

Southern Portugal

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

To Faro and the Alte Hotel

Our entire holiday is based at the beautifully situated Alte Hotel. We should have a little time in the afternoon of our arrival day to explore the surroundings. We'll not have to wait long to see our first orchids as several species flower right by the hotel! There are plenty of common native Mediterranean flowers and shrubs and these attract many butterflies even this early in spring. Queen of Spain Fritillary and the brilliantly-coloured Spanish Festoon are always two of the first out but even apparently later season butterflies like Spanish Marbled White will already be on the wing. Clouded Yellow, Bath White, Chapman's Blue and Lang's Short tailed Blue will all be seen and though they may not settle often we'll see both Common Swallowtail and Scarce Swallowtail busily flying back and forth along tracks near the hotel. The birdlife is very good indeed right around the Alte. Those lovely Azure-winged Magpies are sure to be popular whilst groups of White Storks migrate overhead. Hoopoes will be very evident and are quite approachable, whilst we'll be serenaded day and night by Serin and Nightingale respectively. Sardinian Warblers scold from the thicker scrub whilst Woodlarks lull us with their melancholy notes. We'll soon find Thekla Larks too and Red-legged Partridges though any Quail we see are likely to be as they fly away!

Day 2

Castelo de Paderne & Rocha da Pena

These two places are located in the heart of the Barrocal, a mixed farming system typical of the Algarve and comprises, or used to comprise a mosaic of cereal and pastures interspersed with almond, olive, carob and fig trees. These fields are now largely abandoned and along with the limestone substrate combine to make this region a heaven for orchids and other bulbs. The impressive round blue heads of *Scilla peruviana* will be one of the most photographed plants however we are also sure to enjoy *Bellevalia hackeri*, *Tulipa sylvestris* (here with yellow tepals having a red back) and the gorgeous tessellated bells of *Fritillaria lusitanica*. White *Narcissus papyraceus* is joined here by two little yellow daffodils, *Narcissus bulbocodium* and *Narcissus calcicola*. It is the orchids though that have the greater variety. The stately Violet Limodore and Sword-leaved Helleborine are found under the trees alongside two species of Mirror Orchid, *Ophrys speculum* and the much more localised *Ophrys vernixia*. In the more open abandoned fields we'll find Naked Man Orchid, Man Orchid, both *Serapias lingua* and *Serapias parviflora*, and a whole suite of bee orchids including Bumble-bee Orchid, Yellow Bee Orchid, Dull Bee Orchid and the pretty *Ophrys dyris*. Short-toed Eagles hunt overhead though

even they'll have a hard job spotting the Moorish Geckoes which lay almost concealed in cracks in the limestone rocks.

Day 3

Ria Formosa wetlands

This will be a full day to visit one of the most important wetlands in the Algarve, the Ria Formosa complex of tidal lagoons saltmarshes and salt pans. After the breakfast we will drive 40 minutes south to the Quinta do Lago area. Here among plenty of egrets, waders and gulls we will look for Little Bittern, Red-crested Pochard, Purple Gallinule, Audouin's Gull and Caspian Tern. Different wetland habitats (fresh water lagoon, mudflats, saltmarsh, salt pans, dunes, etc) will produce a huge diversity of birds. But not only birds will make our day. In the Mastic Trees we might find the amazing European Chameleon.

The plant life is dominated by dune and salt resistant flora, with some interesting species that will make our day. *Limoniastrum monopetalum* and the stunning *Cistanche phelypaea* will be plentiful everywhere. *Leucojum trichophyllum* will appear in carpets and we might find the spectacular Maltese Fungus (*Cynomorium coccineum*) which is of course not a fungus but a plant parasitic on saltmarsh chenopods.

