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# Swift Weekender



Little Swift © Inglorious Bustards

**28th June - 1st July 2019**

## Summary

An action-packed weekend of excellent birding, we were treated to such Southern Spain specialities as Rufous Scrub Robin, Isabelline Warbler, White-headed Duck, Red-knobbed Coot, Northern Bald Ibis and Common Bulbul.

Thanks to the wide range of habitats within reach of our base near Tarifa we were able to visit salt pans, farmland, mountains and coast, and rack up an impressive number of species of bird in just four days, including such delights as Red-rumped Swallow, Western Swamphen, Kentish Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, European Bee-eater, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Black-eared Wheatear, Crested and Thekla Lark, and Tawny Pipit.

The gorgeous sunny weather didn't disappoint and neither did the food, featuring lavish picnics in prime habitat at lunchtime and local specialities in the area's best restaurants at night.

What a joy to see Europe's breeding Swifts – Common, Pallid, White-rumped, and Little. At times they filled the skies and we respectfully enjoyed stunning close up views of White-rumped and Little Swift at their breeding colonies. All in all a great weekend, celebrating this most aerially superb genus.

## Day 1

We met at Gibraltar airport and soon we were on our way across the border and into Spain. We decided we would take our picnic at Santuario de la Luz where we amongst Mediterranean scrub and hillsides. A group of Griffon Vultures cruised just overhead at this ancient feeding station - here palaeolithic people would lay their dead to rest on the stone alters still visible today and the Vultures would do the rest!

It wasn't just Vultures, both Short-toed and Booted Eagle graced us with their presence, as did European Bee-eaters, squadrons of mostly Pallid Swifts but we did manage to find two cruising Common Swifts.

Among the rock alters Western Black-eared Wheatears flitted among Thekla's Larks .

After lunch we headed to the accommodation in beautifully-converted old farm buildings at Cortijo las Piñas. After some settling-in and relaxing time, we went the short distance to a private farm estate that the Inglorious Bustards have access to. As we walked through the area we found several species including Woodchat Shrikes perched in full view with a constant sight and sound of both adult and juvenile Corn Buntings.

Amongst the trees we found Melodious, Western Bonelli's and Sardinian Warblers. Common Nightingales, whilst not singing, gave themselves away by croaking or whistling and we did also get views of these.

We strolled back to the minibus at a leisurely pace before heading back for our evening meal at the excellent nearby restaurant of El Olivo.



Europes biggest raptor - Cinereous Vulture © Inglorious Bustards

## Day 2

We headed inland this morning to a private location where we searched among the waterways and found five Western Ospreys. As European Bee-eaters quipped and hawked for insects around us they were joined by Red-rumped Swallows. Both Short-toed and Booted Eagles were observed. We also found a Cinereous Vulture drifting alongside the Griffon Vultures overhead - an unusual addition for this area.

The real star here however was the White-rumped Swift, and it was the species we hoped for here. We had a view of it cruising at light speed past cows and over the water ways and whilst we had seen it we weren't convinced it was the best views we could get!

So following our picnic lunch of local cheeses, salads and freshly baked bread, we waited at a respectful distance from the nest site. Our patience was rewarded as a White-rumped Swift cruised towards us giving us great views.

Happy with our views we moved onto the wetland area of La Janda. This site, now drained for agriculture since the late 1960s, was once one of the biggest lakes and wetlands in Europe. However it stills holds onto some of its former glory and several special species can be encountered here.

Pools were full of Black-winged Stilts, a Purple Heron drifted upriver and out of view as Purple Swamphens dashed between cover. As we reached a higher point we watched for raptors; Booted Eagle, Black Kite and Short-toed Eagle along with Griffon Vultures were spotted. Amongst the poplars a Turtle Dove purred and we delighted as we finally found this increasingly rare species due to agricultural intensity and loss of its much needed seed food.



