

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Tarifa & Gibraltar
7 – 14 September 2011

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Holiday participants

Brian Austin and Mary Laurie-Pile
Shirley Awcock
Malcolm and Helen Crowder
Geoff Firth and
Angela Shoulder

George Malcolm and Sonia Donaghy
Hilary MacBean
David Nind and Shevaun Mendelsohn
Colin Taylor
Angela Steed

Leaders

Frank Vargas and Chris Durdin

Daily diary and lists by Chris Durdin.

Photos edged blue by Chris Durdin, edged green by Helen Crowder and edged red by Angela Shoulder,
all taken during the holiday week.

Cover photo: a thermal of migrating white storks.

Our base was Huerta Grande www.huertagrande.com

El Grupo Ornitológico del Estrecho (GOES) www.grupoornitologicodelestrecho.org



As with all Honeyguide holidays, part of the price was put towards a conservation project, in this case for El Grupo Ornitológico del Estrecho (GOES – The Ornithological Group of the Strait), who we watched ringing birds – see the account for 13 September.

The conservation contribution this year of £40 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust, making a total of £660 / €726, our first donation to GOES.

As at September 2011 the total sum of conservation contributions from all Honeyguide holidays is £73,501.

Daily Diary

Wednesday 7 September – Gibraltar to Huerta Grande

Nine of us had a pretty civilised departure time of just after 10 o'clock from Gatwick and a smooth flight of rather less than three hours with easyJet, arriving on time at two o'clock (after adjusting for the clock change). The view of the Rock of Gibraltar as we approached from the east was striking: with the *Levanter* wind in the east, a block of cloud extended westwards from the top of the Rock. The plane went round the Rock and landed, into the wind, on the runway that separates the Rock from the Spanish mainland. It was immediately hot as we collected bags and walked north into Spain across the border and into La Linea, through a shopping centre, past McDonald's and into a car park. An odd way to start a wildlife holiday perhaps, except that the distance was no greater than we'd walked at Gatwick and it was immediately clear why we were here now, in early September, as a booted eagle and a black kite flew over the built up area.

Local leader Frank Vargas was checking the minibuses and had already mostly recovered from the back problem I'd told everyone about, and he immediately told us a 'you should have been here yesterday' story about large numbers of black kites and Egyptian vultures on the move. But it was plain on the journey – just 35 minutes – that migration was very much still underway, with booted and short-toed eagles, vultures and kites in small numbers the whole way, including through the ugly (though concentrated) urban sprawl of Algeciras. For Honeyguiders used to southern Europe in spring, the colour on street and garden shrubs was notable: oleander, bougainvillea, hibiscus, plumbago and others.

At Huerta Grande we struggled to leave the car park as the raptor fly-past continued, with the above species in good numbers plus griffon vultures, but eventually Katrin from Huerta Grande showed us to our rooms, some in wooden lodges but most of us in the two main houses of the Casa del Comandante (commandant's house) and the Casa del Espía (spy's house). It was gloriously warm and we had time to unpack, settle in and meet the six who'd arrived three hours earlier from Manchester. For them, Europcar wouldn't release a minibus without the credit card holder of the booking (me) being present, but Frank had overcome this tiresome constraint by organising a minibus taxi. The Manchester contingent had settled in and found time to explore the garden and property. We found David and Shevaun studying lesser kestrels they'd found and identified, and we heard about firecrest, hoopoe and other birds. Several found time to take a dip in the outside swimming pool.



Monarch butterfly on asclepias flowers; monarch caterpillar; and hoopoe, all found at Huerta Grande.

By seven o'clock everyone had gathered outside the bar/restaurant and most were drinking cold beers. Conversation was interrupted by the regular patrolling monarch butterfly. It often nectared on a yellow flower of *Asclepias*, a north American alien of the milkweed family, and Frank found one of the distinctive looking yellow, black and white striped caterpillars. This was especially intriguing for Sonia and me as we'd seen monarchs not so far away in Algarve on an African plant, bristle-fruited silkweed (which we found later in the week). A hoopoe spent much of that warm evening on the watered Huerta Grande lawn. We ate our three course meal in the warmth of the evening air under oak trees identified as *Quercus faginea* – elsewhere there were many cork oaks too. Frank had gone home in the meantime – under instructions from his mother to eat at home – but he returned to talk about tomorrow's plans and, with friend Antonio, set a moth trap. By this time it was getting dark and a Moorish gecko was walking around on the outside wall, and pretty soon everyone in the group had gone to bed after the early start. It was just the three of us who heard flocks of bee-eaters moving through, with a moon just past its third quarter providing enough light to migrate.

Thursday 8 September - Playa de Los Lances and raptor watchpoint

The moth trap produced just two macro-moths, which later study showed to be pine processionary moths, familiar to many as nests or caterpillars if not as adults. Perhaps the trap was out-competed by the moon and the building lights, below one of which was an ant-lion *Distoleon tetragrammicus*. It surprised most of us that it was still dark at 7 am, so there was little time to do much before meeting for a simple breakfast at eight o'clock.

