

## **Trip report**

### **Birdwatching in the Tagus and Sado estuaries and Southern Alentejo, Portugal, 12 – 16 January 2015**

#### **Ian and Lindsey Barthorpe**

We won a competition at the British Birdwatcher's Fair in August 2013 for a fully inclusive five day birdwatching holiday in Portugal, with Birds & Nature Tours ([www.birds.pt](http://www.birds.pt)) and Visit Portugal Birdwatching ([www.visitportugalbirdwatching.com](http://www.visitportugalbirdwatching.com)), visiting the Tagus and Sado estuaries and Alentejo. We were originally supposed to go in February 2014, but due to illness the trip was postponed until January 2015.

#### **Monday 12 January, Tagus estuary**

So it was that we boarded our TAP flight from Heathrow early on Monday 12 January, arriving in Lisbon 15 minutes earlier than scheduled at 10.40. Formalities out of the way, we met Joao, our guide and left the airport at 11.40 in bright sunshine.

The first birds were familiar – carrion crow, lesser black-backed gull and house sparrow, but soon we were crossing the impressive Vasco da Gama Bridge across the Tagus estuary, with flocks of flamingos and various waders on the salt pans below.

Our first stop was the estuary shore at Sitio das Hortas (GPS: 38.761, -8.936), on the edge of Alcochete, with a lovely hoopoe flying up from the verge as we arrived. Despite it being low tide, the estuary was teeming with waders: avocets, redshanks, ringed and grey plovers, dunlins and curlews. Little egrets and grey herons waded in the shallows while teal and shelducks swam in the creeks.

The scrub behind us yielded meadow pipits, stonechats, goldfinches and a singing zitting cisticola. Diligent scanning by Joao revealed a distant osprey perched, then an equally distant peregrine. Eventually I picked up two raptors soaring high above the estuary. These proved to be the resident pair of adult Bonelli's eagles, which gave good scopes despite the long range.

With lunch calling we heading into Alcochete, where turnstones and sanderlings fed near the pier. We enjoyed a delicious fish lunch in a local restaurant, A Tasca do Vitor, before leaving the town at 14.15.

Next stop was a private farm with old salt pans at Quinta da Atalaya (GPS: 38.739, -8.919). A flyby kingfisher and large flocks of black-tailed godwits, spoonbills, flamingos and coots set the scene for a superb two hours birdwatching.

Another osprey tucked into a fish on the roof of the mill, and a juvenile Bonelli's eagle perched in a dead tree. Both provided good views throughout our visit, with the eagle making several low passes over the marshes. Marsh harriers and a dainty black-shouldered kite added to the raptor list.

Among the waders were greenshanks, common sandpipers and a spotted redshank, while several cattle egrets and a couple of great white egrets added to the heron list, and ducks included shovelers and gadwall.

The passerine flocks added interest too, with the first of many chiffchaffs flitting through the saltmarsh and a sizeable flock of common waxbills feeding on the path. The first spotless starlings were seen and a Sardinian warbler called nearby.

A few distant white storks were disturbed by the Bonelli's eagle, before we strolled further down the track in pursuit of the main coot flock. A few glossy ibises flew over, a Cetti's warbler sang, and a southern grey shrike perched on wires.

Careful scanning of the large coot flock eventually produced a single red-knobbed coot in non-breeding plumage, its identity given away by the blue tint to the bill. Our first European record, this was a great start to the trip.

Happy, we left at 16.15 and moved a couple of miles south to the farmland around Barroca d'Alva to look for a few more local specialities. A wood sandpiper patrolled a large puddle in one field, in company with a common sandpiper. The first flocks of corn buntings flitted across the fields.

Then, just outside the hamlet, we spotted our first targets: a lone squacco heron and three night herons (two adults and juvenile) in a small ditch (GPS: 38.733, -8.894).

Returning towards the main road we stopped to scan through another flock of corn buntings and located not one but three Portuguese exotics: two yellow-crowned bishops, eight black-headed weavers and more common waxbills. The first two were lifers, albeit in Category C. (GPS: 38.731, -8.900).

A little owl was spotted on a barn roof before we returned to Sitio das Hortas to catch a higher tide under a stunning sunset. A few more waders were added to the list, including whimbrel, bar-tailed godwit and knot, but an immature yellow-legged gull was the best and final addition. Tired, we departed for Setúbal where we settled into the Hotel do Sado for the evening.

## **Tuesday 13 January, Tagus estuary**

We awoke to the golden glow of the sunrise above the mist across the Sado estuary, with robin, wren, serin and black redstart all singing outside the window. After breakfast we met our guide for today, Bernardo, at 08.45.

Cattle egrets fed in allotments as we drove through Setúbal then returned to Alcochete. West of the town we headed towards the Salinas do Samouco, pausing to watch several passerines in nearby fields, including crested larks and meadow pipits.

