the river, a flight of **8 Cattle Egrets** flew past while **Cetti's Warblers** called from the depths of the vegetation. We also added **Sparrowhawk, Corn Bunting** and **Nightingale** to the days list before moving further along the valley for another stop. One member of the group glimpsed a **Kingfisher** but unfortunately a search here did not enable us to find it again. Other birds presented themselves though and this included a migrating **Green Sandpiper, 2 or 3 Bee-Eaters** and a **Long-tailed Tit** while a **Green Woodpecker** called in the distance. Star bird status in this valley surely went to a fine male **Woodchat Shrike, which** we were able to see at fairly close quarters without leaving the minibus. Our final sighting of the day was of hundreds of gulls and about a dozen **White Storks** circling over a typically malodorous refuse tip and we were viewing the location from about a kilometre away!!

Wednesday 29 March

As we set off on our pre breakfast walk, Venus and Jupiter were clearly visible and through the telescope we could see 3 moons of the latter planet. We walked along the cliff-top westwards and were soon seeing **Sardinian Warblers** some singing while others were probably busy feeding young. There were the usual **Gulls** around and a few **Cattle Egrets** were heading for the marsh at the far end of town. **Alpine** and **Common Swifts** flew alongside a pair of **Common Kestrels** but sadly there was no evidence of any sea passage.

After breakfast, a problem arose with the minibus and as we were heading eastwards, we decided to change it at Faro airport. Unfortunately, the paperwork took a little time and delayed our arrival at Castro Marim. However, birds were still present in good numbers with **Hoopoe, Woodchat Shrike, Corn Bunting, Caspian Tern** and **Common Buzzard** all being seen before we left the vehicle. As we walked past the olive groves and fruit orchards, **Spotless Starlings** were occasional and we also had brief views of a **Southern Grey Shrike**. Flowers were blooming in abundance and these attracted a passing **Swallowtail Butterfly**. As we neared the salt lagoons, a **Collared Pratincole** flew past and a male **Hen Harrier** disturbed many feeding **Avocets** and **Black-winged Stilts**. Other waders of note were **Redshank, Greenshank, Sanderling, Turnstone** and **Dunlin**. Other salt pans held a few ducks and perhaps **15 Black-necked Grebes** as well as good numbers of **Greater Flamingos**, a few **Little Egrets** and a lone **Spoonbill**. As we made our way back towards the vehicle we added a couple of **Montagu's Harriers, Little Owl, Meadow Pipit** and **Pallid Swift** while one member of the group saw a **Peregrine**.

Close to Castro Marim a shallow lagoon held more **Black-winged Stilts** and **Redshanks** as well as about **10 Little Stints** and at least **4 Curlew Sandpipers**.

We then drove around to the nature centre close to the 'border bridge'. Along the road into this site we saw plenty of **Cattle Egrets** feeding near cattle and close to this we saw a superb **Southern Grey Shrike** on one side of the track and a **Spoonbill** on the other side.

After a brief visit to the centre, we walked out on to the reserve in search of birds. A pair of **Woodchat Shrikes** caught our attention and we heard some distant **Stone Curlews** calling. Despite considerable efforts, these birds were never found. However, further out on the marshes, **3 Lesser Short-toed Larks** were located including one bird singing almost directly over our heads. During the walk back to the car park more **Stone Curlews** were heard and more fruitless searches followed. Meanwhile, quite a few **Caspian Terns** were heading out towards the sea and some gave excellent views.

Thursday 30 March

Following breakfast at our usual time, we set off for an 'inland day' to visit the Portuguese plains in search of different birds and other wildlife. About 50 minutes after leaving the hotel we exited the N2 motorway to head for a gravel track near Ourique. **White Storks** were nesting on many of the telegraph poles; **Corn Buntings** seemed to be singing from every bush and a pair of **Red-legged Partridges** dashed off as we approached. **Short-toes** seemed to take a precedence as an **Eagle** and a pair of **Treecreepers** were seen in rapid succession while 'colour' was added by a pair of **Hoopoes** and **3 Bee-Eaters** were located. A couple of **Black Kites** gave better views than the eagle as did the many **Woodchat Shrikes** and **Crested Larks** that were found. Other additions here included a pair of **Nuthatches, Rock Sparrow** and 2 male **Little Bustards**.

