

# Gibraltar/Andalucía Trip Report

## October 27<sup>th</sup> - November 24<sup>th</sup> 2018.

### Introduction.

This report details a 4-week period I spent as ringer in charge of the Straits of Gibraltar Bird Observatory during the late autumn migration period as a sabbatical from my employers the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Occasional birding trips into Spain were made weather prevented any netting in Gibraltar, details of all daily activities and bird sightings are recorded below. I was joined on this sabbatical by friend and colleague Kevin Middleton and in turn we were visited by other ringers.

The aim of my sabbatical was to provide the local Birdlife International Partner GONHS (Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society) suitable skills to cover the late migratory period for Northern-European passerines that pass-through Gibraltar in late autumn.

This visit was my seventh spell at the Straits of Gibraltar Bird Observatory. I first came here in spring 2002 and have returned in 2004 (twice), 2012, 2013 and 2016, and have a real fondness for the wonderful location overlooking the Straits and into Africa.



GONHS provided accommodation on site at the Observatory, which can sleep up to 6 people. It's rustic but comfortable and is equipped with a kitchen and bathroom. Visiting qualified ringers are more than welcome, using links in the web addresses below.

For information on GONHS and the natural history of Gibraltar visit [www.gonhs.org](http://www.gonhs.org) and for those who may wish to join the society membership information can be found at [www.gonhs.org/membership](http://www.gonhs.org/membership)

## Daily Sightings

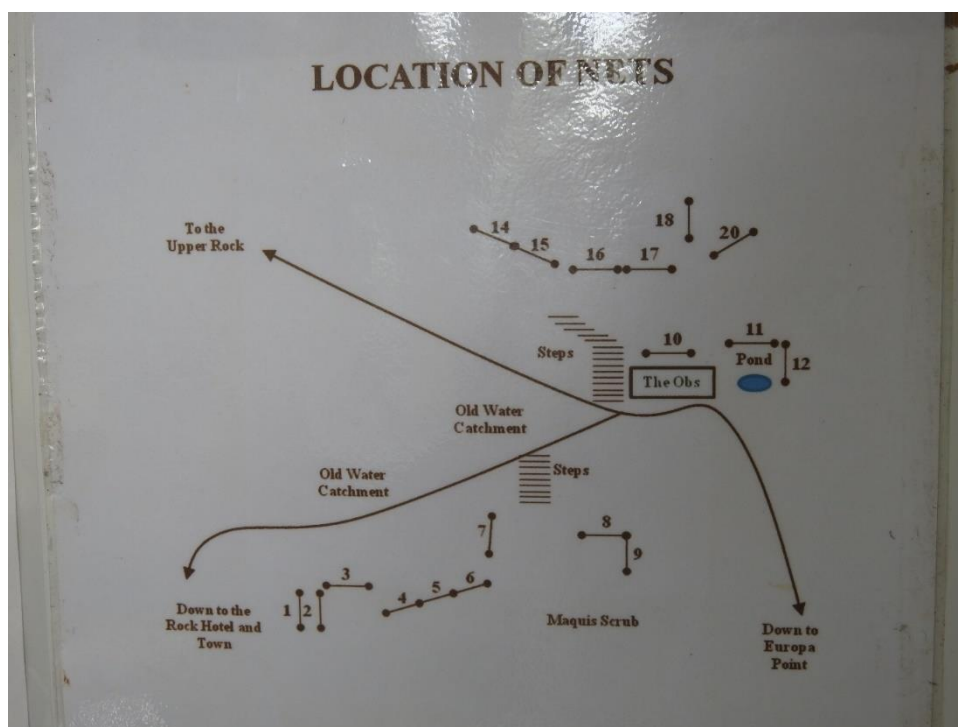
**27<sup>th</sup> October:** I arrived on the slightly delayed British Airways flight from Heathrow. Once landed I was quickly through security and baggage reclaim. I had booked a hire car via [www.espacar.com](http://www.espacar.com) and crossed the border into Spain and picked up the car from their office in the FOCONA car park a few hundred metres away in La Linea de la Concepcion. After driving back into Gibraltar I headed to the local Morrisons supermarket to stock up on groceries.

Upon arriving at the Observatory situated in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve I met with visiting ringers Chris Craig and Mike Bailey who had been running the Observatory for the past week. Also, at the observatory were a German film crew who were filming a documentary about bird declines and featuring Chris's daughter Mya Rose (more familiar to twitter users as Birdgirl) who as a teenager herself is doing an amazing job in inspiring younger birders and promoting access to the countryside for BAME communities.

After a tasty pasta dinner and a couple of bottles of Cruzcampo with Chris and Mike, an early night was needed in preparation for the next day.

**28<sup>th</sup> October:**

The first day of ringing of the sabbatical! As the clocks had changed overnight my alarm was set for 6.30am and it was a quick up and out to open the furlled nets, before returning for breakfast. I remember that the nets set below the road are quite steep and I found parts of my lungs that don't get used much when surveying on flat Cambridgeshire farmland.



The first couple of net rounds were steady with the expected **Blackcaps** and **Robins** the commonest birds. There were a few Serins flying over so I used an MP3 player with Serin song and played this at the nets nearest the observatory.

This worked a treat and of the 52 birds ringed in the day 18 were **Serins**. The German film crew obtained some footage of Mya ringing some birds and interviewing GONHS General Secretary Keith Bensusan.

There were some personnel changes with Mike departing back to Bristol and Kevin arriving on the afternoon flight from Heathrow. After I had collected Kev from the airport, we decided that as the weather was fair, we would have an attempt try and catch any Nightjars at dusk. We had good success in 2016 and were eager to try again.

Conditions were cloudless, and we were advised that we'd need to be very lucky to catch one. We set two nets and leave a lure playing its wonderful monotonous call. 30 minutes later we return with a **Nightjar**.... Job done. Alas this would be the only one we catch all trip as weather and the timing of migration conspired against us.

#### **29<sup>th</sup> October:**

A westerly wind resulted in a slow ringing day with 32 birds caught, this did include the first **Black Redstarts** of the trip. The star bird was something of a surprise in the form of a **Dunnock** a scarce species in Gibraltar and Southern Spain, this was the first ringed in Gibraltar for three years. Birds seen from the Observatory included **Raven** and **Grey Wagtail**.

