

Birding Trip Report

Portugal 17th to 23rd April 2013

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Area around the back of Guerreiro, leading to LPN, Alentejo.

We booked flights with Easyjet from Liverpool for just under £100 (plus £30 for a checked in suitcase). The flight times were very civilized leaving Liverpool 9:30am and arriving Faro around 12:30 leaving most of the afternoon for birding around Faro airport lagoons. The car hire was from Europcar who we have used in the past and they were the usual competitively priced, friendly company and we had no problems with the Fiat they gave us. We pre-booked a small hotel in the town of Boliqueime (a haven for retired Brits) in the centre of the Algarve, 'The Boliqueime Inn' which was cheap, clean, with excellent food and laid back,

friendly staff. Friday night is 'Elvis' night but other than that, it was a good choice as it was ideally situated for the sites we wanted to visit, never more than an hour or so from one end of the coast to the other as well as a trip north to the Alentejo area. The one exception was a day visit into Spain to the Coto Donanna which took approximately two hours each way.

Wednesday 17th April. Faro Airport Lagoons/Ria Formosa.

On leaving Faro airport there is a large traffic island with concrete statues of people looking up. Take the exit towards the beach at the side of the petrol station there and carry on for a few minutes until the woodland on the right peters out and stop and park there before the road crosses the Ria Formosa. There is a gate on the right with a raised bund with a path used by cyclists and joggers that skirts the river, marshes and the inland lagoons. Follow this path towards the Ludo Farm area, scanning the marsh and lagoons.



Immediately we had Crested Lark, Cettis & Sardinian Warbler, all of which are common everywhere in Portugal. There appeared to be a fall of Woodchat shrikes that morning and we had over 30 in that immediate area, all of which had disappeared on our next visit at the end of the trip. There were good numbers of waders with breeding Kentish Plovers, flocks of Dunlin, Sanderling, 4 Curlew Sandpiper, many Black Winged Stilts, 32 Whimbrel plus Grey Plover, Turnstone and Curlew. A superb adult Caspian Tern appeared just above us followed later by an Osprey which flew low over head with a large fish. Further along this path, as we approached the Ludo Farm area, the big inland pool immediately beyond the obvious line of tall trees pool had breeding White Stork. This pool is also good for Spoonbills and an assortment of waders and ducks including Red-crested Pochard. The surrounding scrub had Turtle Doves, Pied Flycatchers, Zitting Cistollosa and Azure Winged Magpies, which we saw just about everywhere. This general area is good enough to spend the day around at this time of year as it feels as if anything could turn up.

We eventually checked in to our accommodation around seven which, after chucking out time at the bar at about twelve, we had completely to ourselves thus avoiding a crowded Algarve as the main holiday season doesn't really take off until June.

Thursday 18th April. Pera Marsh, Alvor coastal areas and Vilamoura

Pera Marsh can be a fantastic site however due to poor weather and unusual rainfall in the previous weeks; it was too full with little exposed mud. It was also very windy when we arrived. We did have Flamingos here and a Purple Heron. Around Alvor we had our first Bee-eaters, Red-Rumped Swallows, Alpine Swifts and a Little Owl showed well from a power cable.



Vilamoura. We made the first of a number of trips to this reserve which adjoins the extensive holiday and golf complex around the town of Vilamoura. From the N125 going east towards Faro, turn right into the obvious Vilamoura sign with an anchor on it down past a 50 mph flashing sign through three islands carrying on then taking the next right turn. There is immediately a bridge across the water that splits the golf course. Stop here as we found it excellent for Purple Swamp Hen and Little Bittern. Carry on down this road and take an obvious wide track on the left which leads to a lagoon with a hide. From here we had Black Shouldered Kite, Hen, Montagues and Marsh Harrier, Great Reed Warbler, Black Headed Weaver, Hoopoe and Purple Heron to name a few. Nightingales sang everywhere here.

Friday 19th April Alentejo.

This was probably the most enjoyable and productive day of our trip.

Head north on the A2 toll road leaving at junction 12 for Castro Verde; after leaving the motorway there is a short drive to Castro Verde, ignore the first turn off (avoiding much of the town) take the second and follow the signs for Mertola out of Castro Verde. This is the best time for wildflowers and the display this year can only be described as spectacular; a botanists dream.



Wild flower meadows Alentejo.

Anywhere along this road can yield good birds so stop as and when and scan the fields. Good places are the two river bridges on the way to the village of San Marcos; also the right turn to the tiny village of Rolao and following the road to Guerreiro where a track from here meets the back of the LPN Reserva De Biodiversdade, a good place to stop for soaring raptors and Bustards.



Permission is needed to drive through the track the on reserve however the surrounding area from the road and other tracks are just as good.