After a coffee stop in Castro Verde we tried our usual 'bustard spot' and managed to locate two more **Little Bustards** as well as a few **Calandra Larks, 2 Short-toed Larks** and a **Red Kite**. During lunch nearby we added at least **2 Montagu's Harriers**, a fine male **Black-eared Wheatear** and a **Little Owl**.

Further on we tried various roads and tracks in our search for the 'big bird' and as a consequence we found a pale phase **Booted Eagle**, more **Black Kites, Montagu's Harriers, Bee-Eaters** and **White Storks** and even a very close male **Little Bustard**.

Eventually we tried 'just one more track' and were almost disappointed with more **Montagu's Harriers** and another male **Little Bustard**. Eventually eyes fell on a **Great Bustard**. Then another, and another and Our total ended up at 42 individuals of this super bird with at least 6 males displaying at once. It was a truly fabulous, though somewhat distant spectacle. This called for a celebration in the form of 'coffee' in Mértola where from the bridge we also saw **Lesser Kestrels** and hundreds of **House Martins**.

From here we began the journey back towards the hotel and en route towards Almodôvar we saw more **Montagu's Harriers**, both species of **Kite** and a few **Azure-winged Magpies** while beyond this town we had our only **Black-shouldered Kite** of the day. We arrived back at the hotel in reasonable time before heading out into town for a meal at the Serol Restaurant to complete another fine day.

Friday 31 March

After a relaxing breakfast we drove westwards to the Fortaleza de Sagres and as we walked over towards the fort entrance we were almost escorted by a couple of **Thekla Larks**. Once inside the fort we began to see the first of numerous **Black Redstarts** and there were plenty of flowers growing on the limestone 'pavement' that is such a feature of this location. Also a big feature here is the plentiful anglers who fish from the top of the 100'-high cliffs; it looks terrifying! Perhaps due to the fairly stiff offshore cooling breeze, a sea watch produced only a few of the hoped-for birds. However, we did see a good few **Northern Gannets** passing as well as a few **Sandwich Terns** and **3 Kittiwakes**. We also saw a few **Barn Swallows**, **2 Sand Martins** and many **Pallid Swifts** flying around the area. The latter species, usually difficult to separate from their Common cousins, were sometimes flying so close to us that their paler chins and other distinguishing features could be seen without binoculars!! As we were leaving the area, a **Peregrine** flew past giving mostly tail end views.

As we drove towards our lunch stop, a pair of **Stone Curlews** flew across the road in front of us and gave us good views. From the Taverna do Beliche we were able to watch a pair of **Common Stonechats** as they ferried food to a nestful of young while a couple of **Montagu's Harriers** hunted over the nearby scrub. The **6 Jackdaws** that flew around were our first for the trip and an attractive male **Ocellated Lizard** spent a good while basking on a rock.

After lunch we drove the short distance to a 'heathy' area and soon found 3 species of wild orchid, **Mirror**, **Narrow-lipped Tongue** and a **Woodcock/Bee** type with a rather narrow lip too. **Common Stonechat** and **Corn Buntings** were abundant and **3 Red-billed Choughs** frequently flew past calling. Eventually we were able to find a couple of **Spectacled Warblers** but unfortunately they proved to be very elusive. Not so the **Short-toed Eagle** which flew rather low over our heads giving us every opportunity to see all of the identification features.

As we moved from the scrubby area out on to the open grassland, a couple of **Red-rumped Swallows** dashed past and a **Short-toed Lark** went up in song flight. Distant calling alerted us to the presence of **Little Bustards** and in the end we located 2 males and 3 females. There must have been some degree of rivalry between the males as they both tried to impress prospective mates and in the end both of them flew around for a while, one rapidly pursuing the other. After getting good views of a **Tawny Pipit** we returned to the vehicle and drove off out across the grassland. Here we found a rather lonely looking **Northern Lapwing**, 2 more male **Little Bustards** and **3 Lesser Kestrels**.