The windy conditions caused an early closure of the nets and permitted a siesta. In late afternoon we all visited Europa Point, the southernmost point of Gibraltar. From around the lighthouse area we enjoyed numerous **Gannets** (including plunge diving birds), and **Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwaters** as well as a few **Black-headed Gulls** amongst the the ubiquitous **Yellow-legged Gulls**.



**30<sup>th</sup> October:** Today was an awful weather day, we were awoken by gales and the rain pounding on the observatory. We don't venture outdoors until late afternoon once the storm had passed. We open the three nets nearest the observatory to dry them out, as the sunny evening was a complete contrast to the rest of the day. Thankfully, for Chris and his family this improvement in the weather allows their flight to depart from Gibraltar and no transfer to Malaga was required. We ringed a lone **Robin** and recaptured a **Blackbird** originally ringed here in 2015.



**31<sup>st</sup> October:** After the monsoon the previous day we were happy to find the skies had cleared by dawn. Cloud increased during the morning with drizzle setting in by midday called an end to ringing for the day. This lull in the weather enabled us to catch c40 birds with the catch dominated by **Blackcaps**, but we also ringed three **Crag Martins** and an amazing **Red-rumped Swallow**, the third ringed here this autumn.

In the afternoon as thunderstorms and torrential rain and strong winds arrived from the south-west. Kev and I decided to head off to have a look at the estuary from the town of Palmones between Algeciras and Gibraltar. To find what would have been in the past a small typically Spanish seaside town we had to navigate through the maze of ugly retail outlets and car dealerships.

We found a couple of places to park overlooking the estuary and contented ourselves by birding from the car due to the downpour. The tide was partly out and there were a number of gulls and waders on the sandbars. We found a small number of **Grey Plovers**, c50 **Ringed Plover** as well as **Greenshank** and **Dunlin**. A **Kingfisher** flew along the river and amongst the **Yellow-legged** and **Black-headed Gulls** were a couple of **Audouin's Gull**. The weather deteriorated further we cut our losses and headed back to Gibraltar.

### 1<sup>st</sup> November:

A very cold and windy day, ringing was abandoned as the north wind increased after the first couple of net rounds. These yielded 11 Blackcaps in the 16 birds ringed. We decided that we would venture further into Spain after lunch.

Our initial plan was to head off to Tarifa beach (Playa de Los Lances), but upon arrival we couldn't find any parking spaces near the football ground due to the mass of Kite Surfers enjoying the windy conditions. We had a quick wander at the back of the beach and find **Zitting Cisticola**, numerous **Stonechats** and foraging **Serins**, but the windy conditions and kite surfers prevent any beach birding.

We called it quits and headed off towards the coastal village of Bolonia. Our aim was to see if we could find any Chameleons that reside in the pine woods bordering the beach. On our journey to Bolonia via the Sierra de la Plata we saw numerous **Griffon Vultures** over the rocky hillsides and the fields were full of charms of **Goldfinches**. A wander along the beach in the now warm and sunny, but still very windy conditions yielded a juvenile **Gannet** plunge diving in the surf and a lone **Kentish Plover**. We had a detailed search for any Chameleons but drew a blank, the woods were full of **Blackcaps**, **Song Thrushes**, **Robins** and **Chiffchaffs**.

We headed up to the Cueva del Moro on the hillside above Bolonia, here we had good view of about 20 **Griffon Vultures** that swoop in and roost on the rock face above us. **Ravens** and **Kestrels** all came to mob the vultures and several **Crag Martins** fly overhead. We also heard a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** here without locating the bird.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> November:

A clear and sunny day, with a westerly breeze. Ringing wise we had another steady day with increased finch passage through Gibraltar, this was reflected in our catch with 18 **Serin** and 8 **Greenfinch** the commonest species in the total of c40 birds. We also managed to ring the second **Dunnock** of the autumn. Later in the morning we were joined by Jill Yeoman from GONHS whom we had arranged our visit. Jill joined us for a couple of days each week which enabled her to ring some more birds towards obtaining her ringing permit.



In the evening we headed down to the Victoria Stadium for Lincoln Red Imps v Boca Juniors Gibraltar in the local football league. The Imps ran out 3-0 winners helped by a couple of howlers from the Boca 'keeper.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> November:

The weather turned much colder today with a brisk north-west wind. When opening the nets, we heard a flyover **Redwing**. This proved to be a portent for a "thrush" day as the first net round yielded an impressive seven **Song Thrushes** and the first **Redwing** ringed in Gibraltar since 2005. The northerly conditions also seemed to bring in more migrants and we ringed 28 **Blackcaps** the highest day total of the stay so far.



Later in the day we are joined by Peter Gruar (my Dad), Maureen Reeves and Leane Holyoak who had arrived from UK. All were here for a very productive week ringing in late October 2016 and back for a week to help with our running the observatory. An unsuccessful attempt was made to catch any Nightjars passing through late evening.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> November:**

This was the first day since arrival that there was some Levanter cloud over the rock and light easterly winds. The low cloud and mist obscured views of the bay from the observatory until mid-morning. These were perfect conditions for migrants to move through Gibraltar and almost 100 birds were caught during the day. Today's catch was dominated by the three main migrant species for this time year with **Robin**, **Blackcap** and **Black Redstart**. A late **Garden Warbler** was a surprise capture. By lunchtime the cloud had dispersed, and the afternoon was warm and sunny and called a halt to ringing for the day. **House Martin**, **Sparrowhawk** and **Peregrine** were all seen from the Observatory.

We took a trip to Europa Point to enjoy the evening sunshine. Offshore we found all the usual suspects with **Gannet**, **Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwater**, **Yellow-legged Gull** and both **Shag** and **Cormorant**.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> November:**

No fireworks today, another day's ringing was lost to the weather as we were awoken to another westerly gale with rain and strong winds. The rain did as was forecast and cleared through by midday, but the wind didn't drop below 20mph.



We took the opportunity to get out for a day's birding in Spain to the well-known Laguna de Medina. A site I had surprisingly never visited. A wander through the scrub to the view point yielded many **Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs** and **Sardinian warblers**.

The observation point overlooking the lake gave us fantastic views of a mass of wintering waterfowl. We find good numbers of the scarce **White-headed Duck** amongst the **Coot, Pochard** and **Mallards**. I manage to find a drake **Ferruginous Duck** as it flew in distantly and allowed 'scope views. Three species of grebe (**Black-necked, Little** and a lone **Great Crested**) were also seen.

