BIRDING THE COSTA BLANCA

COAST, PLAINS & MOUNTAINS

www.bargainbirdingclub.com

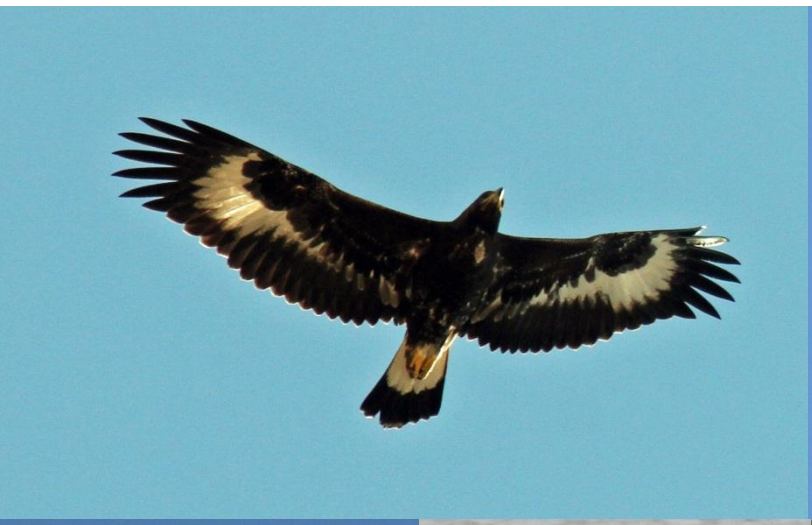
8th to 15th October 2016

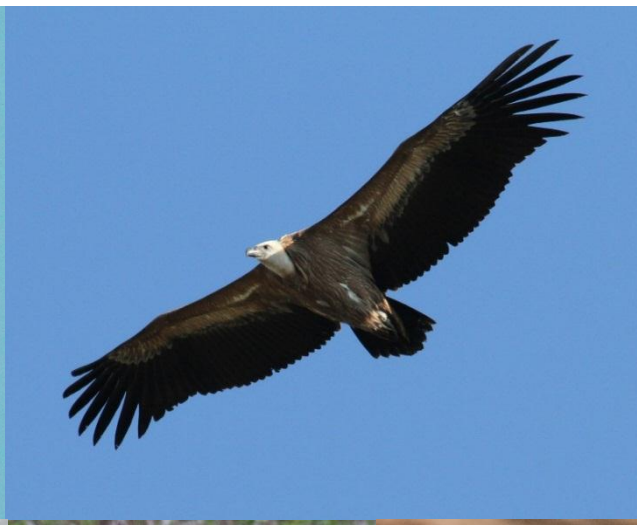
Guides:

Bryan Thomas (freelance guide), Simon Ginnaw (freelance guide)
Alvar Segui (Sant Cristofol Griffon Vulture Project) and Richard Hanman (Bargain Birding Club)

Trip Guests:

Peter Saville, Cheryl Hicks, Charlotte Saville, Lesley Frizell, Ed Woodhouse, Shona Tudor, Nigel Davies, Judy Davies, Sharon Wells, Steve Wells, Tim Rea and Trevor Hatton.





Bargain Birders (RH)

Bargain Birders (RH)

Birding the Costa Blanca

Introduction:

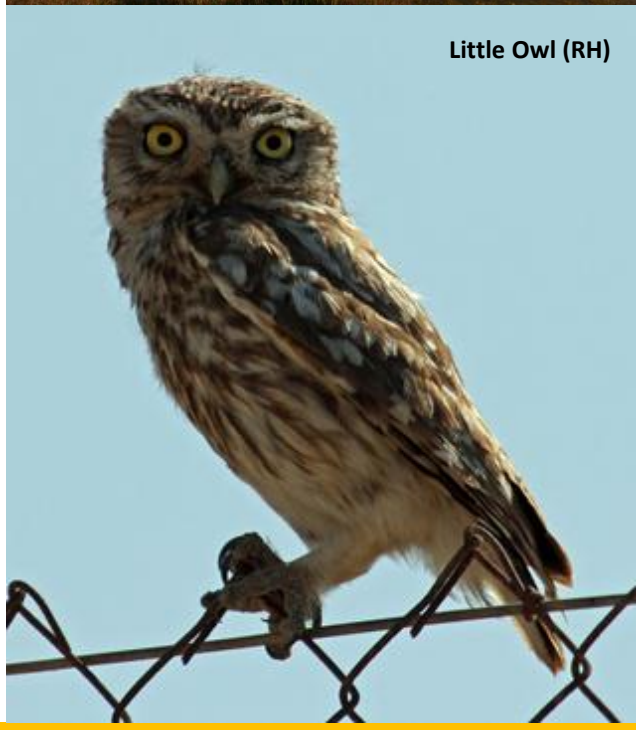
This was our second **Bargain Birding Club** trip to Costa Blanca in as many years and I'm happy to report it was another success with **152 bird species**, and a good time was had by all 12 guests.

