

TARIFA, SOUTHERN SPAIN

autumn bird migration through the Straits of Gibraltar



Every autumn huge numbers of soaring birds, principally storks and raptors, cross the Straits of Gibraltar on their southward migration into Africa. The spectacle of thousands of Honey Buzzards, hundreds of Short-toed and Booted Eagles, Black Kites and White Storks and a large assortment of scarcer species is a phenomenon which draws many birdwatchers to the southern tip of Europe. Our visit is timed to coincide with the peak of the autumn migration.

In addition, there are many other interesting species to be found in the mountains, wooded hills, lowlands, marshes and coast.

We will fly to Malaga, spending the first three nights at Los Palacios, and exploring the wetlands on the east bank of the River Guadalquivir. On day four we will move down to Tarifa for a four night stay, before eventually heading back to Malaga for our flight home.

ITINERARY

THE GUADALQUIVIR MARSHES

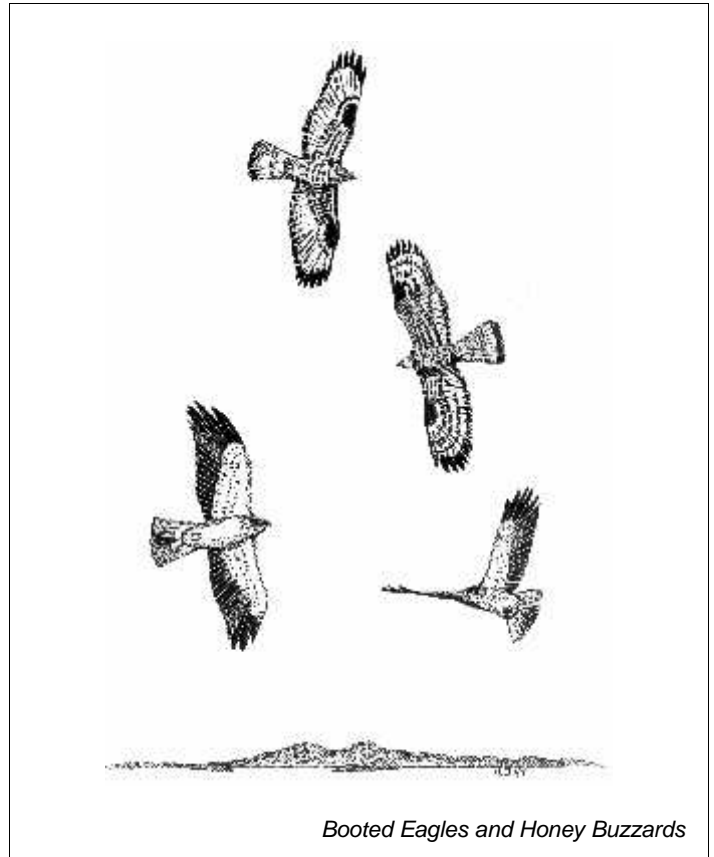
On day one we will fly to Malaga and then drive to Los Palacios, our base for the first three nights.

On the east bank of the famous Guadalquivir River, and adjacent to the Coto Donana, are some areas of preserved habitat where a multitude of wetland birds can be found. Purple Gallinules are common, Collared Pratincoles may still linger at this time of year, and herons, egrets, terns, waders and ducks vie for our attention. Glossy Ibis, formerly a rare bird in this area, is now an increasingly common resident. Marbled Teal is regularly seen.

Close to our hotel there is a tamarisk-fringed lake where Western Olivaceous Warblers linger until late September.

On day three, a short drive south will take us to lakes which hold White-headed Ducks, as well as the commoner Red-crested Pochard and Black-necked Grebe. Hoopoes and Bee-eaters occur throughout. An evening excursion should produce sightings of Red-necked Nightjar.

We will visit the extensive Bonanza salt pans. Off-limits to birdwatchers until recently, much of this is now a reserve. It is attractive to hundreds of Greater Flamingos as well as Slender-billed Gulls, Spoonbills, egrets and herons and



Booted Eagles and Honey Buzzards

abundant passage waders. A recent addition to the local avifauna is the Little Swift, now breeding regularly in small numbers.

On day four we will head south to Tarifa, for a four night stay.

TARIFA

En route to Tarifa we will visit the justly famous town of Ronda, built above a deep gorge. 'More Choughs than the whole of Wales' as someone once said. We can expect Black Wheatear and Rock Bunting, plus the chance of Peregrine. At the spectacular Sierra de las Nieves we will look for Bonelli's Eagle, Spectacled Warbler and Rock Thrush.