Around the exposed shores of the Laguna the only waders to be found were **Black-winged Stilts** whilst a small group of **Greater Flamingo** were seen on the far shore, these gave a fantastic flypast from the hide. However, the brisk breeze made viewing from the hide difficult.



We visited the white town of Medina Sidonia and had a late lunch at one of the restaurants on the Plaza de España (Restaurante Paco Ortega). The tapas with the Carrillada (pigs' cheek) and Croquetas was very tasty and we were treated to up to 30 **Griffon Vultures** soaring over the town as we ate. We returned to the free Car park and find a "friendly" local expecting some money for keeping the car safe, we'd noticed him watching us when we were dining. Our refusal resulted in a send-off that was best deemed as impolite....

On our return to Gibraltar we have time for a quick detour to the Palmones Estuary and find **Whimbrel, Sanderling** and **Greenshank**, whilst a **Peregrine** caused panic in the assembled waders and gulls. Not a bad end to a good days birding.

## 6<sup>th</sup> November

We had a much better weather day for ringing with early levanter cloud and light winds that turned westerly. Again, the commonest birds ringed were **Robin**, **Blackcap** and **Black Redstart** with 17 of the latter being the best day total so far for this species. The afternoon became very warm and sunny and we witnessed a massive feeding frenzy of **Gannets** and **Shearwaters** in the Straits off Europa Point. The seabirds were also joined by several pods of dolphin (alas too distant to speciate). Three **Cormorants** are seen flying near the Observatory and both **Raven** and **Sparrowhawk** were also seen.

## 7<sup>th</sup> November

The westerly winds had picked up again today and the sunny and windy conditions determined that bird activity dropped off by late morning and our nets were furled at lunchtime after c40 birds had been ringed.

In the afternoon we visited the area known as La Janda, an area of farmland that was formerly a large wetland that rivalled Doñana between the white towns of Vejer de la Frontera and Fascinas. This area is a mixture of rice paddies, cotton fields and grazed grassland and is still a haven for many birds. We drove down the track that runs opposite the main road junction for Zahara and Barbate. We quickly found **Spanish Sparrows** within the flocks of **House Sparrows**. **White Wagtails** and **Meadow Pipits** were on the tracks and the flooded fields were alive with **Little** and **Cattle Egrets**, 100's of **White Storks** and distantly **Common Cranes**. **Marsh Harriers** quartered the fields and a very distant male **Hen Harrier** was found by Kev. We continued along the track finding **Green Sandpipers** and **Snipe** foraging in the arable fields and pairs of **Stonechats** perch on trackside bushes. Distantly we noted a **Black-winged Kite** perched on top of pylons, later we had slightly closer views of the bird hovering over the track.

Where the track meets the bridge over the drainage channel the area of farmland held a lot more water and here we found a group of **Spoonbills**, one was a Dutch colour ringed bird (see appendix 2 for colour ring re-sighting information) amongst hordes of **Little Egrets** and **White Storks**, a lone glossy ibis was also found here before about 200m further down the track we find a flock of c200 **Glossy Ibis** and several hundred white storks in a field that was being cultivated, an amazing site.



We also found single **Ruff** and **Greenshank** as well as a few **Green Sandpipers** in the fields too. Three mammals scurried across the track in the distance and were not seen well enough due to the evening gloom and rain that had begun to set in to distinguish if they were Otters or Egyptian Mongooses.

On dark we headed for dinner to one of my favourite places in the world the town of Tarifa. Despite the darkness the birding didn't end as we were treated to the sight and sound of hundreds of **Spotless Starlings** roosting in the palm trees around the town. The town was very quiet, with many bars and restaurants shut for the winter, we found that Bar-Restaurante Alameda on Calle Sancho IV el Bravo was open and had an excellent dinner including some locally caught fish.

### **8<sup>th</sup> November**

We had a surprisingly slow start to ringing despite the relatively calm conditions. Numbers of birds ringed increased by mid-morning and 60 birds were caught before the breeze caused nets to be closed around lunchtime. After seeing flyover **Grey Wagtails** every day, we managed to catch one in the nets near the Observatory pond. With windy afternoon conditions we have another venture to Europa Point for some lunch and a supermarket trip via the Catalan Bay (eastern side of the rock) where a **Blue Rock Thrush** flew over the car. Heavy rain set in preventing any evening ringing.

## 9<sup>th</sup> November

The last full day for visitors, again the weather was sunny with a westerly breeze that picked up during the day that resulted in most nets being shut at midday. Three nets around the Observatory were left open during the afternoon and the occasional **Serim** was lured. New species ringed for the trip was a little taste of home in the form of a **Blue Tit**, we found on average that the **Blue Tits** here are slightly smaller than those in the UK. Again, the observatory was graced by fly-by **Peregrine** and **Raven** and a pair of **Barbary Partridge** appear on the steps just metres from the Observatory door.



## 10<sup>th</sup> November

Cloudy skies in the morning cleared to give sunny spells during the day. Another 39 new birds were ringed at the Observatory with 13 **Serims** being notable. Early in the afternoon we dropped the others at airport for their return flight to Heathrow. We had another friend Chantal MacLeod-Nolan of RSPBs species recovery team arriving later in the day, so with a couple of hours to kill Kev and myself head off to Palmones. For the first time in our visit the frontier crossing took a while to navigate. We arrived to find Palmones bustling with lots of restaurants open for lunch and parking limited. We park up and Kev immediately finds an **Osprey** fishing over the marshes. The tide is higher than in previous visits giving nowhere for waders or gulls to rest up and the only other new species for the trip is a **Common Sandpiper**, decided that a tapas lunch was our best option. We saw from distance Chantal's flight as it landed in Gibraltar and headed back to collect her from the airport.

### 11<sup>th</sup> November

Chantal's first day of ringing at the Observatory was under clear skies and light south-west winds. This helped our catch rate with c50 birds recorded. As with previous days it was **Blackcaps** that are the mainstay of the catch and we also ring five **Sardinian Warblers** which was the highest single day total of our stay. These were a new species for Chantal and they posed a few questions for all of us in regards how to age the birds as they undergo a varied moult strategy compared to most other birds. After ringing had finished around lunchtime we ventured down into town and met Kev's parents who have had a few days in Spain with Bird Guide Simon Tonkin (Inglorious Bustards) and are in Gibraltar for a couple of days. We visited Europa Point for the usual **Gannets** and only the occasional **Shearwater**. The weather prevents any evening opening of the nets, so we contented ourselves with dinner in O'Reilly's in Ocean Village.