After a quick visit to Cabo de São Vicente where there was a rather cooling strong breeze and no apparent seabird passage, we returned to our lunch time taverna, had a coffee and headed back to the hotel.

Saturday 1 April

A rather elite group set out for the pre breakfast walk and were soon searching the marsh and surrounding areas for birds. The water levels were a little lower than on our previous visit

and as a consequence there were at least **9 Black-winged Stilts** to be seen as well as a flight of **6 Cormorants**, a couple of **Grey Herons**, **4 Shovelers** and a female **Mallard** with numerous young in tow. As we returned to the vehicle to head for another we flushed up a **Song Thrush** which was presumably a late wintering bird. Along the road past the campsite, we added **Common Kestrel**, **Corn Bunting** and **Hoopoe** to the day's list.

After breakfast we drove to the Alvor Estuary seeing a **Little Owl**, a few **Bee-Eaters** and another **Hoopoe** on the way. Along the bumpy track into the reserve a **Common Buzzard** was perched on a telegraph pole and a **Little Owl** was on a fence post.

The first species we noticed as we set off on our stroll was **Greater Flamingo** with 15 individuals present. Nearby a few **Black-winged Stilts** were feeding with a **Black-tailed Godwit** for close company. Out on the estuary mud there were lots of 'bait diggers' who seemed to render the area unsuitable for feeding birds though there were single **Greenshank** and **Kentish Plover** present. We saw more of these two species as we continued our walk around but they were either on the few undisturbed areas or inside the sea wall. There were perhaps **15 Yellow Wagtails** noted, a few **Crested Larks** and an occasional **Sardinian Warbler**. **3 Oystercatchers** and some **Grey Plovers** were seen and further along a **Whimbrel** was seen feeding at close range. On some of the salt pans a few more **Black-winged Stilts** and about a dozen **Avocets** were noted and as we returned towards the minibus, we found a couple of **Meadow Pipits**. As we drove away from the area, **2 Red-rumped Swallows** flew past.

In our search for a suitable coffee or even a lunch stop, we tried one road near Alvor. It turned out to be a dead end but thankfully some birds were visible including **19 Spoonbills** roosting out on the marsh and overhead a few **Bee-Eaters** gave their liquid calls. We continued along the N125 and as we came to the two bridges near Portimão, a group of flying birds caught our attention. These turned out to be **26 Black-crowned Night-Herons**; a new species for Travelling Naturalist in the Algarve. Further east we paused for lunch before heading for Albufeira Marsh.

This rather extensive wetland usually holds lots of birds and today was no exception. Many **Black-winged Stilts** and **Avocets** were dotted around the area while **28 Greater Flamingos** preened then fed fairly close to us. **Sanderlings**, **Kentish** and **Ringed Plovers** fed in the shallower areas while **Grey Herons** and a few more **Spoonbills** stood sentinel at the back edge of the marsh. A group of **8 Purple Herons** flew around for ages before deciding to land in trees close to some deserted buildings. Other birds of note here were **Northern Pintails (3)**, a resting **Caspian Tern**, numerous **Sandwich Terns** in a variety of plumages, **Purple Gallinules** mostly putting in brief appearance perhaps due to the presence of a **Marsh Harrier**, a **Whimbrel** and a passing **Glossy Ibis**.

This completed our day's birding so we headed back to the hotel and another excellent dinner.

Sunday 2 April

There was no pre breakfast walk to allow plenty of time for packing before we headed homewards after lunch. Our success at the Albufeira Marsh the previous afternoon suggested we should try there again and so shortly after 9 a.m. we drove through Armacão de Pera and past the Pera Marsh. Around what could be described as the 'back edge' of the marsh, we turned on to a dirt road in the hope of finding waxbills around some of the surrounding cultivated land. The search for this particular species proved fruitless but we did manage to locate a nesting pair of **Hoopoes**, **Marsh Harrier**, **Corn Buntings**, **Black-winged Stilts**, **Kestrel** and **Little Owl**. We also heard **Common Quail** and **Willow Warbler** calling though sadly we did not see either species.