The Salinas (GPS: 38.745, -8.975) themselves were alive with waders. A sizeable mixed flock of ringed and Kentish plovers and dunlins offered a good chance to compare the two plovers. Avocets and black-winged stilts added some elegance, as did a graceful greenshank. Careful scanning also revealed a spotted redshank, snipe and a handful of little stints.

Alongside spoonbills and flamingos were the ubiquitous little egrets and grey herons, while a few Sandwich terns were among the black-headed gulls.

Moving to the far side of the Salinas (GPS: 38.744, -8.978), Bernardo hoped to find a bluethroat that had established a winter territory. With some persistence a lovely female appeared and fed along the edge of the pool for several minutes, alongside a robin and several chiffchaffs.

Continuing to the estuary shore, a black-shouldered kite perched among the posts where cod used to be dried (GPS: 38.745, -8.981). A little owl and a probable great spotted woodpecker were seen, while sanderlings, turnstones and more Kentish plovers fed along the shore.

Leaving at 11.00 we returned to Quinta da Atalaya, but this time made for a beautiful area of cork oak woodland. Passing through the farm we watched a flock of tree sparrows and waxbills.

The woods were full of chiffchaffs and robins, with blackcaps feeding along small streams. At the far end of the woods we located a large vocal flock of azure-winged magpies accompanied by a few jays, and a great spotted woodpecker. Lindsey's sharp eyes spotted our first short-toed treecreeper which eventually gave good but brief views.

As we returned to the road we saw great white egret, green sandpiper and yesterday's juvenile Bonelli's eagle and osprey, then a close zitting cisticola. A brief stop on the edge of Alcochete added hoopoe, Sardinian warbler and the first chaffinch, before we stopped for lunch in the town.

Leaving Alcochete at 14.10 we headed north along the eastern edge of the Tagus estuary, leaving the main road on a dirt track (GPS: 38.756, -8.917) through farmland and cork oak woods. Flocks of passerines included corn buntings, crested larks, skylarks, house sparrows and both common and spotless starlings. The latter stood out as much darker than their common relatives at this time of year.

A scan from some high ground produced a distant male hen harrier, while buzzards and kestrels perched on many posts. A few southern grey shrikes were spotted, though mostly distantly, while flocks of azure-winged magpies flitted through the cork woods.

One particularly impressive finch flock included good numbers of serins and several linnets, while several flocks of goldfinches reached three figures. Our first mammals of the trip were very familiar: rabbits.

At 15.40 we entered the rice fields of the northern Tagus estuary (GPS: 38.933, -8.917), an area known as Leziria do Tejo. This was a total contrast, with many flooded fields full of flocks of ducks, lapwings, black-tailed godwits and various herons. Glossy ibis, white stork, pintail and wigeon were notable additions for the day.

Marsh harriers were widespread here, and a couple of hen harriers were seen. A highlight was two short-eared owls roosting in a small tree behind one of the few buildings. One gave excellent views as it set off hunting. Bernardo located several little owls too.

Among the passerines a pied wagtail was notable among the many white wagtails, and the first reed bunting of the trip briefly perched in the open.

We eventually reached the huge visitor centre at EVOA - Tagus Estuary Birdwatching and Conservation Area (GPS: 38.850, -8.974) just in time for a hot drink before it closed, and were rewarded with a couple of purple swamp-hens feeding on the adjacent pool, where a water rail and zitting cisticola could be heard. The new building has a superb exhibition of the estuary and its wildlife and is popular with local schools. Sadly we didn't have time to explore any of the trails and hides – you'd need to arrive much earlier in the day – but we did see a green sandpiper as we left.

With daylight fading, we didn't expect much more from the day, but how wrong we were. The next 40 minutes provided some truly incredible birdwatching, with memories that will last a long time.

Freshly ploughed fields, with the tractors still active, were teeming with birds. In the fading light it was only possible to make crude estimates of numbers, but even so I put the black-tailed godwit flock at a minimum of 10 000 birds! Add in hundreds of lapwings, black-headed and lesser black-backed gulls, white storks and cattle egrets and the sight was impressive to say the least.

A little further on, we stopped in a gateway where Bernardo hoped to find a penduline tit among the reeds. He heard one, but we couldn't locate it. As he scanned the cattle field for any little bustards we watched a small line of glossy ibises flying from the estuary towards the rice fields.

For at least the next ten minutes there was a continuous stream of ibises passing overhead. Sadly a handful failed to clear the adjacent wires successfully. By the time we left we had estimated at least 5000 ibises, and as we drove back past their chosen field the entire flock took briefly to the air in a tight dark cloud.

And still it wasn't finished, as an osprey was perched on a roadside post and flew slowly in front of us for a few hundred metres. Finally, at 18.05 we returned to main road, arriving back at the hotel at 19.00 after an incredible day.

## **Wednesday 14 January, Alentejo**

We had our third different guide today, Carlos, and met him shortly after 08.00 for the long drive south-east to Mértola. It was a cloudier morning, and rain for some of the journey meant the birding was slow to start with. Highlights of the long drive included a couple of ravens and several red kites.