### 12<sup>th</sup> November

Dawn brought heavy levanter cloud over the Rock which lasted until midday. The light easterly conditions were perfect for mist netting and passerines always appear to more abundant on the upper Rock in such weather. We ringed a further 70 birds with 30 **Blackcaps** and 20 **Black Redstarts** making up the bulk of the catch. The original aim of bird ringing was to determine the migration routes of birds (more recently it has been used as a tool for assessing productivity and survival) and primary function of the Observatory to monitor birds passing through Gibraltar from elsewhere in Europe. Mid-morning Kev extracted two **Blackcaps** from Net 20 that were only 20cm apart, both were already ringed; one from Spain and the other from Belgium an excellent example of the data the Observatory sets out to collect. The data from these individuals and all the other ringing data will be sent to the British Trust for Ornithology by GONHS and they will be informed of where and when these birds were ringed.



## 13<sup>th</sup> November

We were lucky to have a second day of favourable easterly winds and ringing was busy before the cloud dissipated and temperatures climbed ceasing any bird activity. A lone **Wren** was amongst the usual fare of **Robins**, **Black Redstarts** and **Blackcaps**.

Kev's parents visited us late morning and we planned another afternoon visit to La Janda. This time we drove the central track in reverse from the previous trip. Unfortunately, there were fewer storks at this western end and the flock of Glossy Ibis had moved on. It took us a little while to locate a **Black-winged Kite**, and as luck has it a second flew over the van later in the day.

Compared to the week before there were more spoonbills and storks on wetter areas and we recorded the colour ring combinations on several **Spoonbills**, the details are in Appendix 2. Four birds were ringed as nestlings three in The Netherlands and one in Germany. Migration is just so fascinating!



At the Venta de Retin end of the track we encountered more **White Storks** as they came into roost in the fields. The air here was full of the calls of **Common Cranes** as large groups took to the air in the distance. The sky seemed to be alive at dusk with these majestic birds, one of the highlights of any birding trip. As is our custom with visiting La Janda we popped into Tarifa again in time to witness a massive **Spotless Starling** murmuration and a tasty dinner in Bar Morilla in the old town.

## 14<sup>th</sup> November

We awoke to heavy and humid levanter conditions, with a heavy rain shower mid-morning. These were perfect fall conditions and we had the busiest day ringing wise of the whole trip. Over 130 birds were caught including 4 Crag Martins. We had the upper nets open from dawn until dusk as conditions allowed. The total of 33 **Black Redstarts** was the best single day total for this species.



There was an unusual visitor near the observatory and pillar of Hercules monument in the form of a Barbary Macaque, the apes are rarely seen on this part of the rock and it appeared to be a lone individual probably a young male ousted from its troop. Thankfully it paid us and the nets no attention. A tiring but very rewarding day and very much the kind of day we wanted for our sabbatical.



#### **15<sup>th</sup> November**

A clearer day saw a reduction in the numbers of birds ringed. All the usual suspects were represented, and a **Goldfinch** was a nice addition and we also recapture the Belgian ringed **Blackcap** that has stayed on the Rock either for the winter or to fuel up for the next leg of its migration. We also managed to catch up on some data entry and general housekeeping around the Observatory.

#### **16<sup>th</sup> November**

The cloud and east wind returned and again it brought the birds. A Brambling was heard calling on flight as it over flew the Observatory. It transpired to be the best finch day of the month with 14 **Greenfinch**, 9 **Serins**, 2 **Goldfinch** and **Chaffinch** amongst the 115 birds caught. **Blackcaps** and **Black Redstarts** being the commonest migrants ringed as expected. A lone **House Sparrow** was an unexpected capture and with a high fat load it may have been on to spend the winter across the Straits.

For the evening we were at the Victoria stadium for the Europa Nations League football with Gibraltar taking on Armenia. After a shock victory in Armenia the atmosphere was positive before kick-off and a smart finish after a defensive error Gibraltar took the lead, this sparked wild scenes in the stands. However, the difference in class between the teams soon began to show and Gibraltar were soon 5-1 down. The crowd remained supportive and were rewarded as Gibraltar scored a second. The final score was Gibraltar 2 Armenia 6 the team left the field to a standing ovation.



### **17<sup>th</sup> November**

This was Chantal's last day. We caught 30 birds in two rounds of visiting the nets before heavy rain arrived by 10am. **Blackcap** being the only species to reach double figures. Once the rain had started, we knew that the forecast was not good for the following day, but the week that was to follow was so frustrating with rain and gales undermining much of our efforts.

### **18<sup>th</sup> November**

The predicted monsoon and forecast gale arrived with a vengeance. This had blown through to give a bright but very windy by late morning. However, it was not long before frequent heavy afternoon showers arrived, due to the poor conditions no ringing undertaken.

We decided to take a short trip to the small reserve at the nearby gated community of Sotogrande. 15 minutes after our arrival the heavens opened again to pelt down another deluge that lasted half an hour. The rain relented slightly and despite the drizzly conditions we managed to locate some nice birds with an in-flight **Little Bittern** and three **Teal** additions to the trip list. About 20 **Red-rumped Swallows** hawked over the reedbed too. Alas the rain increased we were forced back to the vehicle and headed back to the Observatory.

### **19<sup>th</sup> November:**

Yet another day with torrential rain and gale force winds. This cleared around 2pm and after lunch and tasty chocolate cake at the Europa Point café which had free Wi-Fi, we had a walk to the lighthouse and this was well timed as an adult **Audouin's Gull** gave a close fly-past.

We had to visit the GONHS office in the Alameda Botanical Gardens and record a **Peregrine** near the Rock Hotel and a **Grey Wagtail** in the car park.

Again, the weather improved in the late afternoon, we opened the three nets immediately near the observatory building for an hour which yielded just the three **Black Redstarts**.



### **20<sup>th</sup> November:**

Another day with early morning rain and the westerly wind had grown even stronger. The day brightened up but there was no relent in the gale force wind. We headed into Spain again late morning. Our plan to head to Benalup-Casas Viejas at the northern end of La Janda. On route we saw many storks and vultures probably enjoying the drier conditions. On the outskirts of Benalup-Casas Viejas we find two **Red Kites**, one in a tussle with a lone **Black Kite**. Here Storks and both **Cattle** and **Little Egrets** frequent the flooded fields bordering the roadsides. We take the turning towards La Janda only to be told that they have just started to resurface the road and it's now closed.