At Albufeira Marsh we began with excellent views of a **Fan-tailed Warbler** and as we rounded the seaward end of the lake we had excellent views of a **Dunlin** and a **Sanderling** that seemed to be keeping each other company. The sand dunes held **2 Tawny Pipits** and 3 or 4 singing **Short-toed Larks**. **Coots**, **Moorhens** and **Purple Gallinules** were frequently

encountered on the lake and among the ducks was a group of perhaps **20 Common Pochards** and 2 male **Garganey**. There were **5 Grey Herons** and **8 Spoonbills** mostly resting half-hidden over the back edge of the lake and another **Marsh Harrier** (or was it the same bird we had seen earlier just a short distance away?) drifted around. As we looked out from the raised platform 'hide' a couple of **Southern Water Voles** dashed from one clump of rushes to another. As we walked back towards the minibus we continued searching and were eventually rewarded with brief views of a **Little Crane** that spent a few seconds preening within the edge of the reeds before making a very quick flight back into the depths of the reed bed. A brief but pleasing view for those that saw it and a 'lifer' for the leader. What a splendid end to the trip!

We returned to the hotel to change and have lunch before setting off for the airport and our respective flights homeward.

SPECIES LISTS

BIRDS

Little Grebe Noted on 5 days.

Great Crested Grebe Just a single bird at Quinta do Lago pond on 7th.

Black-necked Grebe Only seen near Castro Marim on 29th when about 15 birds were present.

Northern Gannet About 30 seen from Fortaleza de Sagres on 31st.

Great Cormorant Regularly seen from the hotel on the first 4 days and also at one or two coastal locations during that period and at the Pera Marsh on 1st April.

Grey Heron One on 28th during the pre breakfast walk then 3 in the Castro Marim area on 29th. On 1st and 2nd April there were a few on the Albufeira Marsh.

Purple Heron A single sighting at Dunas Douradas on 27th then 8 at Albufeira Marsh on 1st April

Cattle Egret This was the most frequently encountered member of the heron family with sightings every day except 26th.

Little Egret Seen on 5 days mostly in coastal areas.

Little Bittern Just a single male seen at Quinta do Lago on 27th.

Black-crowned Night-heron A flock of 26 flying around in a tight bunch above the estuary to the north of Portimão suggested they had perhaps been disturbed by a predator. This was the first time a Travelling Naturalist group had recorded this species in the Algarve!

Greater Flamingo About 15 seen from the motorway near Alvor on 28th then at least 70 seen near Castro Marim the following day. On 1st there were 15 on the Alvor Estuary salt pans and 28 on Albufeira Marsh. At the latter location there was a similar quantity the following morning.

White Stork Seen every day from 27th.

Glossy Ibis A single bird seen at Quinta do Lago on 27th was followed by a brief, distant sighting at Albufeira on 1st.

Eurasian Spoonbill A single distant bird seen to the south of Castro Marim on 29th was followed by another later in the early afternoon that same day. These were followed by 31 birds near the visitor centre as we left the Castro Marim area to head back to the hotel the same afternoon. There were 19 close to Alvor on 1st and at least 3 at Albufeira later and on 2nd there were 8 at this latter location.

Garganey Two males at Albufeira on 2nd; the first Travelling Naturalist record for the Algarve.

Mallard Noted every day.

Northern Pintail Two males and a female at Albufeira Marsh on 1st.

Northern Shoveler Seven at Quinta do Lago on 27th and a further 3 or more later that day at Dunas Douradas. The species was also noted on 29th near Castro Marim, at the Alvor Estuary on 1st and at Albufeira Marsh on 1st & 2nd.

Red-crested Pochard About 15 at Quinta do Lago on 27th with a further pair at Dunas Douradas later that same day. The only other sighting was of another pair near Castro Marim on 29th.

Common Pochard A pair seen at Quinta do Lago on 27th was followed by a flock of about 20 at Albufeira on 2nd.

Black Kite The first 2 were seen to the east of Ourique on 30th with quite a few more seen later the same day near Castro Verde and towards Mértola.

Red Kite At least 3 seen between Castro Verde and Mértola on 30th.