After a brief stop in Aljustrel, where a fox sat on a factory roof, we finally reached the steppes north of Castro Verde. The rolling plains offered great potential, so Carlos stopped regularly to scan for some of the region's special birds, as we headed east via Entradas (GPS: 37.777, -8.014) and São Marcos da Ataboeira (GPS: 37.705, -7.938).

It wasn't long before we found our first bustards: a distant flock of five male great bustards feeding several fields away, with a small flock of golden plovers nearby. While watching them, flocks of crested larks, meadow pipits, corn buntings and goldfinches flitted around us. Carlos heard black-bellied sandgrouse calling and a flock of 11 birds was soon spotted flying over.

A little further on we stopped again and found three more great bustards. A little closer this time, we were sad to note that one had a trailing wing, possibly as a result of a collision with wires. Nearby, two more sandgrouse circled and briefly landed close to the car, affording excellent views. While watching them a little bustard flew over, and then a female merlin zipped past, perching briefly before heading off to pursue an unsuspecting passerine.

Among the larks Carlos pointed out several calandra larks, explaining how different their bat-like song flight is to that of the crested larks. It took a while, but some eventually showed really well.

A small roadside reservoir (GPS: 37.766, -8.010) held a few coots, gadwall and shoveler and a little egret on the dam, with two swallows feeding overhead. Chiffchaffs and serins fed in the scrub, and as we drove past a grey wagtail flew onto the dam.

Reaching an area of open olive and oak woodland we finally spotted our first woodpigeon then Carlos stopped to scan and located a juvenile Spanish imperial eagle perched in a large eucalyptus

tree. We enjoyed superb 'scope views for several minutes, giving us the chance to study its plumage in detail, before eventually heading to Mértola for lunch, arriving at 12.40.

After lunch, a quick scan of the river added crag martins and a calling kingfisher before we headed out again on a route through the woodland and farmland of the Guadiana River Nature Park.

Carlos knows the area intimately, and his knowledge soon helped us to locate more eagles. Along the road to Alvares a pair of Spanish imperial eagles displayed, and a few minutes later the arrival of a juvenile golden eagle led to brief dog fight. Further along the track we located the two imperials perched, barely 200 metres from the road. A Dartford warbler and both red and fallow deer were seen here too. Could it get any better?

Later, close to the village of Joao Serra (GPS: 37.677, -7.837), we found large flocks of sparrows settling to roost in a series of white stork nests. Not only were there the ubiquitous house sparrows, but several Spanish sparrows and a good flock of rock sparrows.

With light fading we scanned several fields in the hope of stone-curlews. While unsuccessful on that front, we did find a ringtail hen harrier and both male and female merlins, before returning to Mértola at 18.05 to check into the [Hotel Museu](#).

## Thursday 15 January, Alentejo

A pre-breakfast walk beckoned this morning, but thick fog quickly dampened our hopes of enjoying the wonderful views and architecture in Mértola. Crag martins zipped around the roofs, where spotless starlings sang from aeries.

As we reached the castle, a small flock of azure-winged magpies approached much more closely than the timid birds at Atalaya. Despite the fog, our search for blue rock thrush was successful, with black redstart also singing.

After breakfast we left at 09.10, with the sun now shining, and I soon spotted hoopoe on wires above the road. We made a short detour to the summit of Alcaria Ruiva (GPS: 37.701, -7.762), the highest hill in the area, where alpine accentors had been seen recently.

While we were unsuccessful looking for the accentor, we did hear their commoner cousin, a dunnoek, and Carlos heard an unidentified bunting. It was nice to see both asphodels and cystus in flower on the summit too. On reaching the main road again we added another raptor as a sparrowhawk flew over.

As we headed across the plains it wasn't long before we spotted the first black-shouldered kite of the day. Soon we turned towards Corte Pequena and stopped as Carlos spotted a group of little bustards close to the road (GPS: 37.718, -7.860). Closer inspection revealed at least 41 bustards in two separate flocks. A ringtail hen harrier flew over too.

The fields were again full of flocks of corn buntings, crested and calandra larks, house sparrows and goldfinches, while buzzards and red kites were hunting and a little owl skulked in a pile of stones. Opposite Corte Pequena (GPS: 37.748, -7.855) we turned left towards another hill on which sat Ermida de Nossa Senhora de Aracelis (the chapel of Our Lady of Aracelis) (GPS: 37.746, -7.887).

As we drove through the fields and olive groves, several ravens flew over and chaffinches became more numerous. Driving up the hill we spotted our first woodlarks of the trip.

The view from the chapel was once again superb, and from here we finally found our first common cranes. Several groups in distant fields totalled probably 300 birds, though we weren't able to get close views. Even more distant were 21 great bustards along a field ridge, then Carlos found an equally distant great white egret.