We decided that we would head to Vejer de la Frontera. On the way we passed by the Finca de Las Lomas where there were flocks of both **Woodpigeons** and **Jackdaws** on the wires. We arrived in Vejer for a late lunch dodging the crazy parking and traffic as we timed our arrival for when kids were being collected from school.

Over lunch we planned that we would visit the Barbate wetlands driving past the Vejer Northern Bald Ibis site. As we drove the road below the town, we failed to find any birds on the cliffs, but Kev noted a small skein heading towards us. He managed to find a parking spot opposite the bars near Barca de Vejer and we were treated to 8 **Northern Bald Ibis** circling above us before they headed off after about a matter of a minute.... nice!

We proceeded towards Barbate and crossed the bridge out from Barbate town and parked up overlooking where the river flows into the sea. Here we found an **Osprey** attempting to fish in the shallows and both single **Whimbrel** and **Turnstone** on shoreline. The salt pans and lagoons are alive with waders and we quickly find **Greenshank**, **Black-winged Stilts**, **Common Sandpipers** and **Sanderlings**. From the tracks around the salt pans we spooked a couple of **Spoonbills** and found about 70 roosting **Audouin's Gulls**, including a colour ringed individual (details in bird list).

We drove back via Zahara and any attempt we had at visiting La Janda were thwarted by two Guardia Civil police cars blocking the entrance track with a motorist they had stopped. We took this as a signal that it was time to head back to Gibraltar.

#### **21<sup>st</sup> November:**

Yet again we have early morning rain, we opened a few nets to dry them out in a lull in the weather, but this did not last long, and we closed them shortly afterwards. As was typical of the week the weather improved through the day and by late afternoon it was bright and sunny. We opened the top run of nets for a couple of hours as we were joined by Jill and caught 20 birds including a **Crag Martin**. What was notable was the birds all had high fat loads, so despite the poor weather it appeared that birds were managing to feed well.

#### **22<sup>nd</sup> November:**

After the early morning light drizzle cleared away, we were able to open some nets until heavy showers arrived around 1130am and prevented any further ringing for the day with c30 birds caught. When unfurling the nets, we heard flyover **Redwings** and **Bramblings** and our expectations were raised that birds were passing through. We were not disappointed as in the first net round we find two **Redwings**, quite amazing that none were ringed here for 15 years and we managed to catch three in less than in three weeks. On the migration front there were notable flocks of **Goldfinch** passing through the observatory.

My sabbatical took a turn for the worse as when going to fetch something from my room I managed to go over badly on my ankle in the observatory. An hour or so and after taking some painkillers we decided that I need to get my ankle checked out at the hospital. After about four hours and X-rays in A&E I find thankfully that I have not broken my ankle but have damaged the ligaments. The afternoon spent in the hospital did mean that we missed yet another monsoon like storm that hit the Rock. Once out the hospital Jill kindly treated us to a tasty Thai take away.

## **23<sup>rd</sup> November:**

Our last full day finally arrived. I'm observatory bound on laundry, data entry and cooking duties. Kev runs five nets on the lower slopes. After the constant rainstorms we were very happy to be greeted by a clear morning. The first net round was quite busy, then most of the morning was surprisingly slow in terms of birds ringed. There seemed to be very little evident migration with only occasional **Serin** flocks flying through. More birds appeared during the afternoon with **Black Redstarts** being notable.

We were also fortunate that we managed to catch another bird ringed elsewhere in Europe this time a **Robin** wearing a German ring. Jill also came over and helped Kev take down the nets in my enforced absence to signal the end of the ringing for another year in Gibraltar. The day ended with one last awesome sunset over in the direction of Tarifa. The view from the observatory rates as one of the best I have ever seen on my travels and never get tired of.

We deemed our sabbatical a success with over 1100 birds ringed at a time of year when the observatory is often unmanned and despite the severe lack of any favourable easterly winds. We recorded some interesting species and three captures of birds ringed elsewhere in Europe was noteworthy. 106 species were seen in Gibraltar and Spain over the four-week stay with records submitted BTO's Birdtrack database. We will return.

## **Acknowledgements:**

I'd like to thank all at GONHS especially Jill Yeoman, Charlie Perez and Keith Bensusan. The RSPB for granting us this sabbatical and providing some funding. All the other visiting ringers for contributing so much.

The Gibraltar Health Service for A&E treatment on my ankle. Europa Point Express for access to wi-fi accompanied by very tasty Gambas Pil-pil and O'Reilly's for good pub grub and a TV so Kev could watch Ipswich Town play. Both Gibraltar and the region of Andalucía for amazing landscapes and great birding.....we will be back!

## Bird List:

**Mallard:** Common on Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November. Large numbers on Embalse de Celemin near Benalup-Casas Viejas on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Teal:** Three birds dropped into the pools at Sotogrande on 18<sup>th</sup> November.

**Gadwall:** A few birds seen at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

**Shoveler:** Common amongst other water birds at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

**Pochard:** Very common (mainly drakes) found at Laguna de Medina 5<sup>th</sup> November.

**Ferruginous Duck:** A lone drake was found in flight and re-located giving distant scope views at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

**White-headed Duck:** Commonly found on Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

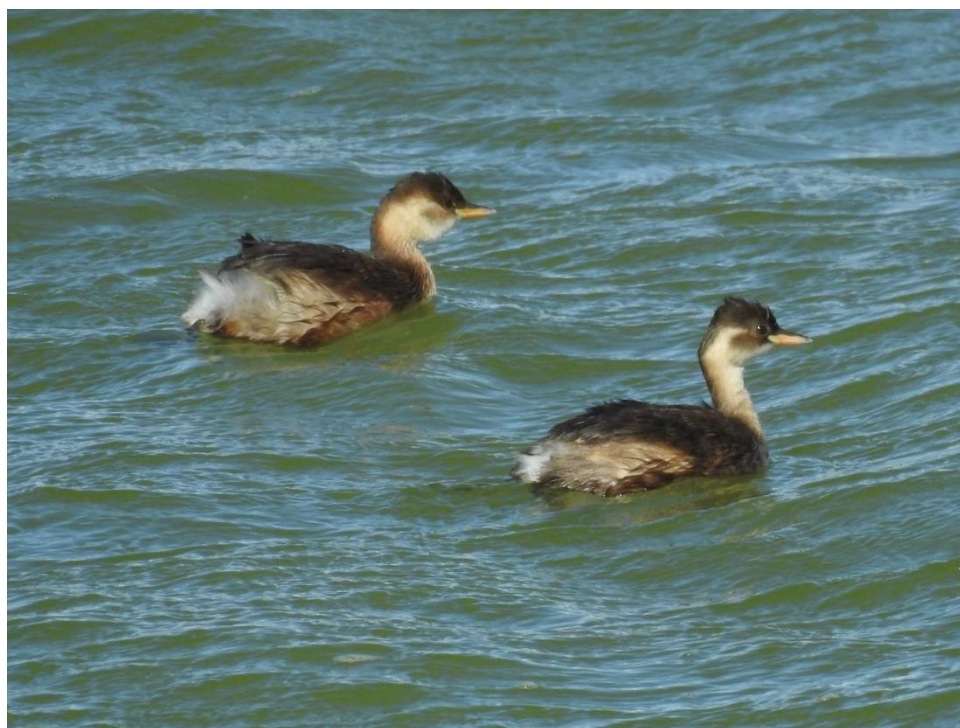
**Red-legged Partridge:** A pair was flushed near the Cueva del Moro above Bolonia on 1<sup>st</sup> November.