It was only half an hour to Tarifa's Playa de Los Lances, approached via recent urbanisation and past a funfair which occupied Frank's more usual car park. Beyond that, though, the protected beach is wide, with extensive stable dunes and a fine wooden boardwalk making easy walking (or jogging or cycling for some holidaymakers). Immediately there was a stonechat and several fan-tailed warblers, perhaps surprisingly still singing at this time of year. Swifts, both pallid and common, were on the move. Yellow-legged and lesser black-backed gulls came past, as might be expected: more inspiring was the steady flow of migrating birds of prey all morning. These included any number of booted and short-toed eagles, many black kites, Egyptian and mostly more distant griffon vultures, a scattering of honey buzzards, a small group of lesser kestrels and a single marsh harrier. Two black storks were joined in the same thermal by two short-toed eagles.



The inter-tidal lagoon at Playa de Los Lances, a magnet for many birds, and along the distant shore kite-surfers taking advantage of the warm Levanter wind.

On the dunes there were a few crested larks, a small group of short-toed larks and some wheatears. On grazed land between the dunes and the road, flocks of cattle egrets – a hundred or so in one area – were feeding in among the cows, and groups of spotless starlings often moving with them. On the beach were Kentish plovers and, by a creek, one curlew sandpiper and two whimbrels walking slowly through dune vegetation. At this point there was also a sanderling and a dunlin, then more of both of these as we continued up the beach.

If this all sounds like easy birdwatching that's fair, though we were battling with a fierce but very warm wind all the time so telescopes were left unattended at their peril. The most notable flowers were sea daffodils, with a mixture of chunky unripe seedpods and here rather tatty looking white flowers. An apple of Sodom grew right by the boardwalk

The walk ended at an open hide overlooking a lagoon, on which there was a solitary juvenile flamingo with all the gulls. Those gulls included some 40 Audouin's gulls and two black-headed gulls, along with several Sandwich terns, two black-tailed godwits and another whimbrel. Frank and I then retraced our steps to move the minibuses nearer to the walk's end point.

It was lunchtime and we returned to Huerta Grande for both a comfort stop and welcome shade. The early arrivers yesterday had already had a taste of Frank's picnics: today we all tucked into fresh bread, gazpacho, meats, cheese and more. Some of us on the picnic benches under the Aleppo pines had a firecrest come as close as you can imagine, approaching in response to a recording I played.



Short-toed eagle and Egyptian vulture determinedly heading south.

For the afternoon, although by now it was just past three o'clock, we took the shortest of journeys to a local raptor watchpoint run by local body Migres, where the wind was noticeably gentle compared with the coast. On the hillside was a concrete shelter, giving some shade, overlooking low mountains but at a point where many birds of prey come through before taking the sea crossing to Morocco. Probably the busiest time was over, but there were

still many raptors moving, including several honey buzzards. Underneath the eagles and kites were swallows and martins, flying purposefully south, and several groups of bee-eaters came through in the usual noisy groups. Vegetation was dominated by Spanish oyster plants, a prickly yellow composite, and we looked at many sea squills just beginning to throw up flowering spikes from chunky bulbs, a species more familiar to most of us as just leaves and bulbs in spring. Swallowtail butterfly, blue-winged grasshopper and violet carpenter bee added to the interest, and several people had good views of a Sardinian warbler.

Back at base there was time for a swim, to study praying mantises, to look at the mosaic model of the Tarifa area by the museum next to Huerta Grande and do checklists before another *al fresco* meal.

Friday 9 September – Barbate saltmarsh, cliffs at La Breña, La Janda ricefields

Hilary, Colin and Malcolm came to breakfast with tales of an excellent walk round the perimeter of Huerta Grande and a spotted flycatcher seen there.



Stone pine woodland, a feature of the area, beyond the Strait of Gibraltar Information Centre.

Heading westward, our first stop was at the information centre about the Strait of Gibraltar, complete with shells from a local limpet species which looked like tiny volcanoes, and an under-floor diorama about underwater sea life. The latter was delightful, but topped by Frank's anecdote that this creation was done in a sealed unit which the staff couldn't get into and one of the first things that happened, immediately after its installation about three years ago, was that a model of a fish fell over and has been upside down ever since. We bought souvenirs, collected information leaflets and returned outside, where the now usual steady trickle of birds of prey came over the car park.

We journeyed through an astonishing concentration of wind turbines, beyond which our first stop was on a distinctly unpromising bit of rough off-road parking just beyond the bridge over the saltmarsh and intertidal inlet at Barbate. Storks had caught Frank's eye. Over the town was a spiral of white storks in a thermal (*photo on front cover*) steadily gaining height before flying almost over us in unstructured groups, before congregating in another thermal over the estuary. Those who attempted counts arrived at a surprisingly close consensus of about 700 white storks (and one difficult-to-find black stork). Another group gathered where the first had been, some 300, and followed the same route past us – so that's 1,000 white storks in a glorious demonstration of migration in action and the use of thermals by broad-winged birds.

We walked the very short way back along the narrow path along the road bridge to overview the estuary. There were the expected gulls, egrets, herons and waders, the last including curlews, but also an osprey perched on a post and the distinctively huge, if distant, form of a Caspian tern flying around.

By now it was already lunchtime on a ferociously hot day, without the cooling influence of yesterday's wind, so we moved to the shade of a stone pine forest for another of Frank's friend's delicious picnics, complete with extra supplies of refreshing gazpacho and Spanish *tortilla*. There were the usual wildlife distractions: a very pale Egyptian locust, on which the usual striped eyes were unusually tricky to make out; a Cleopatra butterfly and a 'real' swallowtail that Helen saw lay an egg on what looked like fringed rue.