Day 4

Castro Verde plains

The plains of the Alentejo offer some superb birdwatching. Just now the extraordinary display of the Great Bustards will be at its height and we'll see males strutting their stuff, looking quite bizarre as they fluff out their fabulous white whiskers and rump! We'll look for cryptically marked Little Bustards, always much more obvious on the wing, and we'll hope to see Black-bellied Sandgrouse, or at least hear their lovely purring calls. Calandra Larks sing loudly over the open landscapes, and every little bush (there aren't many) seems to have a resident Woodchat or Great Grey Shrike. Raptors are quite a feature with Red and Black Kites common and there are many pairs of Montagu's Harriers breeding. The lovely Black-winged Kite though is the prize! We'll likely disturb a Stone Curlew or two and sitting on piles of stones will be the occasional Little Owl. The dry soils are home to the endemic little purple *Linaria algarviana* and here we'll also find the larger yellow *Linaria viscosa* and fudge-coloured *Dipcadi serotinum*.

The River Cobres are alight with both *Narcissus bulbucodium* and *Narcissus jonquilla* amongst a variety of other nice flowers. *Gladiolus illyricus* is plentiful and makes a pretty sight amongst Cistuses and abundant Lavenders. *Ferula tingitana* will be almost flowering and we'll find plenty of European Swallowtails buzzing up and down the paths.

Day 5

Barranco do Velho Cork Oak forests

A little east of Alte is the Barranco do Velho, located in the Caldeirão hills, a huge area covered with Cork Oak forest. In this unique forest we will find a wonderful range of Rock Roses with *Cistus ladanifer*, *Cistus populifolius*, *Cistus salvifolius*, *Cistus albidus* and *Cistus crispus* as well as many interesting flowers such as Brotero's Peony, *Cytinus ruber* and *Ornithogalum broteroi*. We will also look for some interesting orchids, including huge populations of *Orchis morio*, *Serapias cordigera* and *Serapias lingua*. Booted Eagles, Short-toed Eagles and Bonelli's Eagles are all likely in the skies above and in the trees Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers as well as Firecrests.

Day 6

Salgados Lagoon & Monchique Hills

First we will visit the most popular birding place in the Algarve, the Salgados lagoon. Here we will hope to find a nice selection of waterbirds, with plenty of Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard, Flamingo, Spoonbil, Glossy Ibis, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, and many other waterbirds. We will also find the largest population of the tiny toadflax *Linaria algarviana* and massed displays of yellow Buttonweed.

After our picnic we will go up to Monchique, the highest mountain in the Algarve. With its cork oak forests and Spanish Heath scrub it is very interesting from the botanical point of view. Most notable will be a plant that many of us in the UK have reason to dislike as it has colonised many of our woodlands, but here *Rhododendron ponticum* is native, almost a continent west of its main range. The pretty blue *Scilla monophylus* shelters under the shade with Champagne Orchid, Violet Limodore and *Epipactis lusitanica*. Dartford Warblers pop in and out of the low shrubs that include lots of *Erica umbellata*.

Day 7

Sagres Plateaux

We'll visit the Sagres Peninsula which has a fine coastal flora. A low scrub of *Cistus palhinae* and *Astragalus tragacantha* shelter many fine orchids, notably the delicate *Orchis champagneuxi* and the strange little green *Gennaria diphylla*. We'll also see the first flowers of Pyramidal Orchid and lots of *Ophrys picta*. Toadflaxes are particularly varied with *Linaria algarviana*, *Linaria oblongifolia* and lovely *Linaria amethystea*. Campions such as *Silene colorata*, *Silene littorea*, *Silene rothmaleri*, *Silene scabriflora* and *Silene niceensis* as well as the Snapdragon *Antirrhinum cirrhigerum* are abundant here, growing alongside *Dipcadi serotinus* and *Iberis procumbens*. Inland of the beach are some fine clumps of *Narcissus gaditanus*. On the bird side we will see Peregrine, Red-billed Chough and Blue Rock Thrush, among many migrant passerines. We will end our day and our tour in Cape Saint Vincent, an inspiring place, full of flowers and other wildlife. There's Gannets offshore and nearer at hand spectacular Portuguese Squills and *Lupinus luteus*.

Day 8

Return to the UK

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