**Barbary Partridge:** Heard daily and often seen around the observatory at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. A covey of 8 birds on 12<sup>th</sup> November the maximum count.

**Pheasant:** Released game birds were found on visits to La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Black-necked Grebe:** Very common at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

**Little Grebe:** Common at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November.



**Great Crested Grebe:** Lone bird with other wildfowl at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

**Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwater:** Abundant out at sea either viewed at distance from the Observatory at Jew's Gate, or at closer quarters from Europa Point, Gibraltar. Numbers declined from the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of November.

**Gannet:** Common offshore in the Straits of Gibraltar, often seen plunge diving distantly from Jew's Gate, with much closer views from Europa Point, Gibraltar.

**Cormorant:** Birds seen flying distantly out at sea from Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. Often seen flying past Europa Point Gibraltar and at wetland sites in Spain.

**Shag:** Several birds seen around the lighthouse at Europa Point, Gibraltar.

**Little Bittern:** One in flight from reed bed at Sotogrande on 18<sup>th</sup> November.

**Cattle Egret:** Very common and often in association with livestock especially on our visits to La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Little Egret:** Common in all wetland habitats especially at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November. Abundant at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November and at the Marismas de Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Grey Heron:** Seen at all wetland sites visited including Palmones, Laguna de Medina and La Janda.

**White Stork:** Some birds at old nest sites around Los Barrios. Flocks of 100+ common in the farmland around La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Glossy Ibis:** A flock of c200 birds seen at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> November.



**Northern Bald Ibis:** 8 birds were seen circling near the nesting cliff at Vejer de la Frontera. 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Spoonbill:** A single birds was seen from Palmones promenade on 31st October. Small groups seen at La Janda on 7th and 13<sup>th</sup> November with several individuals with colour rings. Photos were taken, and details submitted to the Spoonbill working group. Details of the original ringing data is contained in appendix 2.

**Greater Flamingo:** c15 individuals were at the Laguna de Medina on the 5<sup>th</sup> November.

**Griffon Vulture:** Often seen from the Algeciras to Tarifa road. About 40 flew over us whilst having tapas in the plaza mayor in Medina Sidonia on 5<sup>th</sup> November. Flocks also seen between Los Barrios and Benalup-Casas Viejas on 20<sup>th</sup> November. Best views were of c20 birds that came into roost at Cueva del Moro, Bolonia on 1<sup>st</sup> November.



**Osprey:** A fishing bird was seen from Palmones promenade on 10<sup>th</sup> November. A second bird was at Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Red Kite:** One was seen as we approached Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November. Two birds were near Benalup-Casas Viejas 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Black Kite:** The only bird of the trip was seen with a Red Kite near Benalup-Casas Viejas on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Marsh Harrier:** Commonly seen at both Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November and on the two visits to La Janda on 7th and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Hen Harrier:** Distant male bird seen at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> November.

**Buzzard:** Occasionally seen in singles or pairs at La Janda, Laguna de Medina and near Benalup-Casas Viejas.

**Sparrowhawk:** Occasional birds seen from Jew's Gate, Gibraltar particularly in early November. With birds noted on 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-winged Kite:** One bird seen at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> November and two on our second visit to the same area on 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Kestrel:** Most widespread raptor seen with birds recorded at almost all sites visited.

**Peregrine:** Three birds were seen at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar on 2<sup>nd</sup> November. Resident pair seen near rock hotel Gibraltar on various dates.

**Moorhen:** Small number were seen on the fringes of Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November. Also found in the drainage channels around La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Coot:** Large numbers wintering at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November. A lone bird was at Sotogrande on 18<sup>th</sup> November.

**Crane:** The wintering flock increased in size between our two visits to La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November with birds arriving in as we watched. The sight and sound of over 100 birds in the air on the evening of 13<sup>th</sup> November was probably my highlight of the trip.

**Oystercatcher:** A lone bird was with other waders at the Palmones Estuary on the 31st October.

**Black-winged stilt:** Widespread at wetland sites with 6 birds at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November and c40 birds at Marismas de Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Ringed Plover:** A flock of c50 birds were at the Palmones Estuary on 31st October. Several birds were seen in the rice paddies of La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> November.

**Kentish Plover:** A single bird was on the beach at Bolonia on 1<sup>st</sup> November. At least three birds at Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Grey Plover:** Small group of c10 birds at Palmones Estuary on 31st October and at Marismas de Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Lapwing:** Flocks of wintering birds were seen in the rice paddies of La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Sanderling:** A lone bird was at the Palmones Estuary on 31st October. A small group of c30 birds were at the Marismas de Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Dunlin:** Small number seen at both the Palmones Estuary on 31st October and the Marismas de Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Knot:** A flyover bird was seen at Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Turnstone:** A single bird was on the shoreline at Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Green Sandpiper:** Several birds were seen and heard around the rice paddies of La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Common Sandpiper:** A single bird was seen from the promenade at Palmones 10<sup>th</sup> November. 2 or 3 birds were on the salt pans at Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Redshank:** Small number seen at both the Palmones Estuary on 31st October and the Marismas de Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Greenshank:** Single birds seen at Palmones Estuary on 31st October, La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> November and several birds at Marismas de Barbate 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Ruff:** Single bird found in rice paddies with storks and ibises on 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Whimbrel:** Single birds seen with one at the Palmones Estuary on 5<sup>th</sup> November and a second at Barbate shoreline 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Snipe:** Small numbers seen in paddy fields at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> November.