The heat continued into the early afternoon as we walked through more stone pine woodland towards the cliffs at La Breña. I say 'towards' as from the car park the cliffs were some two kilometres away from what the sign said, and that felt too far in the roasting heat: we all instinctively took every chance to pause in the shade of each parasol-shaped pine (they are also known as umbrella pines, as it happens) as we followed a spotted flycatcher. Geoff found a beautiful metallic-looking beetle, Angela produced a copy of *Chinery* and we were able to name it as *Chalcophora mariana* (picture on page 15). Looking south towards Morocco, though rather too much into the sun, we paused to attempt some seawatching. In truth this felt far from promising, but our efforts were rewarded: there were several distant gannets, Frank found a Balearic shearwater quite close to shore and several of us with scopes watched three Cory's shearwaters, plus a pale-phase booted eagle coming towards the shore over the sea.



A zoomed-in shot of some of the white storks in the spiral at Barbate; and one of the bald ibises seen in a flock on the way to La Janda.

Heading towards La Janda, we had a great stroke of luck: a flock of bald ibises feeding in a field next to the main road. It was a tricky place to stop but there was one pull-off, which Frank beckoned me into, and those in my minibus enjoyed excellent views of 37 of one of the rarest, if not necessarily the most beautiful, birds in the world. Some were visibly radio tagged and they all come from a reintroduction scheme (from which George, Sonia and I had encountered four ibises in Algarve in 2009). We'd parked across the entrance drive to someone's finca and a car appeared, forcing us to move on, but it was timely because as we moved off the first minibus had managed to about turn, passing us coming in the other direction, and was able to replace us where we'd pulled off the road. The ibises took flight at this point and the flock watched by Frank's crew was reduced to 24.

Our late afternoon birdwatch was at the paddyfields of La Janda, a wetland which under General Franco's rule had been damaged by bringing it into productive use, but the wetter areas especially still seem to prove very attractive to birds. Over the adjacent fields were up to four Montagu's harriers, and a flock of corn buntings landed on a wire fence. Down a ditch a couple of mallards flew, two green sandpipers moved off and the usual egrets fed. There were many glossy ibises in the main area of rice, but it wasn't until a marsh harrier came though just as we were leaving that some 200 flew up. But these were outnumbered by white storks, some 400, all busy feeding in the artificial wetland. This was far from a botanical stop – that's true for most places in September – but squirting cucumber was in prominent patches on bare ground. The yellow flowers are pretty but it was the oblong fruits that provided the diversion. As the Mediterranean flower book says, they exploded suddenly from their point of attachment when that's broken, spitting potentially irritating spots of juice over several of us. "The exciting fruits are always an amusement to catch the uninitiated observer" notes Christopher Grey-Wilson: yes, quite.



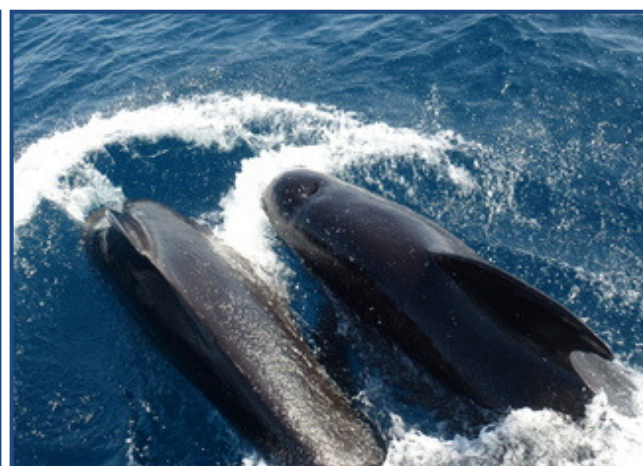
La Janda: ditch, paddyfield and wind turbine cluster.

Then home, and another nice meal sitting outside at Huerta Grande.

Saturday 10 September – whale-watching trip, Tarifa and raptor watch

Our boat's departure was not until 11 am, giving us three-quarters of an hour at base after breakfast before we needed to leave. Hilary and Colin took us on their easy and delightful walk from yesterday around the inner perimeter of Huerta Grande. Hawfinch and spotted flycatcher were the most notable birds. At one point I tapped the charred trunk of a cork oak while mentioning that the cork was its fire resistant covering, only to find that I'd disturbed a hornets' nest, so we moved quickly on as several emerged.

The run into Tarifa was easy enough where we dropped the group at the port, though finding places to park the minibuses proved much more challenging, but eventually successful. There were some pre-trip nerves about the sea trip, it's fair to say. But it became apparent, firstly, that this is quite a routine tourists' outing, with several families on board too; secondly that it was so warm today, even at sea, that extra layers were not needed; and thirdly, as we moved out of port, that it was remarkably calm, and there was no trace of seasickness from anyone on board. The calm followed a switch of wind direction, now from the west, which had dictated the timing of today's marine excursion.



Long-finned pilot whales alongside the boat in the Strait of Gibraltar.

It wasn't long before we were with a small group – perhaps seven – of striped dolphins, who playfully came right alongside and under the boat. Farther out was a school of long-finned pilot whales (taxonomically strictly speaking a big dolphin) which showed well on all sides of the boat for many minutes, including, like the dolphins, coming right alongside. Terrific stuff. Cory's shearwaters were around in ones and twos, with a wonderful close view of one of these as we turned back to harbour. Other birds were gannets, Sandwich terns and yellow-legged gulls and at one point a trickle of swallows flying to Africa. There was even one pale phase booted eagle and four white storks, the last flying the 'wrong way' north towards Tarifa as we came closer to the port.