The best of the day's birds in the Alentejo area included: 12 + Montague's Harriers plus a single Hen and Marsh. Good numbers of Griffon and at least 3 Black Vultures, 3 Juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagles plus 1 Juvenile Golden and 1 Short-toed. Regular Black Kites, Lesser Kestrels; Southern Grey shrikes, 2 Rollers, 10 Collared Pratincoles, Calandra Larks and many Bee-eaters. Several Cuckoos, plus 2 pairs of Great Spotted Cuckoos, 40+ Great Bustards, 5 Little Bustards all showed well. White Storks nest in the low concrete pylons just past San Marcos and Spanish Sparrows breed in the lower bulk of these nests.

The whole of the Alentejo is an area the size of Wales and one day hardly does it justice but in good weather in spring, it is well worth a visit.



Saturday 20th April Vilamoura.

Most of the day was spent in this area where we were surprised to see 7 Night Herons first thing showing well in the reeds from a bridge crossing the golf course and later another 7 flying which proved to be additional birds. Later we had up to 5 individual Little Bitterns at the same bridge, Purple Swamp Hens and a variety of typical pond species. The area of the reserve is worth exploring returning to the same vantage points during the day as things can change depending upon weather, time of day etc.

Sunday 21st April. Spain: Coto Donanna

After an early start we made the area in just under two hours. The previous heavy rains made the main lagoon opposite the town of El-Rocio too deep however it is still a special place to visit. Well over 100 Whiskered Terns on show here.



Take the road out of the town towards the beach and immediately after the new road bridge turn right through the large gates and car park to the information centre. There are several walks here to 4 hides where we added another 200 Whiskered Terns, 2 Gull Billed, plus 2 Black. Savis Warbler sang from the reeds and we had a several Melodious warblers showing well. Black Kites were always visible and also an obliging, low flying Booted Eagle being mobbed by a Marsh Harrier. There are several causeways across reedy areas and one had 8 Night Herons roosting in the trees there and later a Crested Tit near one of the hides.

Again, a day visit does not do it Justice as there is so much of it but still well worth at least scratching the surface.

Monday 22nd April. Cape St. Vincent.

This most western point on the Algarve can be alive with birds on a good day however it was very windy when we arrived and relatively quiet. We did add Gannet, Black Redstart, Pallid Swift, Rock Dove, Jackdaw, Meadow Pipit, Blue rock Thrush, and Peregrine to our species list and it is a spectacular place to visit just for a day out so still worth it.

On our way back we called in at Burgau Marsh – Burdens Marsh, or as it is known locally: Boco do Rio. This is largely coastal salt marsh with an expansive reed bed between Burgau and Salema. A really good site this which was quiet when we arrived as it was hot around mid-day but we had Great and Reed warbler plus Iberian Chiff Chaff. Seems a really good, but under watched site.

Late afternoon we called in at the Vilamoura reserve again and found Short Toed Tree Creeper feeding young in a nest box there. We visited a large stand of Poplars which are supposed to be good for Golden Oriole according to Gosney's guide but with no luck.

Tuesday 23rd April. Faro Marshes.

A final brief visit to the airport lagoons around the Ria Formosa before our flight home at 13.00pm yielded another Osprey. We spent the last hour looking for Chameleons in the scrub but ran out of time. Overall, this was a really enjoyable trip, with good weather and excellent variety.

Other Species.

Mammals

Hare

Reptiles & Amphibians

Large Psammandromus

Spanish Psammondromus.

Iberian Water Frog

European Pond Terrapin

Iberian Pond Terrapin.

Red Eared Terrapin

Common Toad

Butterflies

Spanish Festoons and Clouded Yellows were plentiful as well as a range of unfamiliar butterflies we simply didn't have time to check out.

Algarve/Alentejo and Coto Donana Bird List. 19-23 April 2013

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| • Common Shelduck | Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago |
| • Gadwall | Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago |
| • Northern Shoveler | Alentejo plains |
| • Red-crested Pochard | Coto Danana /Vilamoura |
| • Common Pochard | Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago |
| • Red-legged partridge | Quinto de Lago./ |
| • Quail | Alentejo plains |
| • Little Grebe | Quinto de Lago /.Vilamoura |
| • Great-Crested Grebe | Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago /vilamoura |
| • Greater Flamingo | Pera Marsh |
| • White Stork | daily |
| • Northern Gannet | Cape St Vincent |
| • Greater Cormorant | Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago |
| • Little Bittern | Vilamoura |
| • Grey Heron | Rio Formosa /Quinto de Lago /Coto Donana |
| • Purple Heron | Vilamoura |
| • Little Egret | Quinto de Lago /.Vilamoura./.Coto Donana |
| • Cattle Egret | daily |
| • Black-crowned Night Heron | Coto Donana /Vilamoura |
| • Eurasian Spoonbill | Quanto de Lago |
| • Osprey | Ria Formosa |