**Black-headed Gull:** Wintering birds were found at Europa Point, Gibraltar and at Laguna de Medina, Palmones and Barbate.

**Lesser-black backed Gull:** Wintering birds found at Laguna de Medina and La Janda.

**Yellow-legged Gull:** Omnipresent over the observatory at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. The typical gull species of the area. Birds seen at most wetland and coastal visited.

**Audouin's Gull:** Two birds were roosting at the Palmones Estuary on 31st October. A close fly past adult bird was seen at Europa Point, Gibraltar on 19<sup>th</sup> November. A group of c70 roosting at Marismas de Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November contained a colour ringed bird ringed at Punta de La Banya, Tarragona on 04/05/2009. The only other observation of this bird was at Barbate in July 2017.

**Sandwich Tern:** Several birds were foraging at the Palmones Estuary on 31st October. Others were seen at Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Feral Pigeon:** Common in urban areas a small flock were a constant sight near the observatory at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar.

**Woodpigeon:** Single bird overflowed the road between Tarifa and Fascinas on 13<sup>th</sup> November. Flocks were seen perched on wires between Vejer and Benalup-Casas Viejas on 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Collared Dove:** Common in urban areas, only occasional birds seen at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. A group of 8 were on Europa Road leading up to the observatory on 18<sup>th</sup> November.

**Tawny Owl:** Heard calling on nights of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of November and one flew over the Jew's Gate Observatory, Gibraltar on the morning of 16<sup>th</sup> November.

**Nightjar:** A lone bird was caught and ringed at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar on the evening of 28<sup>th</sup> October.

**Kingfisher:** Single bird seen flying along river at Palmones Estuary 31st October.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard in woodland near Cueva del Moro above Bolonia on 1<sup>st</sup> November.

**Crested Lark:** Commonly found in open and farmland habitats.

**Crag Martin:** Seen daily at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. The birds roost in Gotham's Cave on the east side of the rock. Small numbers ringed during the month.

**Red-rumped Swallow:** One bird was ringed Jew's Gate, Gibraltar on 31<sup>st</sup> October with occasional bird seen in 1<sup>st</sup> week of November with Crag Martins. A flock feeding of c20 birds in rain over reeds at Sotogrande 18<sup>th</sup> November.

**House Martin:** At least three birds over Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

**Meadow Pipit:** Common migrant with numbers increasing flying through November at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. Seen at most open habitat sites in Spain, notably several were seen around gardens in Sotogrande on poor weather on 18<sup>th</sup> November.

**White Wagtail:** Widespread and common in Spain. Occasionally seen overflying Jew's Gate, Gibraltar.

**Grey Wagtail:** Seen or heard Daily overflying Jew's Gate, Gibraltar One was ringed on 8<sup>th</sup> November. One was in the Alameda Gardens, Gibraltar on 19<sup>th</sup> November and another on the shoreline at Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Duncock:** Two birds ringed at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar on 29<sup>th</sup> October and 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

**Robin:** Abundant migrant and wintering birds daily at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar 194 birds were ringed during our stay. A German ringed bird was caught on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, this was originally ringed at Lisdorf, Saaland on 17<sup>th</sup> October a distance of 1765km covered in 37 days.

**Black Redstart:** Abundant migrant and wintering birds around Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. A total of 243 ringed during our stay.

**Stonechat:** Very common in open habitats with many birds being seen at Playa de Los Lances on 1<sup>st</sup> November and La Janda 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.



**Song Thrush:** Small numbers seen daily at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar until mid-November.

**Redwing:** A single bird was ringed on 3<sup>rd</sup> November Jew's Gate, Gibraltar, another was heard after dark on the same date. Two birds were caught on the morning of 22<sup>nd</sup> November,

**Blackbird:** Small numbers seen daily at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar, two birds ringed in 2015 were recaptured during our stay.

**Blue Rock Thrush:** One seen around the observatory Jew's Gate, Gibraltar another overflow the car near Catalan Bay, Gibraltar on 8<sup>th</sup> November.

**Blackcap:** Common and widespread in scrubs habitats, commonest bird ringed at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. A total of 385 were ringed during our stay. Belgian and Spanish ringed birds were caught together on 15th November.



**Garden Warbler:** A late migrant was ringed at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar on 4<sup>th</sup> November.

**Sardinian Warbler:** Common resident and migrant through Gibraltar, birds seen and heard daily and ringed on most days.

**Zitting Cisticola:** Frequently seen in open habitats with several birds being seen at Playa de Los Lances on 1<sup>st</sup> November and La Janda 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Cetti's Warbler:** Birds heard from dense vegetation at Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November. Also heard at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Chiffchaff:** Small numbers seen daily at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. Numerous migrants in scrub around Laguna de Medina on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

**Wren:** Heard daily around Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. A single bird was ringed on 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Blue Tit:** Seen daily around the Observatory at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. The few birds caught were mainly recaptures with one bird being ringed back in October 2012 as a juvenile and has been re-trapped seven times in the intervening 6 years and 23 days from when first ringed.

**Great Tit:** A bird was heard from the observation point at Laguna de Medina.

**Jackdaw:** Small flocks seen in the farmland area of La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Raven:** Birds seen overflying the Observatory at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar on 29<sup>th</sup> October and 6<sup>th</sup> November. Also seen whilst driving between Algeciras and Tarifa and near Benalup-Casa Viejas.

**Spotless Starling:** Commonly found in towns and farmland. We witnessed a massive roost in Tarifa on the evenings of 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November. Small groups of less than 20 birds seen daily from, Jew's Gate, Gibraltar.

**House Sparrow:** Common in urban areas and large flocks seen in the farmland around La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November. Two passage birds were ringed at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar on 16<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November.

**Spanish Sparrow:** Several birds seen within mixed sparrow flocks at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**Chaffinch:** Widespread but not abundant. Seen daily from Jew's Gate, Gibraltar with small number of birds ringed during the month.

**Brambling:** Birds seen and heard at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar on 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

**Linnet:** Occasionally passage of birds over Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. Small numbers seen at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November also at Sotogrande on 18<sup>th</sup> November.

**Goldfinch:** Common passage migrant with flocks of c30 birds regular through Jew's Gate, Gibraltar. Very common in Spain.