Once back on dry land after two delightful hours at sea, we located a large group of white storks over the castle. Some 700 strong, they were plainly trying to rise on a thermal and seemed to be struggling to gain the extra height needed to get across the Strait. There were black kites and a few other raptors with them too.



As we disembarked in Tarifa harbour after the sea trip a huge, curvaceous, lenticular cloud hung above the line of fluffy cumulus on the landward side and is just visible in the photo above.

This was our best chance to see a bit of Tarifa so Frank led us through a charming network of streets and alleys where we stopped for coffee. The idea now was a late lunch with a bit of shade, which might have been possible under some stone pines by the beach but today was a big mistake: any numbers of kite surfers and others were also trying to get down the same overcrowded track to the same overfull car park. Somehow we extracted ourselves from this – let's gloss over the details – and for our picnic found an area by the road with some shade under eucalyptus trees. The return road took us past another migration watchpoint which proved a great way to enjoy what was left of the afternoon. The birdwatchers took in the continuing stream of eagles, kites and honey buzzards. Others pottered, looking up plants and examining two large nymphs of Egyptian locusts, which intriguingly had no wings but did have the typical striped eyes of the species.



At the watchpoint – a raptor identification masterclass.

Back at base the stream of raptors continued and it was hard to make it to the swimming pool without stopping to look at booted eagles, honey buzzards, griffon vultures and several flocks of bee-eaters. After checklists it was paella night, served with sangria.

Sunday 11 September – Gibraltar

In the car park we rapidly assembled picnics, suitable for carrying ourselves, and headed back to the car park in Tarifa where the Gatwick contingent had found Frank and the minibuses a few days ago. Just across the border we bought 15 'hoppa saver' bus tickets (15 as George stayed behind due to an upset tummy) and the no. 5 bus took us to the bus terminal by Grand Casemates Gates. From there the no. 2 bus took us to the station for the cable car, into which somehow we all squeezed and were smoothly transported to the top of the Rock. There the first things you notice are the Barbary macaques (along with signs warning you not to feed them), the adults sitting patiently while their photograph is taken (*right*) and the young tumbling round the parents and indeed the feet of the tourists. There was some cloud, though not all the time, but it was still warm in the gentle westerly wind. A Montagu's harrier appeared very briefly and disappeared into the cloud, but the dominant raptor moving through was certainly honey buzzard, with several groups that would have totalled around 100 birds. The odd Egyptian vulture was with them and four apparently migrating sparrowhawks too.



After a coffee we began the descent, on foot. It's not the best time of year botanically-speaking for the Mediterranean scrub, which is dominated by olive and lentisc, but we did find in flower a meadow saffron species *Colchicum lusitanicum*, sea squill and spiny *Asparagus albus*. A female pied flycatcher perched obligingly and Brian and Colin found a spotted flycatcher. But honey buzzards apart, the star natural history turn was the sighting of several beautiful two-tailed pasha butterflies. Their normal larval food plant is strawberry tree, which was certainly present in small numbers, though one book with us says that round here they feed on the sandalwood *Osyris alba*. The walk took us south and allowed a view of the less than impressive south tip of the Rock, then back north under the nature reserve entrance sign and eventually into the fine botanic gardens. Here we stopped for a late lunch on some handily placed tables and chairs at the entrance to a small collection of animals, mostly made from those confiscated by customs officials. Nearby, in a water feature area, there were several willow warblers feeding and showering and blue tits taking a bath.



The Rock, looking north towards Spain; two-tailed pasha.

The group then split up for a couple of hours free time. In the botanic gardens most of us saw the fine dragon trees from the Atlantic islands, and we puzzled over some heavy, bumpy green fruits, identified later by Angela as osage-orange

or horse-apple, a native of the USA. Most of the group re-assembled both at a café opposite The Convent (the Governor's residence) and at another in the late afternoon rendezvous in Grand Casemates Square at the far end of Main Street. There was lots of bunting (non-ornithological) on account of National Day the day before, but the streets were quiet and most of the shops shut, which nobody seemed to mind – indeed there was none of the hubbub we suspected on this extended bank holiday weekend (which had caused the Algeciras-Gibraltar ferry not to be running). Then back on the bus to the border and on foot to the minibuses in the underground car park.

Frank's friend Paco came to see us at Huerta Grande with a rescued horseshoe whip snake and a chameleon, on their way to being released. It was barbecued pork for tonight's meal, during which birds continued to appear. As well as the now usual bee-eaters overhead there was a flock of some 50 house martins, then a similar flypast of swallows, plus the local firecrest in the pines over the tables. Brian's nephew and his girlfriend also joined us for dinner, as did the recovered George.

Monday 12 September – raptor viewpoint, La Janda and cliffs near Bolonia

We started at the viewpoint on the other side of the road to last time, on the right as you head west. Here the buildings themselves, created for migration studies especially for use by local organisations like Migres, are unfinished curiosities. We were under a long, shaded shelter, which was welcome against the sun, but there is also a larger (arguably too large) building that isn't being used, despite being EU-funded, but not finished off by the Andalusian *junta* (regional government). Naturally we wondered if the EU auditors would be prompted to intervene. But this is by-the-by: there was a trickle of the usual migration suspects, but nothing spectacular. A plant of dill had a swallowtail caterpillar; the botanists looked at the beauty in miniature detail of violet larkspur and the large, prostate thistle flowers of *Atractylis gummifera* (with rather dead looking leaves and bracts); and there were about three Egyptian locust nymphs.