Our next destination was a long forest track from the villages of Corte Gafo de Cima and Corte Gafo de Baixo. We quickly spotted a golden eagle soaring along a ridge. As we continued, huge flocks of wood pigeons were obvious in the woods, along with chaffinches and robins, and soon Carlos spotted a Spanish imperial eagle. As we watched it we heard a green woodpecker, and Carlos had a brief glimpse of a sand martin.

A little further on we spotted two imperial eagles soaring over a distant ridge. We really didn't expect to see so many of these scarce eagles, but it got even better when Carlos pointed out not one but two golden eagles perched on a ridge behind us. Four eagles in one view! Incredible!

Eventually this track led to a viewpoint across the Guadiana river, called Canais (GPS: 37.706, -7.647). The views were stunning, and Carlos soon picked up one of the imperials on the far side, then a wild boar feeding in the woods on a distant hill. While we enjoyed 'scope views of the boar, Carlos found two firecrests in the scrub behind us, but they moved on before we could see them.

We were now late for lunch so returned to Mertola for another superb local meal. It was threatening rain when we left again at 14.55.

Carlos took us along another forest track south of the town, signed Bombeira do Guadiana, with great views back along the river towards the town. On a bend in the track (GPS: 37.625, -7.668) we got out for a potter and caught sight of several hawfinches flying over. They briefly perched but quickly moved on. A party of long-tailed tits fed in trees below us, and then Lindsey and Carlos glimpsed a couple of bullfinches flying over.

With rain now falling we continued along the track and were lucky enough to find a single thekla lark a few metres from the track. Carlos now suggested heading further north to a local beauty spot called Pulo do Lobo (Wolf's leap) (GPS: 37.804, -7.634).

It was 16.30 by the time we reached our destination: a narrow gorge where the river tumbled among jagged rocks, carved by the power of the water. Although the birdwatching here was limited, it was a stunning place, well worth a visit.

We left at 17.30 and paused for ten minutes at dusk at a known eagle owl breeding area, hoping to hear one call. Unfortunately, with the wind now quite strong, our chances were always going to be slim, so we returned to the hotel and our final meal in Mértola.

## **Friday 16 January, Alentejo and Sado estuary**

We headed out again before breakfast on a gorgeous sunny morning. As soon as we walked outside, Carlos pointed out two red-rumped swallows and two house martins among the huge flock of crag martins. The former were back incredibly early – the earliest Carlos could recall.

We took the car through the old town then across the old bridge where nestboxes have been erected for lesser kestrels. A kestrel perched on one box briefly raised our hopes. We then spent some time

scanning the valley below the castle in the hope of rock bunting, but without success. Robins, chiffchaffs and song thrushes were the most numerous birds here.

We then returned to the Bombeira do Guadiana track, stopping above a cottage to search again for rock bunting (GPS: 37.629, -7.668). I soon saw a great spotted woodpecker flying into the canopy, and minutes later a lesser spotted woodpecker called nearby, but refused to show. A gorgeous firecrest did offer brief views and a black redstart was found, but again no buntings. After a flyby kingfisher on the river we returned to Mértola for breakfast.

We checked out at 10.10 for our final day in Portugal. Our journey took us back across the Castro Verde plains, retracing our route from Wednesday via the villages of São Marcos da Ataboeira and Entradas, though this time with few stops.

Flocks of larks, finches and corn buntings dominated the sightings, with red kites overhead and cattle egrets dotted across the fields. We did make one stop to watch an impressive flock of 30+ great bustards, and a couple of green sandpipers flew along a small stream.

We paused briefly alongside the dump outside Beja in the hope of spotting a wintering black kite. Huge flocks of lesser black-backed gulls and many white storks filled the air, but no kites.

Our next stop, at 11.30, was a large reservoir at Beringel (GPS: 38.064, -7.981), where Carlos hoped to add some diving ducks to our list. We were unsuccessful this time, but did find several great crested grebes, a hunting osprey, a common sandpiper, flocks of coots and commoner ducks, and a great white egret.

At the dam, Lindsey's sharp eyes spotted a large, sleek mammal dashing through the long grass: an Egyptian mongoose. This alone was worth the detour.

We left the lake at 12.15 to complete the long journey towards the Sado estuary, stopping for lunch on route. Our detour meant time was limited, but the birdwatching was still productive. A brief stop adjacent to some stone pines, in the hope of finding a crested tit did produce a calling short-toed treecreeper and the first clouded yellow butterfly of the trip.

We reached the estuary at the tiny fishing harbour of Carrasqueira (GPS: 38.413, -8.754) at 14.25, just an hour and a half before our ferry was due to leave. It was immediately obvious that the Sado estuary was very different to the Tagus, as the first waders we spotted were oystercatchers.

With heavy showers threatening, we scanned the estuary, quickly rattling up a good mix of waders: redshanks, curlews, dunlins, turnstones, bar-tailed godwits, whimbrels, ringed and grey plovers and a greenshank. Several black-necked grebes swam in the deeper water, and flamingos fed in the distance. Among the gulls were several Mediterranean and yellow-legged gulls and Sandwich terns.