Black-shouldered Kite A single bird was seen near Almodôvar on 30th

Short-toed Eagle A distant bird near Ourique on 30th was most unsatisfactory but this was more than made up for by one of the 2 birds seen near Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st which flew right over our heads.

Marsh Harrier Presumably a pair of this species was seen near Castro Marim on 29th and at Albufeira on 1st a juvenile was seen while an adult female was in the same location the following day.

Montagu's Harrier A female and two males were seen near Castro Marim on 29th and then on the plains between Castro Verde and Mértola the following day we probably saw in excess of 20 individuals. We also saw 3 near Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st.

Hen Harrier A male bird probably of this species was seen near Castro Marim on 29th and a female was at Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st.

Common Buzzard Seen in small numbers on 5 consecutive days from 28th.

Sparrowhawk Just a single bird seen in the Odelouca Valley on 28th.

Booted Eagle Two distant birds on Foia on 28th plus a much closer pale phase individual to the east of Castro Verde on 30th.

Lesser Kestrel At least 6 were seen at Mértola on 30th and there were 4 at Cabo de Sao Vicente the following day.

Eurasian Kestrel Noted every day.

Peregrine Falcon One seen near Castro Marim on 29th and another at Fortaleza de Sagres on 31st.

Red-legged Partridge A single bird near the Quinta do Lago golf course on 27th was well behaved as it waited on the pavement until the traffic had passed! More birds were seen on 29th and 30th.

Water Rail

Moorhen Noted on 4 days.

Purple Gallinule At least 10 seen at Quinta do Lago on 27th then 1 seen later the same day at Dunas Douradas.

Common Coot Noted on 3 consecutive days from 27th.

Little Bustard 4 males seen between Castro Verde and Mértola on 30th then 4 males and 3 females seen near Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st.

Great Bustard Following fruitless searches for this species in many of their previously known haunts, a group of 42 were found between Castro Verde and Mértola on 30th; yes I do mean **42!**

Eurasian Oystercatcher Three on the Alvor Estuary on 1st.

Black-winged Stilt Seen in good numbers during our 4 'coastal marsh' days, 27th, 29th, 1st & 2nd.

Avocet Seen in the same locations as the previous species; Quinta do Lago, Castro Marim, Alvor Estuary and Albufeira Marsh X2.

Stone Curlew Having heard them calling in a couple of places without seeing them earlier in the day, it was very pleasant to get good views of 2 just before we left the Castro Marim area on 29th then on 31st, 2 flew across the road as we neared Cabo de Sao Vicente.

Collared Pratincole Just a single sighting of a bird flying away from us near Castro Marim on 29th.

Northern Lapwing A single bird was looking rather lonely near Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st.

Grey Plover Seen at Quinta do Lago on 27th, 1 at Pera Marsh on 28th and also seen at the Alvor Estuary on 1st.

Ringed Plover At least 5 near Quinta do Lago on 27th and a few at the Alvor Estuary on 1st.

Kentish Plover This lovely species, now absent from the UK, was seen on 4 days in good numbers.

Black-tailed Godwit Just a single bird on the Alvor Estuary salt pans on 1st.

Whimbrel Single birds seen on the Alvor Estuary and the Albufeira Marsh both on 1st.

Common Redshank Best seen on 27th and 29th at Quinta do Lago and near Castro Marim respectively but there were also 4 distant birds on the Albufeira Marsh on 1st.

Common Greenshank Three at Quinta do Lago on 27th, 3 near Castro Marim on 29th & a few were on the Alvor Estuary on 1st

Green Sandpiper Just a single bird in the Odelouca Valley on 28th.

Common Sandpiper Seen in ones and twos on 3 consecutive days from 27th.

Turnstone Five at Quinta do Lago on 27th, 1 at Castro Marim on 29th and 2 on the Alvor Estuary on 1st.

Sanderling Seen on 4 days with the best quantity being approximately 20 birds on the Albufeira Marshes on 1st.

Little Stint Approximately 10 birds seen near Castro Marim on 29th.

Dunlin Noted on 4 days with at least 20 near Castro Marim on 29th being the best count.

Curlew Sandpiper Four near Castro Marim on 29th was the only sighting.