Off we drove, past hundreds of wind turbines, none of which were turning on this still morning. As we arrived at the rice fields of La Janda, where we'd been previously, there were two thermals of white storks in the process of moving off. We'd seen a small part before, but it had been the best bit: heading up the wide valley a lot of the area was intensive and rather soul-less arable, with mostly straight and featureless ditches and rice paddies here and there that rarely had the birds of the first chunk. There was the odd turtle dove, our first woodpigeons and various harriers and other birds of prey, a few red-rumped swallows and a small cloud of dragonflies. Later studies of Chris's photos showed one of these to be a female broad scarlet, looking as if she'd been spray-painted with gold (*above*).



Sadly there was no sign of the black-shouldered kites that have a territory here. Heading out of the area there were then two rather good trackside pools. The glossy ibises quickly moved to the one farther from the track but were still well in view, along with a couple of black-winged stilts. Nearer were some 20 little ringed plovers, from which 13 flew off but the others remained and were joined by a ruff.

It was hot, very hot, and Frank moved us on to an excellent spot with shade, picnic tables and a view over a reservoir for yet another of his superb picnics. A couple of migrant common sandpipers appeared at the reservoir edge and danced over the water in their characteristic style. Frank caught a butterfly that looked very much like a gatekeeper at first glance but was in fact a meadow brown of a southern subspecies, with more orange than those farther north. Some red deer – Iberian subspecies – on the far bank were reintroduced to the area, we learnt.

The drive back this hot afternoon took us round the rest of La Janda. There were a few harriers and a low thermal of 40 or so black kites, some of which dropped onto the ground to feed, probably on grasshoppers. On the little bit of ibis wetland a wood sandpiper dropped in and somewhere along the way were our first coots and moorhen. But mostly it was a long, hot drive (thank goodness for air conditioning) along dusty tracks with little to see in an area you could imagine wild west films being shot in but with few redeeming features, today at least. Some of us wondered what on earth kept the cattle going in the parched fields. Did I mention it was hot? After re-fuelling the minibuses, as afternoon turned to early evening we drove up to some low cliffs above Bolonia, from where we could look down from the little viewpoint among the gum cistus and see the excavated Roman town of Baelo Claudia and the Bolonia dunes. The cliffs are a site for both little and white-rumped swifts, though sadly not today. But the supporting aerial cast was excellent: several hundred alpine swifts, many common swifts and hirundines, including our first crag martins, and lots of honey buzzards on migration. On the rock were our first blue rock thrushes and easy-to-see griffon vultures, a few of which we watched land with undercarriage extended. We made it back, past the ostriches, to Huerta Grande for a rather rushed wash and brush up for a later than usual dinner (8pm instead of 7:30).

Tuesday 13 September – Guadiaro estuary and Huerta Grande area

An earlier than usual 7:30 breakfast – it was still dark as we started – to allow a quick getaway today. The reason was that Frank had arranged for to be us to present when GOES – El Grupo Ornitológico del Estrecho – was ringing migrant and local birds caught in a reedbed by the Guadiaro estuary, near Guadarranque, north of Gibraltar. A curiosity was that the approach to this area is through a gated community of upmarket

housing and a too-perfect golf course. The GOES guys had several birds in bags, extracted from mist nets in the reeds, on the point of being processed: the amount of fat and prominence of the breastbone checked, measurements taken and ring added. These included a willow warbler, reed warblers (also singing nearby), Cetti's warblers and a swallow. It's fair to say this was new to most group members apart from Brian, who had the opportunity to ring a couple of birds including his first Cetti's warbler. The careful explanations were superb, including moult details that help to age birds, but probably it will be facts like the tongue spots of the juvenile reed warblers and short wings of the non-migratory Cetti's warblers that will stay with us.



Slender-billed gull; Cetti's warbler in the hand; marbled duck.

From the small hide looking over the wetland there were many egrets, one juvenile flamingo and about five immature night herons. A single marbled duck was a new bird for most of us, plus a shoveler, three teals and a distant and unidentified terrapin. A purple gallinule fed on a cut reed area and an out-of-context wader proved to be an immature knot. The GOES team even provided some refreshments and we presented them with a cheque for 726 euros, our conservation contribution from this holiday. Several of us bought GOES tee-shirts or fleeces. From here we took the short walk to the beach and along the Mediterranean shore to the mouth of the estuary. There was a single slender-billed gull here, a mixed group of waders, namely ringed and Kentish plovers and sanderlings, and a kingfisher dashed through low over the water. We re-traced our steps, with the back markers pausing for a small brown butterfly with tails, which after later study was identified as the established alien geranium bronze. We headed through the traffic for home and a picnic lunch at Huerta Grande.

The busy main road east prompted a change of plan and the idea of returning to the Palmones estuary, near where we were this morning, was dropped in favour of more local exploration. We took a very short drive to find the rather local sundew *Drosophyllum lusitanicum*: not in flower but the long, thin leaves had the characteristic sticky globules of any sundew. George found an ocellated lizard on a rock by the path. There was also *Daphne gnidium* in flower and a damp strip held two monarch butterfly larval food plants: the *Asclepias* we'd seen at Huerta Grande plus the South African bristle-fruited silkweed. An adult monarch nectared on the former.