After half an hour we continued west along the estuary, pausing to watch a spoonbill and black-winged stilt in one creak, and little egrets in another. A high vantage point across the estuary (GPS: 38.416, -8.816) provided good views of red-breasted mergansers, but no sign of the estuary's famous dolphins.

We reached the ferry terminal at Troia (Cais Sul) (GPS: 38.467, -8.863) at 15.25, giving us half an hour before the next ferry. On the ferry quay were both great black-backed gull and kingfisher, but despite much searching we again failed to find the dolphins – a species that continues to elude all Lindsey's efforts to see it. There was no sign of the great northern divers either.

Shortly before boarding Carlos spotted a great skua – an unexpected bonus. The crossing itself was uneventful, with several Mediterranean gulls being the birding highlight.

We docked in Setúbal at 16.30, and continued our journey to Lisbon airport, adding a couple of black-shouldered kites on route. With little to add we decided against another quick visit to Hortas, and arrived at the airport at 17.10, where we said our goodbyes to Carlos before catching the flight back to London at 20.15.

## **Summary and highlights**

It was an excellent five days in Portugal. There were so many birding highlights: the eagles, the huge flocks of waders, ibises and flamingos, the 'exotics' and Iberian endemics all stand out. I was surprised how easy it was to see black-shouldered kites, having struggled to see them in Spain previously. Conversely we were surprised not to see any vultures. Yet it was possibly the sheer numbers of wintering chiffchaffs that stood out most. January may be seen as off-season, but the birdwatching was still superb.

All three guides were superb – probably the best I've used. I'd heartily recommend using Birds & Nature Tours if you are planning a birding trip to Portugal – a country with excellent food, history and architecture as well as the birdwatching.

## Species list

Key locations visited each day (for GPS readings, and other locations see text)

**Mon 12 Jan (Tagus estuary):** Lisbon Airport, Sitio de Hortas, Alcochete, Quinta da Atalaya salt pans, Barroca d'Alva, Sitio das Hortas, Setúbal

**Tue 13 Jan (Tagus estuary):** Setúbal, Salinas do Samouco, Quinta da Atalaya corkwoods, Alcochete, eastern Tagus estuary, Lezíria do Tejo ricefields, Setúbal

**Wed 14 Jan (Alentejo):** Setúbal, Aljustrel, Castro Verde plains, Mértola, Mértola steppes (Alvares, Joao Serra), Mértola

**Thurs 15 Jan (Alentejo):** Mértola, Alcaria Ruiva, Ermida de Nossa Senhora de Aracelis, Canais viewpoint, Mértola, Bombeira do Guadiana track, Pulo do Lobo, Mértola

**Fri 16 Jan (Alentejo and Sado estuary):** Mértola, Bombeira do Guadiana track, Mértola, Castro Verde plains, Beringel, Carrasqueira, Troia (Cais sul) ferry terminal, Setúbal, Lisbon airport

## Birds

<b>Little grebe</b>	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Several in Salinas around Tagus estuary and few on pools in Alentejo
<b>Great crested grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	30+ at Beringel Reservoir
<b>Black-necked grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	At least four at Carrasqueira
<b>Cormorant</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Common on both estuaries and a few on pools in Alentejo
<b>Black-crowned night heron</b>	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	2 adults, 1 juv at Barroca d'Alva
<b>Squacco heron</b>	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	One at Barroca d'Alva
<b>Cattle egret</b>	<i>Bubuculus ibis</i>	Common around Tagus estuary and on Castro Verde plains, plus a few in Setúbal
<b>Little egret</b>	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Common around Tagus estuary, a few at pools in Alentejo and around Sado estuary
<b>Great white egret</b>	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Numerous in Lezíria do Tejo rice fields with a few elsewhere
<b>Grey heron</b>	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Common around Tagus and Sado estuaries and several in Alentejo, especially along Guadiana river
<b>White stork</b>	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Numerous, with many already occupying nests
<b>Glossy ibis</b>	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	13 at Quinta da Atalaya; common in northern Tagus estuary, including 5000+ roosting in Lezíria do Tejo ricefields
<b>Spoonbill</b>	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	Common around Tagus estuary, with several sizeable flocks. One on Sado estuary
<b>Greater flamingo</b>	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	Several large flocks around Tagus and Sado estuaries, including at Quinta da Atalaya and Salinas do Samouco
<b>Greylag goose</b>	<i>Anser anser</i>	Four at Sitio das Hortas, then ca 100 around Lezíria do visitor centre
<b>Shelduck</b>	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Small flocks at Sitio das Hortas and Carrasqueira
<b>Wigeon</b>	<i>Anas penelope</i>	200+ at Sitio das Hortas
<b>Gadwall</b>	<i>Anas strepera</i>	A few at Quinta da Atalaya salt pans, small reservoir on Castro Verde plains (37.766, -8.010) and Beringel reservoir
<b>Teal</b>	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Flocks at Sitio das Hortas, Quinta da Atalaya salt pans, Lezíria do Tejo ricefields and Carrasqueira
<b>Mallard</b>	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Small flocks at all wetlands and on Guadiana River
<b>Pintail</b>	<i>Anas acuta</i>	A few in Lezíria do Tejo ricefields