Turtle Dove © Inglorious Bustards

Later we slowed by a large ditch and observed quietly and without disturbance the Cattle Egret colony that was bustling with activity of very young to almost fledged chicks! We also found the less numerous nests of the Glossy Ibises. Even the road was jammed with recently fledged Cattle Egrets - we passed comment on which muppet they most look like and bid farewell to them and La Janda.

### **Day 3**

After a slightly earlier start we headed to a nesting colony of Northern Bald Ibis - two delightful chicks still remained, their cousins having already fledged. We discussed the conservation status of this globally rare species, which numbers only 1000 birds in the wild.

The first birds were released in 2005 in the Barbate area, Cádiz; in 2014 there was a free-flying flock of some 70 birds in the area and 24 pairs bred in the wild; 25 chicks were fledged. Now nesting birds are ranging some distance to forage, notably on coastal pastures and nearby ricefields - so we were lucky these two, who made it easy for us!

Here we also found three Isabelline Warblers, which had just fledged from a nearby nest. This species is exclusively restricted to the watercourses of Andalucia.

Next onwards to the Eastern side of the Guadalquivir river. Here our very first stop in the harbour was rewarded with a gaggle of giggling Little Swifts, hawking for insects just overhead! We were enthralled by the antics of our fourth species of Swift for the trip. Common Swifts broke through their ranks, screaming and chasing each other as the Little Swifts manoeuvred through the throng. We took a refreshment break in the harbour and continued to watch these aerial plankton munchers as they zipped around us, a truly savoured magical Swift experience!

Next we went to some secret agricultural pools where we got very close to White-headed Ducks and four stunning Marbled Ducks. These pools are really superb for these two specialties of Iberia, as they have both the open water preferred by White-headed Ducks and the heterogeneous bankside reeds and gaps attractive to Marbled Duck. We saw Little Bittern and Purple Swamphen also enjoying the banksides, and variety of habitats as both Red-crested and Common Pochards occupying the open pools.

We moved onto another pool where we hoped to find Red-knobbed Coot - a species now close to extinction in Europe. Almost straight away we were rewarded with views of at least two individuals of this superb species.

Having already amassed amazing sightings and species for our memory banks we headed to the better known pools of Laguna Tarelo. Here we got good views of a male Little Bittern clambering up the reeds as big rafts of Little Grebes drifted past. On the island there were Eurasian Spoonbills and Black-crowned Night Herons which had just fledged.

We took a leisurely lunch in the Algaida Pinewoods. Next we headed on to the salt pans of Bonanza, where Doñana National Park extends onto the eastern side of the Guadalquivir river. Pied Avocets, Kentish Plovers and Little Terns nesting on the low

banks between the pans. At this time of year, the southward passage of migratory waders has already begun, and flocks of Sanderling, Curlew Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwits and summer-plumage Dunlin were gathering.

Further on, in the feeder lagoon, we enjoyed views of Greater Flamingoes, Eurasian Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, Caspian and Gull-billed Terns, while Iberian Yellow Wagtails, Crested and Lesser Short-toed Larks flitted amongst the salt-tolerant scrub.

Our time seemed to go so quickly here amongst this mass of diversity. We left this busy avian metropolis for a completely different experience of the nearby vineyards of Trebujena.



Kentish Plover © Inglorious Bustards

We stopped at a well known stop to us where the habitat consists of fig trees, vines and natural scrub. Here we heard the star immediately, and then he showed in his favourite tree singing and splaying his tail - the superb Rufous Bush Robin!

With that we returned, freshening up before heading to the Tarifa EcoCenter - our favourite restaurant in Tarifa - to celebrate!

## Day 4

We headed into the old town of Tarifa, parking just outside the ancient fortified walls. We took a second breakfast with our friend Angie who runs the excellent tapas bar Geko as Lesser Kestrels hawked overhead.