Returning to Huerta Grande many of us then walked a little and a rash few of us walked further all the way around the outside of the fence surrounding our base. There was time for a last swim, notices and checklists, a barbeque with perhaps rather too much meat and a chance to collect the holiday highlights. Frank had been going home to eat with his family on other nights but joined us for our final meal.

Wednesday 14 September – Gibraltar and home

As is usual on a Honeyguide holiday, group members nominated their highlights, as follows:-

Malcolm	Whales and dolphins on the sea trip; the ringing demonstration.
Helen	The thermal of storks at Barbate; raptors.
Sonia	Also the stork thermal; on a geological note, the vertical rock beds at the raptor watch point.
George	Raptor watchpoints; Frank's lunches.
Angela & Geoff	(who agreed, to their own surprise): Bird ringing; sea trip with whales and dolphins; cliffs at Bolonia with griffon vultures.
David	The close Cory's shearwater from the Turmares whale watching boat.
Shevaun	Huerta Grande; horseshoe snake with Paco; fan-tailed warbler.
Hilary	All migration but especially the white storks at Barbate, the stream of honey buzzards and swallows over the sea.

Colin	The tolerant company; honey buzzards over the Rock of Gibraltar.
Brian	Storks, honey buzzards and whales; raptor watching as we arrived at Huerta Grande with a hoopoe on the lawn nearby.
Mary	White storks.
Angela	Africa so close.
Shirley	Ringling and such a great group of men; storks; the pied flycatcher on a branch on Gibraltar.
Frank	Chris jumping when the ocellated lizard ran towards him!
Chris	Long-finned pilot whales under the bow; two-tailed pasha; Huerta Grande.



Female pied flycatcher; purple swamphen (purple gallinule); zitting cisticola (fan-tailed warbler).

SPECIES LISTS

BIRDS	
Cory's shearwater	Distant view of 3 from La Breña on 9 th Sept.; about 10 at sea on 10 th Sept. including very good views.
Balearic shearwater	Some had a distant view of 1 from La Breña on 9 th Sept.
Gannet	Distant views of 6 from La Breña on 9 th Sept.; about 12 at sea on 10 th Sept.
Cormorant	Barbate, 9 th Sept.
Grey heron	Recorded on 5 days.
Purple heron	Singles at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept. and Barbate on 9 th Sept.
Little egret	Recorded on 3 days. 50 estimated on 9 th Sept. at La Janda.
Cattle egret	Common wherever there were livestock, recorded daily. c150 estimated on 9 th Sept.
Night heron	5 from the GOES hide at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Black stork	2 on 8 th , 1 on 9 th , 4 on 10 th Sept.
White stork	Recorded on all except one day. 1,000 at Barbate on 9 th Sept., then 400 feeding in rice fields at La Janda; 700 over Tarifa on 10 th Sept.
Glossy ibis	On both visits to La Janda, notably c.200 flew up when a marsh harrier went by on 9 th Sept.
Bald ibis	37 by the road near La Janda on 9 th Sept. From the reintroduction project: some had radio transmitters.
Greater flamingo	Single immatures at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept. and Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Teal	3 at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Mallard	Recorded at La Janda, both visits, and Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept., max 3.
Shoveler	1 at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Marbled duck	1 at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Osprey	1 at Barbate on 9 th Sept.; 1 at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Honey buzzard	Migrants recorded daily; best estimated count c.100 going over Gibraltar on 11 th Sept., mostly in small groups.
Red kite	Recorded on 4 days but 3 birds was peak count; moving as if migrants.
Black kite	After booted eagle, the commonest migrant raptor, though no large flocks. Estimates of 25 on 8 th , 28 on 9 th , 200 on 10 th Sept.