<b>Shoveler</b>	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Flocks at Quinta da Atalaya salt pans, Salinas do Samouco, Lezíria do Tejo ricefields and Beringel reservoir, and a few on small reservoir on Castro Verde plains (37.766, -8.010)
<b>Red-breasted merganser</b>	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Male and two females on Sado estuary at GPS: 38.416, -8.816
<b>Black-shouldered kite</b>	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	Widespread, often with two or three present together
<b>Red kite</b>	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Widespread on Castro Verde plains
<b>Marsh harrier</b>	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Widespread around Tagus and Sado estuaries, and one on plains near Mértola
<b>Hen harrier</b>	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	A few around eastern Tagus estuary, Lezíria do Tejo, Castro Verde plains and steppes near Mértola
<b>Sparrowhawk</b>	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	One near Alcária Ruiva
<b>Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Common and widespread
<b>Spanish imperial eagle</b>	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	Several sightings around Mértola area, including pairs. At least six birds seen
<b>Golden eagle</b>	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Immature mobbed by imperial eagles on 14 <sup>th</sup> , pair near Canais
<b>Bonelli's eagle</b>	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>	Pair at Sitio das Hortas, juvenile at Quinta da Atalaya
<b>Osprey</b>	<i>Pandion heliaetus</i>	Singles at Sitio das Hortas, Quinta da Atalaya, Salinas do Samouco, Lezíria do Tejo and Beringel reservoir
<b>Kestrel</b>	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Common and widespread
<b>Merlin</b>	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Male and two females on steppes on 14 <sup>th</sup> , female on steppes on 16 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Peregrine</b>	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	One distantly at Sitio das Hortas
<b>Red-legged partridge</b>	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Common around Mértola
<b>Water rail</b>	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Heard at Lezíria do Tejo visitor centre
<b>Moorhen</b>	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Several in Lezíria do Tejo ricefields, singles at Barroca d'Alva and Guadiana River near Mértola
<b>Purple swamp-hen</b>	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	At least one at Lezíria do Tejo visitor centre
<b>Coot</b>	<i>Fulica atra</i>	At least 500 at Quinta da Atalaya, 100+ at Lezíria do Tejo ricefields and Beringel Reservoir and a few on pools on Castro Verde plains
<b>Red-knobbed (crested) coot</b>	<i>Fulica cristata</i>	One within huge coot flock at Quinta da Atalaya salt pans
<b>Common crane</b>	<i>Grus grus</i>	ca 300 in fields near Ermida de Nossa Senhora de Aracelis
<b>Little bustard</b>	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>	One near Entradas, ca 40 near Corte Pequena
<b>Great bustard</b>	<i>Otis tarda</i>	Five flocks on Castro Verde and Mértola plains – counts of 3, 5, 7, 21 and 31
<b>Black-winged stilt</b>	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	100+ at Quinta da Atalaya and Lezíria do Tejo ricefields, 20+ at Salinas do Samouco and Sado estuary, a few elsewhere on Tagus estuary
<b>Oystercatcher</b>	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	100+ at Carrasqueira
<b>Avocet</b>	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	300+ at Sitio das Hortas, ca 40 at Salinas do Samouco
<b>Ringed plover</b>	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Small flocks at Sitio das Hortas and Carrasqueira, 100+ at Salinas do Samouco
<b>Kentish plover</b>	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	30+ at Salinas do Samouco
<b>Golden plover</b>	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	A few small flocks on Castro Verde plains and Mértola steppes
<b>Grey plover</b>	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	100+ at Sitio das Hortas and 50+ at Carrasqueira
<b>Lapwing</b>	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Common and widespread on estuaries and steppes
<b>Knot</b>	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Two at Sitio das Hortas
<b>Sanderling</b>	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Six at Alcochete Pier on 12 <sup>th</sup> , 30+ on Tagus estuary at Samouco
<b>Little stint</b>	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	At least six at Salinas do Samouco
<b>Curlew sandpiper</b>	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Two at Salinas do Samouco
<b>Dunlin</b>	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Common on Tagus and Sado estuaries at various locations
<b>Snipe</b>	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	A few at various locations around Tagus estuary and pools on steppes
<b>Black-tailed godwit</b>	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	30+ at Quinta da Atalaya salt pans, 10k+ roosting in