Magic moments included stunning close-up views of Golden Eagle, Booted Eagle and Griffon Vulture, and a stubble field in Bonete which delivered Little Bustard, Great Bustard, Stone Curlew and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. We also tracked down most of the regions special birds including Bonelli's Eagle, Osprey, Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Squacco Heron, Glossy Ibis, Purple Swamphen, Red-knobbed Coot, White-headed Duck, Black-necked Grebe, Hoopoe, Blue Rock Thrush, Azure-winged Magpie, Monk Parakeet, Slender-billed Gull, Audouin's Gull, Little Stint, Temminck's Stint and Bluethroat. Bonus birds included Black-shouldered Kite, Wryneck and Common Crane.

Saturday 8th October 2016: An introduction to Spanish birds

Most of our group assembled at 7.00am at Gatwick airport in good time for our 9.10am Monarch departure to Alicante. Shona travelled independently from Bristol and met us at Alicante airport. We collected our two Mercedes 9-seater minibuses with automatic gearboxes and after a few embarrassing minutes working out how to apply the hand brake with your foot and release it with your hand, we drove the short distance to our hotel at Santa Pola.

Santa Pola salt pans (RH)


Little Owl (RH)

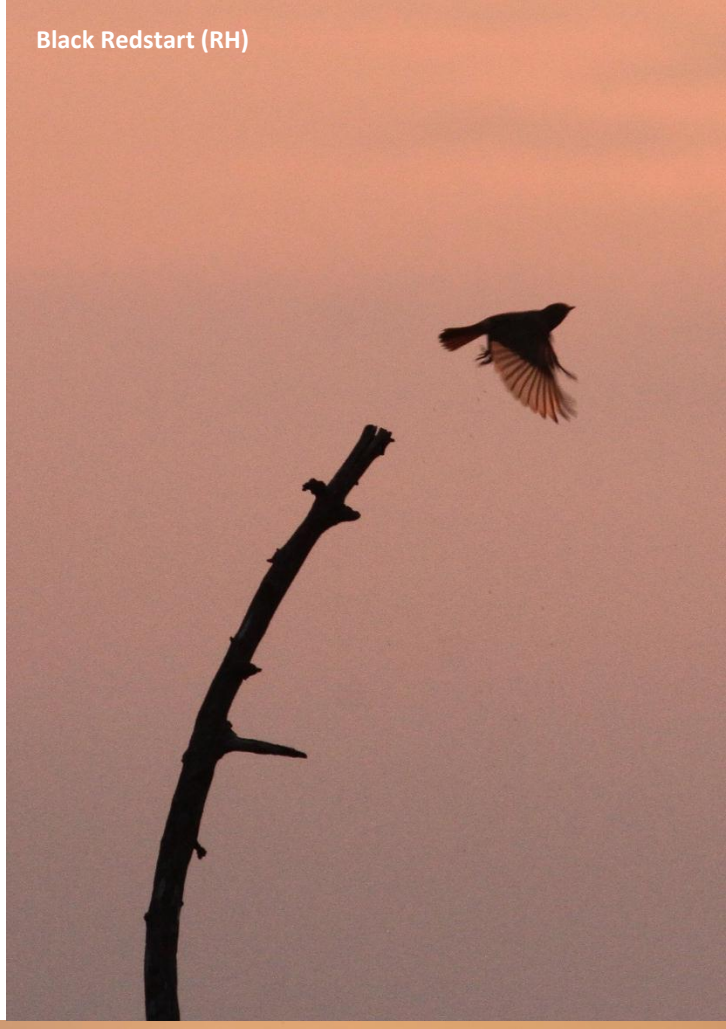
En-route we made a brief stop at the tower layby at **Santa Pola saltpans** to begin our trip list with **Greater Flamingo**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Sandwich Tern**, **Little Egret**, **Yellow-legged Gull** and **Turnstone**.

After checking in we re-gathered in the hotel lobby at 4.30pm ready to pick up Bryan and visit the local reserve at **Clot de Galvany**. From the car park we followed the gravel path to the observation platform overlooking the overgrown pool.