Egyptian vulture	Migrants recorded on 5 days, especially early in the week. Not counted accurately but totalling a few dozen.
(Rüppell's vulture)	On the final morning at Huerta Grande on 14 th Sept. a dark vulture that may have been this species was seen by a few of the group.
Griffon vulture	Recorded daily, mostly flying as if migrants, best count 20 on 10 th Sept. Excellent views on the cliffs at Bolonia on 12 th Sept.
Short-toed eagle	Recorded daily, mostly but not quite all flying as if migrants. Like griffons, best count 20 on 10 th Sept.
Marsh harrier	Recorded on 3 days, including 3 at La Janda on 9 th Sept.
Hen harrier	Recorded on 2 days, including 3 at La Janda on 9 th Sept.
Montagu's harrier	Recorded on 2 days, including 4 at La Janda on 9 th Sept. and 1 disappearing into cloud over Gibraltar on 11 th Sept.
Sparrowhawk	Recorded daily, including 3 flying as if migrants over Gibraltar on 11 th Sept.
Buzzard	Recorded on 4 days, all appeared to be resident birds.
Booted eagle	The commonest migrant raptor, seen daily. Estimates of 100 on 7 th Sept.; 200 on 8 th Sept.; 100 on 10 th Sept. Roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ were pale phase birds.
Lesser kestrel	A few loose groups migrating, several of which were seen from Huerta Grande. Highest count 20 on 13 th Sept.
Kestrel	Seen every day.
Hobby	1 over Huerta Grande on 13 th Sept.
Peregrine	1 on 9 th Sept.
Pheasant	Seen on both visits to La Janda.
Water rail	1 at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Moorhen	La Janda on 12 th Sept. and Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Purple swamphen (purple gallinule)	Excellent view of 1 at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Coot	La Janda on 12 th Sept. and Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Black-winged stilt	Both visits to La Janda.
Little ringed plover	20 on a small roadside wetland at La Janda on 12 th Sept.
Ringed plover	6 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept. A group of 23 with other waders at the Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Kentish plover	7 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept., 2 Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Knot	A single juvenile at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Sanderling	c.40 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.; 12 at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Curlew sandpiper	1 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.
Dunlin	10 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.
Ruff	10 on a small roadside wetland at La Janda on 12 th Sept.
Black-tailed godwit	2 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.; 30 at Barbate on 9 th Sept.
Whimbrel	3 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.; also at Barbate on 9 th Sept.
Curlew	20 at Barbate on 9 th Sept.
Redshank	2 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.; also at Barbate on 9 th Sept.
Green sandpiper	4 at La Janda on 9 th Sept. and again recorded on return visit on 12 th Sept.
Wood sandpiper	1 on a small roadside wetland at La Janda on 12 th Sept.
Common sandpiper	On the reservoir edge beyond La Janda on 12 th Sept.
Black-headed gull	2 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.; also at Barbate on 9 th Sept.
Slender-billed gull	1 at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Audouin's gull	c.40 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.; also at Barbate on 9 th Sept.
Lesser black-backed gull	Recorded 3 days, with an estimate of 40 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.
Yellow-legged gull	Recorded every day, with an estimated 100 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.
Caspian tern	1 at Barbate on 9 th Sept.
Sandwich tern	15 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.; seen on 9 th Sept. at Barbate and c.20 at sea on 10 th Sept.
Woodpigeon	3 at La Janda on 12 th Sept.
Turtle dove	1 by the bald ibises on 9 th Sept.; also at La Janda on 12 th Sept.
Collared dove	Seen daily. Exceptionally tame in the botanic gardens in Gibraltar.
Scops owl	Heard at Huerta Grande on three nights.
Tawny owl	Heard at Huerta Grande every night; seen by some group members.

Alpine swift	Recorded on 4 days, including c.10 at Huerta Grande on 11 th Sept. and c.300 past the cliffs at Bolonia on 12 th Sept.
Common swift	Seen daily.
Pallid swift	Seen on two or three days, the best being at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.
Bee-eater	Seen or heard every day, including at raptor watch points. Often came over Huerta Grande, including after dark. Estimate c.300 on 10 th Sept.
Hoopoe	Seen on five days, most reliably on the watered lawn at Huerta Grande.
Kingfisher	Seen on 9 th Sept. at Barbate and Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Great spotted woodpecker	Seen or heard five days at Huerta Grande.
Short-toed lark	10 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.
Crested lark	5 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.; also seen on 12 th Sept. and on the beach by Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Sand martin	Migrants on four days.
Crag martin	None until the cliffs at Bolonia on 12 th Sept.
Swallow	Seen daily, including flying over the sea towards Africa from the whale-watching boat.
Red-rumped swallow	Seen on four days, in low numbers.
House martin	Seen on four days; estimate c.50 on 11 th Sept.
White wagtail	None until 2 at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept.
Yellow wagtail	Seen on three days, usually small groups, including 30 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept., where <i>Iberiae</i> noted. Other subspecies not identified.
Wren	Heard (usually) or seen daily at Huerta Grande.
Robin	Seen or heard daily at Huerta Grande.
Stonechat	Seen on five days.
Northern wheatear	5 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept., also recorded 9 th Sept.
Blue rock thrush	2 on the cliffs at Bolonia on 12 th Sept.
Blackbird	Seen daily at Huerta Grande.
Cetti's warbler	Heard daily at Huerta Grande; seen in the hand with GOES ringers.
Zitting cisticola (fan-tailed warbler)	Singing birds seen on three days, inc. 6 at Playa de Los Lances on 8 th Sept.
Reed warbler	1 singing in the reedbed at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept., where also seen in the hand with GOES ringers.
Sardinian warbler	Seen or heard on five days.
Blackcap	Seen on five days at Huerta Grande, usually near the centre of brambles.
Chiffchaff sp.	1 singing at Guadiaro estuary on 13 th Sept. 'Sp' noted as for a sight record difficult to know if it was northern or Iberian chiffchaff.
Willow warbler	c.10 in the botanic gardens on Gibraltar on 11 th Sept.. Also recorded on 12 th and 13 th , the latter in the hand.
Firecrest	Seen or heard almost daily at Huerta Grande.
Spotted flycatcher	Seen on six days, including at Huerta Grande and on Gibraltar.
Pied flycatcher	Good views of female on Gibraltar, 11 th Sept.; 2 at Huerta Grande, 13 th Sept.
Blue tit	Daily at Huerta Grande.
Great tit	Four days at Huerta Grande.
Short-toed treecreeper	Seen or heard almost daily at Huerta Grande.
Raven	2 from the top of the Rock of Gibraltar on 11 th Sept.
Spotless starling	Seen daily, often in flocks. Estimate of 80 on 8 th Sept.
House sparrow	Seen daily.
Chaffinch	Daily at Huerta Grande.
Serin	Every day except one at Huerta Grande.
Greenfinch	Huerta Grande on 8 th Sept., but not again.
Goldfinch	Seen daily.
Linnet	Seen on three days.
Hawfinch	Almost every day at Huerta Grande.
Corn bunting	40 on the arable on the way to La Janda wetland on 9 th Sept.; again here on the return visit on 12 th Sept.