<b>Bar-tailed godwit</b>	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Lezíria do Tejo ricefields
<b>Whimbrel</b>	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	50+ at Sitio das Hortas, 30+ at Carrasqueira
<b>Curlew</b>	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Two at Sitio das Hortas, 10+ at Carrasqueira
<b>Spotted redshank</b>	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	A few at Sitio das Hortas and Carrasqueira
		Singles at Quinta da Atalaya salt pans, Sitio das Hortas and Salinas do Samouco
<b>Redshank</b>	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common on Tagus and Sado estuaries
<b>Greenshank</b>	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Singles or twos at Sitio das Hortas, Quinta da Atalaya salt pans, Salinas do Samouco, Lezíria do Tejo ricefields, Sado estuary and a pool on Mértola steppes
<b>Green sandpiper</b>	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Singles or twos at various sites around Tagus estuaries and pools on Castro Verde plains and Mértola steppes.
<b>Wood sandpiper</b>	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	One on roadside puddle near Barroca d'Alva
<b>Common sandpiper</b>	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Ones and twos at various sites around Tagus estuary, Beringel Reservoir and Carrasqueira
<b>Turnstone</b>	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Two at Alcochete pier, 10+ on Tagus estuary at Samouco and 6+ at Carrasqueira
<b>Great skua</b>	<i>Catharacta skua</i>	One at Troia (Cais sul) ferry terminal
<b>Mediterranean gull</b>	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	Five at Carrasqueira
<b>Black-headed gull</b>	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Common around Tagus and Sado estuaries. Two on Guadiana river on 15 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Lesser black-backed gull</b>	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Very common around Tagus and Sado estuaries
<b>Yellow-legged gull</b>	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	One first winter at Sitio das Hortas, at least three adults at Carrasqueira
<b>Great black-backed gull</b>	<i>Larus marinus</i>	One at Troia (Cais sul) ferry terminal
<b>Sandwich tern</b>	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Single figure flocks at Sitio das Hortas, Salinas do Samouco and Carrasqueira
<b>Black-bellied sandgrouse</b>	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>	Eleven near Entradas and two elsewhere on Castro Verde plains
<b>Feral pigeon</b>	<i>Columba livia domest.</i>	Common and widespread
<b>Woodpigeon</b>	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Several hundred in woods near Canais viewpoint, with odd ones elsewhere in Mértola area
<b>Collared dove</b>	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Widespread, but no big flocks
<b>Little owl</b>	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Singles at near Barroca d'Alva, Salinas do Samouco, and various sites on Castro Verde plains and Mértola steppes, and three on Lezíria do Tejo ricefields
<b>Short-eared owl</b>	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	Two at Lezíria do Tejo ricefields
<b>Kingfisher</b>	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Singles at Quinta da Atalaya Salinas, Mértola, Bombeira do Guadiana track and Troia (Cais sul) ferry terminal
<b>Hoopoe</b>	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Singles at Sitio das Hortas, Quinta da Atalaya, Beringel Reservoir and several sites in Mértola area
<b>Green woodpecker</b>	<i>Picus viridis sharpie</i>	Two in woods in Mértola area
<b>Great spotted woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Singles at Quinta da Atalaya cork woods and Bombeira do Guadiana track
<b>Lesser spotted woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	One heard on Bombeira do Guadiana track
<b>Calandra lark</b>	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	Small flocks at various sites on Castro Verde plains and Mértola steppes
<b>Crested lark</b>	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Common on Castro Verde plains and Mértola steppes
<b>Thekla lark</b>	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	One on Bombeira do Guadiana track
<b>Woodlark</b>	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	A few near Ermida de Nossa Senhora de Aracelis and in woods on Canais track
<b>Skylark</b>	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Three in eastern Tagus estuary, common on Castro Verde plains
<b>Sand martin</b>	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	One seen only by Carlos on track to Canais viewpoint
<b>Crag martin</b>	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Common in Mértola
<b>Barn swallow</b>	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	A few at small reservoir on Castro Verde plains (37.766, -8.010) and Bombeira do Guadiana track