**Greenfinch:** Steady passage of birds that increased over the month at Jew's Gate, Gibraltar with 76 birds ringed over the month.



**Serin:** Common passage migrant through Jew's Gate, Gibraltar, we ringed 118 birds during our stay. Very common in Spain.

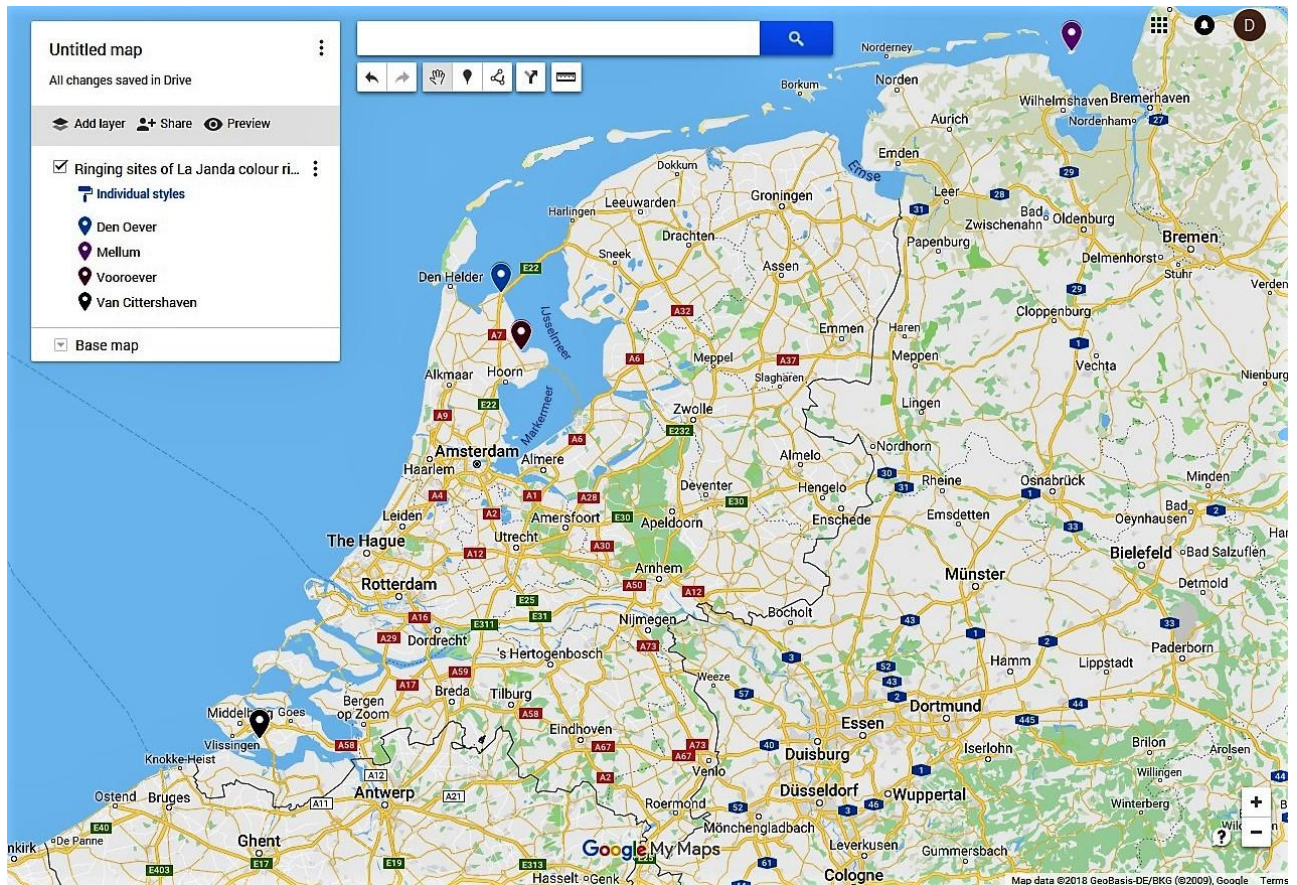
**Reed Bunting:** Birds seen in reeds of drainage channels at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> November and in wetland at Sotogrande on 18<sup>th</sup> November.

**Corn Bunting:** Occasional birds on wires and flying over at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November and Barbate on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

**Appendix 1:** Totals of birds ringed at Straits of Gibraltar Bird Observatory, Jew's Gate Gibraltar  
28/10/2018 to 24/11/2018

<b>Species</b>	<b>Ringed</b>	<b>Recaptures</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Nightjar</b>	1	0	1
<b>Crag Martin</b>	9	0	9
<b>Red-rumped Swallow</b>	1	0	1
<b>Grey Wagtail</b>	1	0	1
<b>Wren</b>	1	0	1
<b>Dunnock</b>	2	0	2
<b>Robin</b>	194	56	250
<b>Black Redstart</b>	243	16	259
<b>Blackbird</b>	5	8	13
<b>Song Thrush</b>	24	1	25
<b>Redwing</b>	3	0	3
<b>Sardinian Warbler</b>	32	23	55
<b>Garden Warbler</b>	1	0	1
<b>Blackcap</b>	385	63	448
<b>Chiffchaff</b>	36	0	36
<b>Blue Tit</b>	1	5	6
<b>House Sparrow</b>	2	0	2
<b>Chaffinch</b>	11	0	11
<b>Serin</b>	118	1	119
<b>Greenfinch</b>	76	1	77
<b>Goldfinch</b>	6	0	6
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1152</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>1326</b>

**Appendix 2:** Original Ringing locations of colour-ringed Spoonbills observed at La Janda on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November 2018.



Colour Code	Date seen at La Janda	Date Ringed	Location/Distance	Location and number of re-sightings
aGR/LYFY	13/11/2018	09/08/2010 Nestling	Den Oever, Netherlands 2044km	Netherlands 13 France 1 Mauritania 1 Spain 3
aYR/LfRY	07/11/2018	01/08/2017 Nestling	Niedersachsen, Mellum, Germany 2226km	Germany 2 Spain 1
BRYf/aRG	13/11/2018	25/05/2012 Nestling	Onderdijk, Vooroever Netherlands 2029km	Netherlands 8 Germany 15 Spain 2
NfPR/aGR	13/11/2018	31/05/2016 Nestling	Sloegebied, Van Cittershaven Netherlands 1854km	Netherlands 3 Belgium 2 Spain 1