

**Dennis Atherton   Southern Spain   September 2011**



Well after a lot of planning and research I decided that raptor migration had to be seen first hand and using the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) website and links I managed to find all my much needed data. The dates were chosen for peak raptor migration time for the species I wanted to see as you can't get everything because of the different times the various species migrate but the last two weeks in September seemed to be a good peak migration time. Another good source for information I found to be the 'Where to Watch Birds in Southern Spain' book.

To make this report more easy and enjoyable it has been broken down into areas and not days and over my stay of a week most sites were visited on multiple occasions with the time of day taken into consideration to best suit in flight photography of birds in low sun conditions.

**For starters, on my arrival and procurement of my hire car the first place I visited was Tarifa. I visited this area everyday and wow! Just look up and this is a typical view of what you see!**



**Above: Migrating Honey Buzzards over Tarifa**

The best location to watch raptors changes everyday because of the wind. In an easterly wind the birds drift across and you will find most of the action around the viewpoints near Tarifa whereas in westerly's the best place is closer to Gibraltar. There are two main viewpoints along the N-340, which is the main road connecting Gibraltar to Tarifa: one is at mile marker 91 and the other is at mile marker 95. Raptors here gather height ready for the crossing to Africa so the best viewpoints are as high up as you can get, but once you've checked out the wind direction and get to the right area all you have to do is look up and encounter a sky full of raptors. Superb and just what I had hoped for. A good hunt through these produced Honey Buzzard, Booted Eagle and Short-toed Eagle all in good numbers along with smaller numbers of White Storks, Black storks, Griffin Vultures and Egyptian vultures.



Above: Black Storks



Above: Egyptian Vulture

Tarifa town is also a good place to see Lesser Kestrels on the castle and there is a reserve near Tarifa beach. The reserve is a great place to visit and here I picked up my first flamingos, high numbers of Yellow-legged Gulls, Crested Larks, Short-toed Lark and distant Kentish Plovers. I unfortunately dipped on Audouins Gull, which are supposed to be around in this area. Here were also high numbers of Kestrels which had been blown of course and were coming in off the sea. They just kept coming and coming and within an hour over a two hundred and come through. I also managed good views here of Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler) and nice good fly-bys of Cattle Egrets, Pallid Swifts and Kentish Plovers.



Above: Cattle Egret



Above: Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler)





Above: Crested Lark



Above: Juvenile Greater Flamingo



Above: Female Kentish Plover

Los Barrios rubbish tip is a must to visit. En route you pass the nesting area of White Storks complete with nest which are around eight feet in diameter, a sight to see! You know when you're getting close to the tip though as looking up the air is full of gulls and although they seemed to be mainly Yellow-legged Gulls, I bet Ian McKerchar would've had hours of fun here alone! Apart from the masses of gulls, over the hills large numbers of Griffon Vultures could be seen soaring.



Above: Griffon Vulture



Above: Soaring Griffon Vultures





Above: White Storks

There is a castle at Jimena De La Frontera which has resident Crag Martins and with the usual bit of 'ditching' I managed to get some good flyovers of Griffin Vultures and Black Kites which are present in large numbers. There are also good numbers of White Storks, Red Kites, Cattle Egrets, Sardinian Warblers and Blue Rock Thrush.



Above: Crag Martin



Above and two below: Griffon Vultures





Above and below: White Stork



Above: Short-toed Eagle





Above and below: Juvenile Black Kite





Above: Red Kite



Above: Female Blue Rock Thrush

La Janda is another cracking location though I did manage to miss an Ortolan Bunting here by five minutes. Other species clearly made up for this miss though and I managed a flock of 500 or so Glossy Ibis plus Spanish Sparrows, Turtle Doves, Corn Buntings, Short-toed Larks, Red-rumped Swallows, Golden Oriole, Marsh Harriers and Montagu's Harriers. Here has also been a reintroduction of Bald Ibis into this area and I saw a flock of about 30 of these crazy looking but superb birds. More good views of White Storks and also large numbers of Cattle Egrets doing what they do best (loitering around cattle) were also obtained.