At Castillo Guzman el Bueno, we enjoyed both the imposing architecture of this 1000-year-old coastal fort, and the antics of the colony of Lesser Kestrels that have made it their home. This population is one of only two non-migratory colonies in Spain, the rest heading to sub-Saharan Africa for the winter. Many of the chicks were on the point of fledging, and begged endearingly from nesting holes in the fort's structure.

Wandering back to the vans via the coastal road, we took a few minutes to look out over the sea, adding Cory's and Balearic Shearwater, Sandwich Tern and Northern Gannet to our list.

For lunch we headed to the clifftop viewpoint at El Trafico, We enjoyed our final picnic with these fantastic views over the Strait, in the company of a bouncing Tawny Pipit and a Little Owl.

Stopping briefly at CIMA (Centro Internacional de Migración de Aves) where we are working in partnership with Fundación Migres, we used the facilities as a Common Bulbul sang and was active among the Eucalyptus trees. We said farewell to our friends and bid farewell to The Straits as we made our way into Gibraltar and the airport and the end of our Swift adventure!

		28th June	29th June	30th June	1st July
1 Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	
2 Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		4		
3 Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			5	
4 Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	
5 Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>			5	
6 Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			10	
7 White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>			30	
8 Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		3		
9 Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>				5
10 Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>				10
11 Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			60	
12 Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			5	
13 Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			200	
14 White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
15 Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>			2	
16 Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		50	15	
17 Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		1	150	
18 Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>			3	
19 Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			10	
20 Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			4	
21 Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
22 Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		c.5	5	1
23 Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		1		
24 Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		10	20	
25 Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>				5
26 Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓		
27 Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		5		
28 Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		1		
29 Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	20	50	10	5
30 Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	3	8	3	2
31 Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>	2	10	5	
32 Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1		1	
33 Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			1	
34 Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			1	
35 Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	5	20	50	
36 Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>				
37 Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1	1	
38 Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>			5	
39 Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			5	
40 Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	
41 Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>			2	
42 Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		30	50	
43 Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			c200	
44 Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		4		
45 Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>			50	
46 Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			110	
47 Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			30	

48	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		1			
49	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>				4	
50	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				2	
51	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>				c.20	
52	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>				50	
53	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				5	
54	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>				2	
55	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓	✓
57	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>				4	
58	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>				2	
59	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>					10
60	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>				30	
61	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	3	10	✓		
63	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		2	1		
64	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>					2
66	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	5	c.10	✓		2
67	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>				c.50	
69	White-rumped Swift	<i>Apus caffer</i>		2			
70	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				2	
71	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		30	10		5
72	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	1	1	2		
73	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	2	1	2		20
74	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	3	4	3		
75	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	5		5		
76	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>			4		
77	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloews monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2			
79	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	2				1
82	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala rufescens</i>				c.15	
84	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	10	30	10		
87	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	1	2	2		
88	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	5	3	2		
89	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>			1		
90	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			3		
91	Isabelline Warbler	<i>Iduna opaca</i>			3		
92	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	5	10	2		
93	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓		2		
95	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

96 Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1		1	1
97 Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	4	2		1
98 Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
99 Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
100 Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	10	2	4	1
101 European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	2			1
102 Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	5	2	1	1
103 Rufous-tailed Bush Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>			1	
104 European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
105 Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	4			
106 House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
107 Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓			
108 Iberian Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>		5	20	
109 White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				1
110 Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>				1
111 Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	1			1
112 Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
113 European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
114 Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
115 European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
116 European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
117 Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

#### Other taxa noted:

Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		2	1	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓			✓
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	✓	✓		
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓			
Southern Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia cecilia</i>	✓			✓
Spanish Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia bathseba</i>	✓			
Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>		✓	✓	
Gypsy Moth	<i>Lymantria dispar dispar</i>			✓	✓
Iberian Pond Tortoise	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>		✓	✓	✓
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>		✓	✓	✓
Ocellated Lizard	<i>Timon lepidus</i>	✓		✓	
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	

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