Yellow-legged Gull Noted every day.

Lesser Black-backed Gull Noted on 4 days mostly in the vicinity of the hotel.

Great Black-backed Gull Noted on 4 days in small numbers mostly close to the hotel.

Black-headed Gull Just seen on the 29th and 1st at Castro Marim and the Alvor Estuary respectively.

Black-legged Kittiwake 3 seen flying west at the Fortaleza de Sagres on 31st.

Caspian Tern Perhaps as many as 20 were seen in the Castro Marim area on 29th and a single bird was seen on the Albufeira Marsh on 1st.

Sandwich Tern Noted every day especially from the hotel dining room.

Little Tern Two distant birds seen near Castro Marim on 29th.

Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon Noted every day with the birds at Fortaleza de Sagres and Cabo de Sao Vicente being as close as you will get to original Rock Doves in the Algarve.

Common Wood Pigeon Just a single bird seen near Ourique on 30th.

Eurasian Collared Dove Noted every day.

Cuckoo Heard on 5 consecutive days from 28th with just a single actual sighting near Ourique on 30th.

Little Owl Individual birds noted on 28th, 29th, 1st and 2nd but 2 were seen on 30th

Alpine Swift Mostly seen on the pre-breakfast walks to the west of the hotel but also noted on 28th in the Odelouca Valley and at Sagres on 31st.

Common Swift Odd individuals seen during the first 3 full days in the Algarve.

Pallid Swift At least 1 near Castro Marim on 29th and then 10 at Fortaleza de Sagres on 31st with some of these birds flying so close to us that they could be identified without binoculars.

Common Kingfisher A single bird seen briefly in the Odelouca Valley on 28th by one member of the group.

European Bee-eater Noted every day from 27th with a breeding colony found near Albufeira.

Eurasian Hoopoe Seen on 4 days with two probably nesting sights located where birds appeared to be feeding good-sized young.

Great Spotted Woodpecker Single bird heard at our coffee and lunch stop on Foia on 28th.

Green Woodpecker Heard in the Odelouca Valley on 28th.

Calandra Lark At least 8 seen in the Castro Verde to Mértola area on 30th.

Short-toed Lark Two on 30th near Castro Verde, 1 on 31st at Cabo de Sao Vicente and 3 at the seaward end of Albufeira Marsh on 2nd.

Lesser Short-toed Lark At least 3 seen near Castro Marim on 29th.

Crested Lark Noted every day from 27th.

Thekla Lark Seven at Fortaleza de Sagres on 31st.

Woodlark At least 4 on Foia on 28th and another 2 near Ourique on 30th.

Sand Martin The only sighting was of two presumably on migration at Fortaleza de Sagres on 31st.

Barn Swallow Noted every day.

Red-rumped Swallow At least 10 on Foia on 28th with other sightings at Ourique on 30th, Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st and on the Alvor Estuary on 1st.

Common House Martin Seen every day.

Yellow Wagtail One on 28th during the pre-breakfast walk to Pera Marshes, then at least 5 near Castro Marim on 29th and a similar quantity on the Alvor Estuary on 1st.

White Wagtail One on 29th near Castro Marim and one heard on the Alvor Estuary on 1st.

Tawny Pipit Two on 31st near Cabo de Sao Vicente and 1 or 2 near Albufeira Marsh on 2nd.

Meadow Pipit Two on 28th on Foia, two on 29th near Castro Marim and two on the Alvor Estuary on 1st.

Southern Grey Shrike Two seen in different areas near Castro Marim on 29th with the second individual being viewed at close quarters. Another 2 were seen between Castro Verde and Mértola the following day.

Woodchat Shrike More plentiful than the previous species with sightings on five days in various areas.

Winter Wren One seen and 2 or 3 others heard on Foia on 28th.

Blue Rock Thrush Just two males seen on 28th on Foia. The birds we usually see close to the hotel on the cliffs seemed to be absent.

Blackbird Noted every day.

Song Thrush Just a single bird seen during the pre-breakfast walk to Foia Marshes on 1st.

Common Nightingale Two individuals heard in the Odelouca Valley on 28th and a single bird was singing close to the bridge in Mértola on 30th.