Total = 114 species

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Terrapin sp. Moorish gecko Ocellated lizard Spanish wall lizard Common toad

MAMMALS

Long-finned pilot whale Striped dolphin Rabbit

BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail	Cleopatra	
Scarce swallowtail	Monarch	
Large white	Speckled wood	Two-tailed pasha
Clouded yellow	Meadow brown (all a southern form with extra orange on the upperwings)	Holly blue
		Small copper
		Geranium bronze



*Swallowtail and caterpillar on separate dill plants; geranium bronze on aromatic inula *Diuriscia viscosa*.*

OTHER NOTABLE INVERTEBRATES

Praying mantis	Blue-winged grasshopper
Cicada sp.	Red-winged grasshopper
Violet carpenter bee	Egyptian locust
Hornet	Crimson speckled moth
Antlion <i>Distoleon tetragrammicus</i>	Pine processionary moth
Rhinoceros beetle	Red-veined darter
<i>Chalcophora mariana</i> – a beetle	Broad scarlet (scarlet darter)



The stripy eyes of an Egyptian locust; crimson speckled moth; Chalcophora mariana; praying mantis.

PLANTS

With the odd exception that have distinctive fruits, here we only list the fairly limited range of plants in flower on this September holiday; plainly there would be a much wider range in spring.

Numbers are as in *Mediterranean Wild Flowers* by Marjorie Blamey and Christopher Grey-Wilson. The pale purple crucifers – probably sea stock or rocket – on the sands weren't identified with certainty.

Flowering plants	
-	redshank <i>Polygonum persicaria</i>
112	American (or Virginia) pokeweed <i>Phytolacca acinos</i> Huerta Grande
258	violet larkspur <i>Delphinium peregrinum</i>
381	drosophyllum – a sundew <i>Drosophyllum lusitanicum</i> (not in flower)
632	southern birdsfoot trefoil <i>Lotus creticus</i> Playa de los Lances
936	<i>Daphne gnidium</i>
953	perfoliate St John's-wort <i>Hypericum perforatum</i> Huerta Grande
1032	squirting cucumber <i>Echballium elaterium</i>
1109	dill <i>Peucedanum anisum</i> a common, thin umbellifer smelling of aniseed was this species, we think.
-	purple loosestrife <i>Lythrum salicaria</i> Huerta Grande
-	bloodflower <i>Asclepias curassavica</i> – milkweed family, alien species from America. *
1267	bristle-fruited silkweed <i>Gomphocarpus fruticosus</i> *
1319	morning glory <i>Ipomoea purpurea</i> – clambering over everything at Huerta Grande.
1341	heliotrope <i>Heliotropium europaeum</i>
-	<i>Echium albicans</i> – a tall, almost over viper's bugloss with pink stamens may well have been this species.
1383	purple viper's bugloss <i>Echium plantagineum</i>
1416	vervain <i>Verbena officinalis</i>
1523	round-leaved (or apple) mint <i>Mentha suaveolens</i> Huerta Grande
1563	black nightshade <i>Solanum nigrum</i>
1565	apple of Sodom <i>Solanum sodomaceum</i> (in fruit)
1601?	<i>Verbascum</i> sp., possibly <i>V. sinuatum</i> – a rather trampled, much-branched mullein when we were more occupied watching white storks in a thermal.
1798	blue fleabane <i>Erigeron acer</i>
1803	Canadian fleabane <i>Conyza canadensis</i> on disturbed ground.
1842	aromatic inula <i>Dittrichia viscosa</i> – this yellow-flowered composite, like a small green bush, dominated many hillsides.
1920	carline thistle <i>Carlina racemosa</i> – a dry, prickly composite with a yellow flower.
1931	atractylis <i>Atractylis gummifera</i> – a large prostate thistle-type flower at a raptor watchpoint.
2020	Spanish oyster plant <i>Scolymus hispanicus</i>
2023	chicory <i>Cichorium intybus</i>
2114	a meadow saffron <i>Colchicum lusitanicum</i> Gibraltar
2214	<i>Asparagus albus</i> Gibraltar
2163	sea squill <i>Urginea maritima</i>
2270	sea daffodil <i>Pancratium maritimum</i> Playa de los Lances and elsewhere.

* monarch butterfly larval foodplants

Ferns

- 2522** maidenhair fern *Adiantum capillus-veneris*
 - bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*

We never did find the royal fern *Osmunda regalis* that occurs at Huerta Grande.

Grasses (very incomplete)

- 2473** hare's tail *Lagurus ovatus*
2481 Bermuda grass *Cynodon dactylon*
2494 giant reed *Arundo donax*
 - reed *Phragmites australis*
 - lesser reedmace *Typha angustifolia*

Trees and shrubs (a few of the uncultivated species noted)

- 1** Aleppo pine *Pinus halepensis*
3 stone (or umbrella) pine *Pinus pinea*
30 an oak *Quercus faginea*
431 carob *Ceratonia siliqua*
865 lentisc or gum mastic *Pistachia lentiscus*
965 sage-leaved cistus *Cistus salvifolius* (not in flower)
971 gum cistus *Cistus ladanifer* (not in flower)
1248 olive *Olea europaea*
2357 dwarf fan palm *Chamerops humilis* – widespread, including on Gibraltar. Together with Cretan palm, the only native European palms.