Tarifa is ideally placed for visits to adjacent mountains, wooded hills, the coast, grassy plains and salt pans as well as being at the centre of Europe's biggest raptor bottle-neck.

Tarifa Beach was once a magnet for bird trappers. In these enlightened days bird protection laws are enforced and this practise has completely stopped. Migrants are safe to take cover in the beach-side scrub before crossing the straits. On the beach itself Audouin's Gulls join flocks of the commoner species and there is even the chance of migrant Lesser Crested Terns alongside more numerous Sandwich Terns. A creek usually proves attractive to Whimbrel, Dunlin, Ringed and Kentish Plovers and Sanderling.

On one afternoon we can join a whale and dolphin-watching trip in the straits. Exciting possibilities include Bottle-nosed, Striped and Common Dolphins and maybe Long-finned Pilot Whales at close quarters. Larger whales are scarce, although we have seen both Sperm Whale and Killer Whale on past trips. We may also be treated to views of Cory's and Balearic Shearwaters, plus a few Gannets and skuas.

Wooded hills and spectacular rocky outcrops just inland of Tarifa are home to large numbers of raptors. Griffon Vulture is a common resident and these are occasionally joined by Ruppell's Griffon, a recent immigrant from sub-Saharan Africa. The rare White-rumped Swift is still present at this time or year, so we will keep our eyes skywards just in case. On one previous visit a flock of swifts and swallows contained all of White-rumped Swift, Little Swift, Alpine Swift, Pallid Swift and Red-rumped Swallow!

Nearby woodland and open areas hold Cirl Bunting, Sardinian Warbler, Woodchat Shrike, Serin, Spotless Starling, Iberian Chiffchaff, Crested Tit, Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper and Blue Rock Thrush.

La Janda was once a huge wetland, a few miles north of Tarifa. It was drained for agriculture in the early 1960s; one of the great ecological crimes of modern times. Today it is a large plain, with abundant Calandra Larks as well as Stone Curlews, Red-legged Partridge, Southern Grey Shrikes, Little Owls and a few Little Bustards. The localised Spanish Imperial Eagle has recently started nesting here. Hydrological studies have been made to see whether the area could be re-flooded. Watch this space

And last but not least, of course, is the chance to witness one of Europe's most impressive raptor migrations. Weather is all important, but in the autumn anything but rain should produce birds in good numbers.

Large soaring migrants rely on thermals for lift. They are simply too big to power their own flight for long periods. Thermals are only created over land, so sea crossings become a problem. The Mediterranean is a major obstacle for birds heading south so they choose to cross at the narrowest point. In the western Mediterranean, the narrowest point is the ten miles between Tarifa and the Moroccan coast. The result is a bottle-neck for thousands of birds: Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Booted Eagles, Short-toed Eagles, Montagu's Harriers, Marsh Harriers, Griffon Vultures, Egyptian Vultures, Sparrowhawks, Common Buzzards, Ospreys, Lesser Kestrels, Common Kestrels, Hobbies, White Storks and Black Storks, plus the chance of rarities. After a

productive week's birding we will then head back to Malaga for our flight home.

PACE

Breakfast will be taken at about 7.30am most mornings, perhaps later if the previous day has been tiring. Basic fitness is all that is required. Full days will be spent in the field and short and medium length walks on the flat will be undertaken regularly. There are no uphill walks of any significance.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full-board accommodation is provided, with three nights at the Hotel Manolo Mayo in Los Palacios and four nights at the Hotel Meson de Sancho near Tarifa. All rooms have en suite bathrooms. Packed lunches will be taken some days. On other days we will have lunch at the hotel, followed by a siesta if the weather is hot.

PRICE INCLUDES

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 17th, ending with breakfast on 24th), bottled water throughout, soft drinks at meal times, local transport by mini-bus and international flights.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flight from Manchester to Malaga using the scheduled services of Jet2. Outbound flight departs early morning, return flight arrives back mid afternoon. Flights also available from London Gatwick, Leeds/Bradford and other regional airports. Please phone for details.

7 nights:	17th to 24th September 2016
Principal leader:	Lance Degnan
Maximum group size:	7 clients with one leader or 12 clients with two leaders
Cost with discount (if you book before 4th June 2016):	£1485 per person sharing (£185 single supplement)
Full Cost:	£1585 per person sharing
Deposit:	£300 per person



Black Wheatear