Black Redstart At least 10 seen at Fortaleza de Sagres on 31st.

Common Stonechat Noted on 5 consecutive days from 28th.

Black-eared Wheatear One male seen fairly close to Castro Verde on 30th during lunch.

Fan-tailed Warbler Noted every day except 26th and 31st.

Cetti's Warbler One near Quinta de Lago on 27th and also at Dunas Douradas later the same day. Then seen on 28th in the Odelouca Valley.

Willow Warbler A single bird was heard singing close to Pera on 2nd.

Iberian Chiffchaff A single bird seen close to the hotel on 27th was probably of this species.

Blackcap Single birds seen pre-breakfast and at Dunas Douradas on 27th and also in the Odelouca Valley on 28th and pre-breakfast on 1st.

Sardinian Warbler Seen in a wide variety of locations on six days.

Spectacled Warbler Two birds seen close to Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st.

Dartford Warbler This skulking species was only seen on Foia where we managed to get views of perhaps five or six individuals.

Crested Tit A single individual was seen at close quarters on the 27th at Dunas Douradas.

Great Tit Seen in ones and twos on three different days.

Blue Tit Just noted as single individuals on 28th and 30th.

Eurasian Nuthatch A pair was seen close to Ourique on 30th.

Short-toed Treecreeper Two or three individuals seen close to Ourique on 30th.

Eurasian Jay Just a single sighting on the way to the hotel on 26th.

Black-billed Magpie One or two individuals seen on 27th on the way to Quinta do Lago.

Azure-winged Magpie Commonly seen on four consecutive days from 27th and also on 1st.

Red-billed Chough Three seen near Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st where a flock of perhaps 30 more distant 'crows' could also have been of this species.

Eurasian Jackdaw Half a dozen birds seen during lunch near Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st.

Common Raven One on 29th near Castro Marim and then quite a few seen between Castro Verde and Mértola the following day.

Spotless Starling Seen every day from 29th.

Corn Bunting Seen every day from 28th.

Common Chaffinch Just a couple of individuals seen close to Ourique on 30th.

European Serin We had frequent sightings of small numbers of this delightful little finch on six days.

European Greenfinch Noted on five days.

European Goldfinch Noted every day from 27th.

Common Linnet At least 8 on Foia on 28th and smaller numbers seen on 31st, 1st and 2nd.

House Sparrow Noted every day.

Rock Sparrow Just a single individual seen briefly on 30th near Ourique.

Weaver bird sp. A single male bird with a black hood and otherwise mostly yellow was seen at Quinta do Lago on 27th. It was obviously a weaverbird as it was nest building and doing the usual hanging-from-the-nest-wing-flapping display.

OTHER TAXA

MAMMALS

Southern Water Vole Two seen briefly on the Albufeira Marsh on 2nd.

Iberian Hare Three seen near Castro Marim on 29th and another individual was seen on 30th near Ourique.

European Rabbit Just a single individual seen at Dunas Douradas on 27th.

Bat species Seen close to the hotel during the pre-breakfast walks on 27th and 29th.

AMPHIBIANS

Iberian Water (Spanish Pond) Frog

REPTILES

European Pond Terrapin Terrapins seen on 27th at Quinta do Lago and Dunas Douradas and on 28th in the Odelouca Valley were not specifically identified but could have been either this or the next species or both!

Spanish Terrapin See above species.

Ocellated Lizard A single male of this species was seen basking on a rock during lunch near Cabo de Sao Vicente on 31st.

Lizard species On 27th at Dunas Douradas a lizard much smaller than the previous species was well seen but unfortunately not specifically identified.

BUTTERFLIES

The following species were recorded during the trip.