Above and below: Cattle Egrets







Above: Bald Ibis



Above: White Storks



Above: Corn Bunting

The Barbate Estuary is a great spot for waders with Spotted Redshanks, Curlew Sandpipers, Ruff, Greenshanks, Spoonbills and Black-winged Stilts plus there are some good tall palm trees here that have nesting Monk Parakeets.



Above: Black-winged Stilt



Above: Monk Parakeet

At the Ojen Valley, other than species already mentioned I managed to locate Crested Tit, Hoopoe and Short-toed Treecreeper. These valleys seem full of Lesser Kestrels hunting in flocks, simply superb with six or seven sat together on fence posts or in the air together and also good numbers of Common Kestrels too. Spain is quite a dry country and there are not many fresh water lakes but the Ojen Valley does have a large lake and en route I found an Osprey sat on a post with a large fish it had just snatched plus I managed more great views of Short-toed and Booted Eagles.



Above: Booted Eagle



Above: Short-toed Eagle





Above: Male Lesser Kestrel



Above: Common Kestrel



Above: second calendar year male Lesser Kestrel



Above: Osprey



Above: Ojen Valley



Above: Hoopoe

I spent a few days on Gibraltar itself and of course visited St. Michael's Caves and saw the Barbary Apes. No matter how many times I tried though I couldn't connect with the Barbary Partridge here and I also missed a Red-necked Nightjar being ringed by the Gohns while I was out looking for the Barbary Partridge. When the wind was westerly it was a great location to get high up the rock and see the birds at eye level instead of looking up at them. Booted Eagles flying below me and seeing them looking up was a memorable sight indeed, especially as it's only from above you get to see the upperwing features and the white shoulder patches. Stunning is all I can say! It's also a very good place to have a close look at the swifts flying around the rock and to pick out the Pallid and Alpine variety. Gibraltar is home to seven pairs of Peregrines, all keeping to their own part of the rock and a pair of Ravens.



Above and below: Juvenile Booted Eagle





Above: Raven



Above: Gibraltar

Other places of interest on Gibraltar are the Northgate Cemetery and Botanical Gardens. Here I picked up Common and Black Redstarts, Wood Warblers, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers and Iberian Chiffchaffs. Gibraltar city itself is home to lots of Yellow-legged Gulls and also Spotless Starlings. Europa Point is excellent for sea watching, producing Audouins Gull and proving great to see Scopoli's (Cory's) Shearwater and 'Mediterranean' Shags, though I never did manage to get a photo of a low flying Honey Buzzard here as they were always high in the thermals.



Above: Iberian Chiffchaff



Above: Osprey



Above: White Stork



Above: Audouin's Gull





Above: Male Sardinian Warbler



Above and below: Yellow-legged Gulls





Above: Spotless Starling



Above: Redstart



Above: Scopoli's Shearwater



Above: Adult Honey Buzzard



As a final note, here is some statistics for the 14th September 2011 recorded by at [www.fundacionmigres.org](http://www.fundacionmigres.org), who are the group recording the official statistics for the area. It's important to note that this migration was recorded in only three hours, from 10am to 1pm! Black Kite 141 White Stork 280 Honey Buzzard 367 Short-toed Eagle 278 Black Stork 13 Egyptian Vulture 15 Sparrowhawk 32 Montague's Harrier 35 Marsh Harrier 6 Griffin Vulture 48 Also a few sighting of Kestrel, Lesser Kestrel and Peregrine.

Well, that's about it for this trip, the most memorable moment being when an Osprey looked right at me from about 10 feet away! I was still sat in the car leaning over to take a photo and he just starred. Ospreys have those forwards facing eyes for hunting but you rarely get to see them so when he looked at me I just froze and it was surreal but amazing view.

So I guess its goodbye from me, the Osprey and enough of my monkeying around from Gibraltar with the Barbary Apes.



**Dennis Atherton, October 2011**

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