• Black-shouldered Kite	Vilamoura
• Black Vulture	Alentejo plains
• Eurasian Griffon Vulture	Alentejo plains
• Short-toed Eagle	Alentejo plains / Burgau Marsh
• Booted Eagle	Alentejo plains / Coto Donana
• Spanish Imperial Eagle	Alentejo plains
• Golden Eagle	Alentejo plains
• Marsh Harrier	Coto Donana /Vilamoura
• Hen Harrier	Alentejo plains
• Montague's Harrier	Alentejo plains
• Black Kite	Coto Donana / Alentejo plains
• Common Buzzard	Alentejo plains
• Great Bustard	Alentejo plains
• Little Bustard	Alentejo plains
• Purple Swamphen	Quinto de Lago /.Vilamoura./.Coto Donana
• Eurasian Moorhen	Quinto de Lago /.Vilamoura./.Coto Donana
• Eurasian Coot	Quinto de Lago /.Vilamoura.
• Northern Lapwing	Alentejo plains
• Black-bellied Plover	Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago
• Kentish Plover	Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago
• Common Ringed Plover	Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago
• Black-winged Stilt	Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago
• Pied Avocet	Quinto de Lago / Coto Donana
• Common Sandpiper	Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago
• Common Greenshank	Ria Formosa
• Whimbrel	Ria Formosa
• Eurasian Curlew	Ria Formosa
• Black-tailed Godwit	Coto Donana
• Bar-tailed Godwit	Ria Formosa
• Ruddy Turnstone	Ria Formosa
• Sanderling	Ria Formosa
• Dunlin	Ria Formosa
• Curlew Sandpiper	Ria Formosa
• Common Snipe	Quinto de Lago
• Collared Pratincole	Alentejo plains /Rio Formosa
• Black-headed Gull	coastal
• Yellow-legged Gull	coastal
• Lesser Black-backed Gull	coastal
• Little Tern	Ria Formosa
• Gull-billed Tern	Coto Donana

• Caspian Tern	Ria Formosa
• Black Tern	Coto Donana
• Whiskered Tern	Coto Donana
• Sandwich Tern	Pera Marsh
• Rock Dove	Cape St Vincent
• Wood Pigeon	daily
• European Turtle Dove	Ria Formosa / Coto Danana
• Eurasian Collared Dove	daily
• Great Spotted Cuckoo	Alentejo plains
• Common Cuckoo	Alentejo plains
• Little Owl	Alver ringing station
• Alpine Swift	Alver /Cape St Vincent
• Common Swift	daily
• Pallid Swift	Cape St Vincent
• Common Kingfisher	Alentejo plains
• European Bee-eater	daily
• European Roller	Alentejo plains
• Great Spotted Woodpecker	Vilamoura
• Green Woodpecker	Vilamoura
• Lesser Kestrel	Alentejo plains
• Eurasian Kestrel	daily
• Peregrine Falcon	Cape St Vincent
• Southern Grey Shrike	daily
• Woodchat Shrike	daily
• Eurasian Jay	Vilamoura
• Azure-winged Magpie	daily
• Eurasian Magpie	Coto Donana
• Eurasian Jackdaw	Cape St Vincent
• Carrion Crow	Alentejo plains
• Common Raven	Alentejo plains
• Calandra Lark	Alentejo plains
• Greater Short-toed Lark	Alentejo plains
• Crested Lark	daily
• Sand Martin	Vilamoura
• Barn Swallow	daily
• Red-rumped Swallow	daily
• Common House Martin	daily
• Crested Tit	Coto Donana
• Great Tit	Odelouca
• Long-tailed Tit	Coto Donana

- Short-toed Treecreeper Vilamoura
- Eurasian Wren Coto Donana
- Cetti's Warbler Ria Formosa
- Iberian Chiffchaff Burgau Marsh
- Melodious Warbler Coto Donana
- Eurasian Reed Warbler Vilamoura
- Great Reed Warbler Burgau Marsh / Vilamoura
- Savi's Warbler Ria Formosa
- Zitting Cisticola daily
- Blackcap Odelouca
- Garden Warbler Vilamoura
- Greater Whitethroat Vilamoura
- Subalpine Warbler Coto Donana
- Sardinian Warbler daily
- Common Nightingale daily
- European Pied flycatcher Ria Formosa /Quinto de Lago
- Black Redstart Cape St Vincent
- Blue Rock Thrush Cape St Vincent
- European Stonechat Burgau Marsh / Cape St Vincent
- Northern Wheatear Ria Formosa
- Blackbird daily
- Spotless Starling daily
- Yellow Wagtail Ria Formosa
- Grey Wagtail Odelouca
- White Wagtail Alemande pools
- Meadow Pipit Cape St Vincent
- Tree Pipit Quinto de Lago
- Corn Bunting daily
- Common Chaffinch Coto Donana
- European Greenfinch daily
- European Goldfinch daily
- European Linnit daily
- European Serin daily
- House Sparrow daily
- Spanish Sparrow Alentejo plains
- Black-headed Weaver Vilamoura
- Common Waxbill Vilamoura