Swallowtail

Scarce Swallowtail

Large White

Small White**Clouded Yellow****Brimstone****Common Blue****Red Admiral****Painted Lady****Speckled Wood****FLOWERS**

The reference numbers for each species refers to the Collins Mediterranean Wild Flowers by Blamey & Grey-Wilson

115	Hottentot Fig	<i>Carprobrotus edulus</i>
116	Red Hottentot Fig	<i>Carprobrotus acinaciformis</i>
169	Silene	<i>Silene littorea</i>
172	Forked Catchfly	<i>Silene dichotoma</i>
180	Silene	<i>Silene colorata</i>
299	Fumitory	<i>Fumaria agraria</i>
326	Sea Stock	<i>Matthiola sinuata</i>
327	Hoary Stock	<i>Matthiola incana</i>
336	Sweet Alison	<i>Lobularia maritima</i>
361	Eruca	<i>Eruca sativa</i>
440	Golden Wattle	<i>Acacia pycnantha</i>
483	Yellow Lupin	<i>Lupinus luteus</i>
677	Dorycnium	<i>Dorycnium pentaphyllum</i>
691	Bladder Vetch	<i>Anthylis tetraphylla</i>
735	Bermuda Buttercup	<i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i>
751	Erodium	<i>Erodium chium</i>
836	Orange	<i>Citrus sinensis</i>
961	Grey-leaved Cistus	<i>Cistus albidus</i>
971	Gum Cistus	<i>Cistus ladanifer</i>
985	Annual Rockrose	<i>Tuberaria guttata</i>
1087	Alexanders	<i>Smyrnum plusatrum</i>
1367	Honeywort	<i>Cerinthe major</i>
1382	Narrow-leaved Bugloss	<i>Echium angustifolium</i>
1383	Purple Viper's Bugloss	<i>Echium plantagineum</i>
1395	Borage	<i>Borago officinalis</i>
1409	Large Blue Alkanet	<i>Anchusa azurea</i>
1528	French Lavender	<i>Lavendula stoechas</i>
1563	Black Nightshade	<i>Solanum nigrum</i>
1654	Cistanche	<i>Cistanche phelypae</i>
1780	Venus's Looking Glass spp.	<i>Legousia pentagonica</i>
1847	Pallenis	<i>Pallenis spinosa</i>
1895	Crown Daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum carinatum</i>
2087	Hollow-leaved Asphodel	<i>Asphodelus fistulosus</i>

2178	Dipcadi	Dipcadi serotinum
2201	Tassel Hyacinth	Muscari comosum
2265	Three-leaved Snowflake	Leucojum trichophyllum
2281	C. Hoop Petticoat Narcissus	Narcissus bulbocodium
2305	Barbary Nut	Gynandrisis sisyrinchium
2307	Field Gladiolus	Gladiolus italicus
2320	Sand Crocus	Romulea columnae
2422	Mirror Orchid	Ophrys speculum
2443	Woodcock Orchid type	Ophrys (poss. scolopax)
2452	Small-flowered Tongue Orchid	Serapias parviflora (a species similar to this occurs in the Algarve and this is probably what we found.

Back at home there was lots of rain and cold winds to make us feel even better in the warm, calm, sunny conditions in this lovely part of Europe. The hotel and tavernas that we visited provided superb food and copious quantities of wine. What more could one ask for?

Well I guess you could ask for lots of good wildlife, especially the birds. It seemed that everywhere we went, the drifts of colourful flowers added greatly to the scene even when we were looking through the scope at a Common Buzzard surrounded by bright blues and yellows of the flora. The birding was excellent and we achieved 141 species. This included some new species for Travelling Naturalist in Southern Portugal. Hen Harrier, Garganey and a species of weaver bird were added along with a flock of 26 Black-crowned Night-herons. Perhaps the biggest birding highlight though was to see a group of 42 Great Bustards. On previous visits I have only personally seen up to 4 individuals and the tour in 2004 with a local guide only saw 9. So this really puts it into context. Perhaps after all, the Salisbury Plain birds have made it as far as Portugal!

My personal astonishment at finding such a good quantity of Great Bustards prompted Ann to write a limerick which is as follows:

We have a grand leader in Mike,
He can find us stone curlews and shrike.
But when Bustards are on view
He'll just shout "forty two?"
Then our Mike is as high as a kite.

Ann also provided the plant list and for this I am very grateful.

As always, you, our clients were excellent company and I was pleasantly surprised to see you laughing even at my bad jokes! I hope you enjoyed the tour as much as I did and I look forward to the possibility of your company again on future tours.