<b>Red-rumped swallow</b>	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	Two in Mértola on 16 <sup>th</sup>
<b>House martin</b>	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Two in Mértola, three at Beringel Reservoir
<b>Meadow pipit</b>	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Common and widespread
<b>Grey wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	One at small reservoir on Castro Verde plains (37.766, -8.010)
<b>White wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	Common and widespread
<b>Pied wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	One at Leziria do Tejo ricefields
<b>Wren</b>	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Ones and twos in woodland at Quinta da Atalaya and near Mértola
<b>Dunnock</b>	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Two heard on Alcaria Ruiva peak
<b>Robin</b>	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Common in woodland
<b>Bluethroat</b>	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	Female at Salinas do Samouco
<b>Black redstart</b>	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Common and widespread
<b>Stonechat</b>	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Common and widespread
<b>Blue rock thrush</b>	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Single males at Mértola Castle and Canais viewpoint
<b>Blackbird</b>	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Widespread in small numbers
<b>Fieldfare</b>	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Three near Aljustrel
<b>Song thrush</b>	<i>Turdus philomelas</i>	Widespread in small numbers
<b>Cetti's warbler</b>	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Singles singing at various sites near water but not seen
<b>Zitting cisticola</b>	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Singles singing at various sites, and several in Leziria do Tejo ricefields
<b>Dartford warbler</b>	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	One near Alvares, two near Canais viewpoint
<b>Sardinian warbler</b>	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Ones and twos at various locations. Most numerous in Mértola area
<b>Blackcap</b>	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Two at Quinta da Atalaya corkwoods, one in Mértola (14 <sup>th</sup> ), several in woodland in Mértola area
<b>Chiffchaff</b>	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Very common and widespread in all habitats
<b>Firecrest</b>	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	One along Bombeira do Guadiana track and seen by Carlos at Canais viewpoint
<b>Long-tailed tit</b>	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	At least six along Bombeira do Guadiana track
<b>Blue tit</b>	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Ones and twos around Salinas do Samouco, eastern Tagus estuary and Canais viewpoint track
<b>Great tit</b>	<i>Parus major</i>	One heard at Ermida de Nossa Senhora de Aracelis
<b>Short-toed treecreeper</b>	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	One in Quinta da Atalaya corkwoods, one heard near Sado estuary
<b>Southern grey shrike</b>	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	Singles at Quinta da Atalaya Salinas and eastern Tagus estuary. Widespread on Castro Verde plains and Mértola steppes
<b>Jay</b>	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Singles at various sites in eastern Tagus estuary and woodlands around Mértola
<b>Azure-winged magpie</b>	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	Flocks in most corkwoods and around Mértola castle
<b>Magpie</b>	<i>Pica pica</i>	Widespread in small numbers
<b>Jackdaw</b>	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Four close to Mértola along Bombeira do Guadiana track
<b>Carrion crow</b>	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Widespread in small numbers
<b>Raven</b>	<i>Corvus corax</i>	A few on journey from Setúbal to Aljustrel, eight near Ermida de Nossa Senhora de Aracelis
<b>Starling</b>	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Numerous in Eastern Tagus estuary and Leziria do Tejo, usually among spotless starlings
<b>Spotless starling</b>	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Common and widespread, often in flocks of hundreds
<b>House sparrow</b>	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Very common everywhere
<b>Spanish sparrow</b>	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	At least ten among house sparrow flocks near Joao Serra village
<b>Tree sparrow</b>	<i>Passer montanus</i>	At least ten in garden at Quinta da Atalaya farmyard
<b>Rock sparrow</b>	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	At least 40 in stork nests near Joao Serra village
<b>Yellow-crowned bishop</b>	<i>Euplectes afer</i>	At least two near Barroca d'Alva
<b>Black-headed weaver</b>	<i>Ploceus melanocephalus</i>	At least eight near Barroca d'Alva
<b>Common waxbill</b>	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	Flocks of at least 20 around Quinta da Atalaya and Barroca d'Alva

<b>Chaffinch</b>	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Pair at chapel N St de Aracelis, flocks in woods near Mertola
<b>Serin</b>	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Widespread and often singing, including large flocks in eastern Tagus estuary
<b>Greenfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Three near Salinas do Samouco and three on Castro Verde plains
<b>Goldfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Common and widespread including flocks of 150+ at Leziria do Tejo ricefields and Castro Verde plains
<b>Linnet</b>	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Two males in eastern Tagus estuary, 20+ on Castro Verde plains
<b>Bullfinch</b>	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Seen by Lindsey and Carlos only along Bombeira do Guadiana track
<b>Hawfinch</b>	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Six on Bombeira do Guadiana track
<b>Reed bunting</b>	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	2 males, 1 female at Leziria do Tejo ricefields
<b>Rock bunting</b>	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Probables heard by Carlos at Alcaria Ruiva and Bombeira do Guadiana track
<b>Corn bunting</b>	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	Common and widespread, including flocks of 150+ on Castro Verde plains

## Mammals

<b>Rabbit</b>	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Widespread in eastern Tagus estuary woods, on Castro Verde plains and Mértola steppes
<b>Red fox</b>	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	One on factory roof in Aljustrel
<b>Red deer</b>	<i>Cervus elephas</i>	Two small groups on Mértola steppes
<b>Fallow deer</b>	<i>Dama dama</i>	Two small groups on Mértola steppes
<b>Wild boar</b>	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	One opposite Canais viewpoint
<b>Egyptian mongoose</b>	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>	One at Beringel Reservoir

## Amphibians

<b>Common toad</b>	<i>Bufo bufo</i>	Heard around Mértola steppes
<b>Natterjack toad</b>	<i>Bufo calamita</i>	Heard around Mértola plains and one seen on road after dark

## Butterflies

<b>Clouded yellow</b>	<i>Colias croceus</i>	One near Sado estuary
<b>Small white</b>	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	Singles in various locations, presumed to be this species