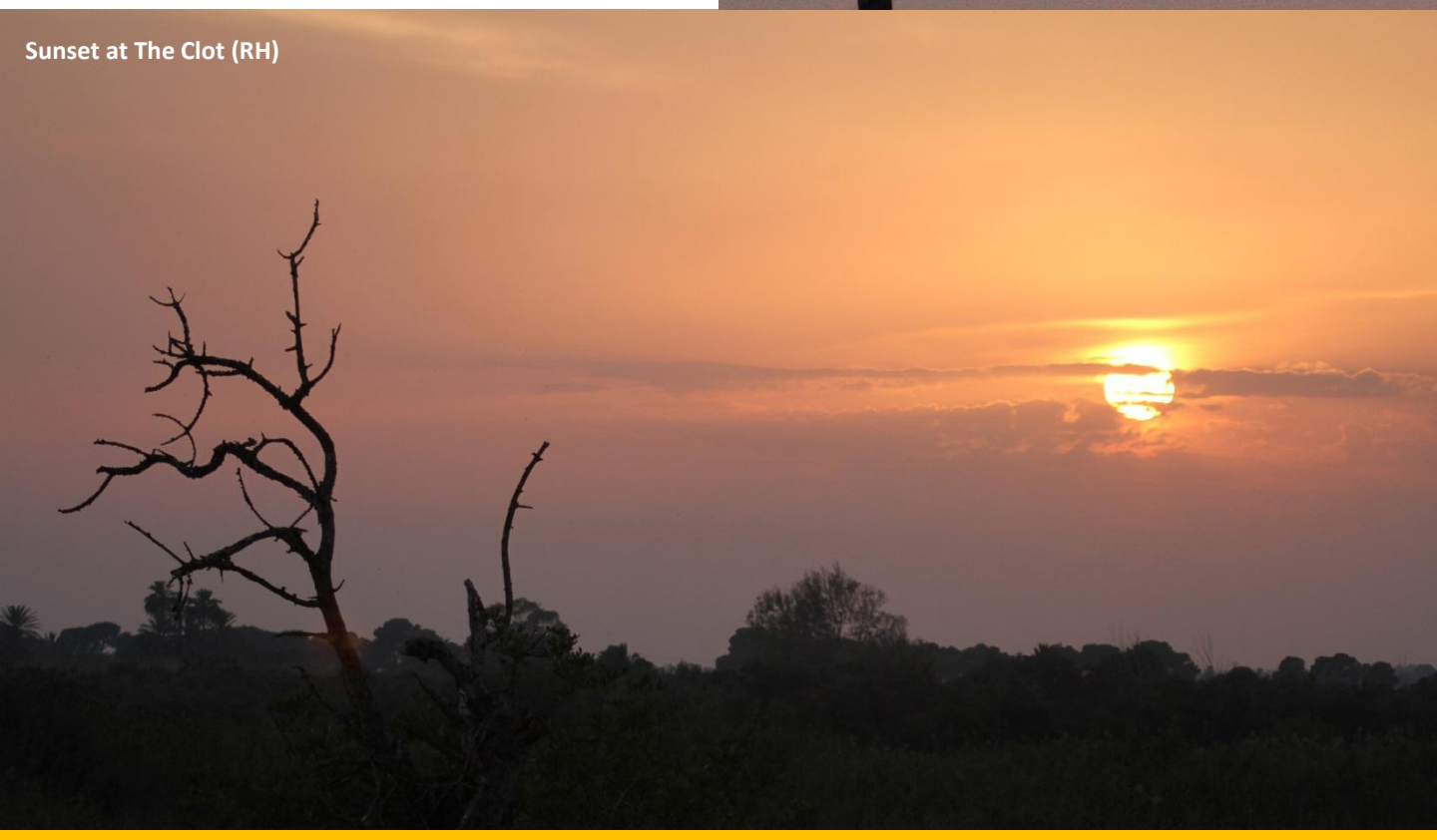
A **Little Owl** perched on the screen fence while **Reed Warbler** and **Goldfinch** worked their way through the reeds. **Spotless Starling**, **Carrion Crow** and **Woodpigeon** flew overhead. In the open water **Little Grebe**, **Coot**, **Moorhen**, **Mallard** and **Shoveler** were joined by a single male **White-headed Duck** – a 'lifer' in the first few minutes for most in the group.

Hidden in the bushes we heard the scratchy call of **Sardinian Warbler** and then Bryan picked out a distant **Stone Curlew** before two further birds flew a little closer. Moving on towards the hide we added **Southern Grey Shrike** and **Black Redstart**. From the hide itself we observed a flock of **Barn Swallow** feeding on the wing sweeping low over the water. **Teal**, **White Wagtail** and **Purple Swamphen** went about their business and an **Iberian Green Woodpecker** perched on top of a tree giving everyone amazing views. As the light faded and gave way to a beautiful sunset, we headed up the hill to a vantage point and watched huge flocks of **Cattle Egret** returning to roost.

At 7.30pm we called it a day and headed back to our hotel, taking in the first of many quick stops at the local Lidl for provisions. Dinner was at 8.30pm giving everyone the chance to chat and bond, reflect on the 35 birds seen already, and look forward to our first full days birding tomorrow.



Black Redstart (RH)



Sunset at The Clot (RH)

Sunday 9th October 2016: San Felipe, El Pinet and backroads of El Hondo

Breakfast at 8am was taken on the top floor of our hotel with wonderful panoramic views of the sun rising over Alicante Bay. At 8.30am were saddled up the vans and picked up Bryan on the way to **San Felipe Visitors Centre**. From the observation deck we admired a pair of **Squacco Heron** and a mixed flock of Little Egret, **Grey Heron** and a **Great White Egret** which towered over everything else.

Purple Swamphen (RH)

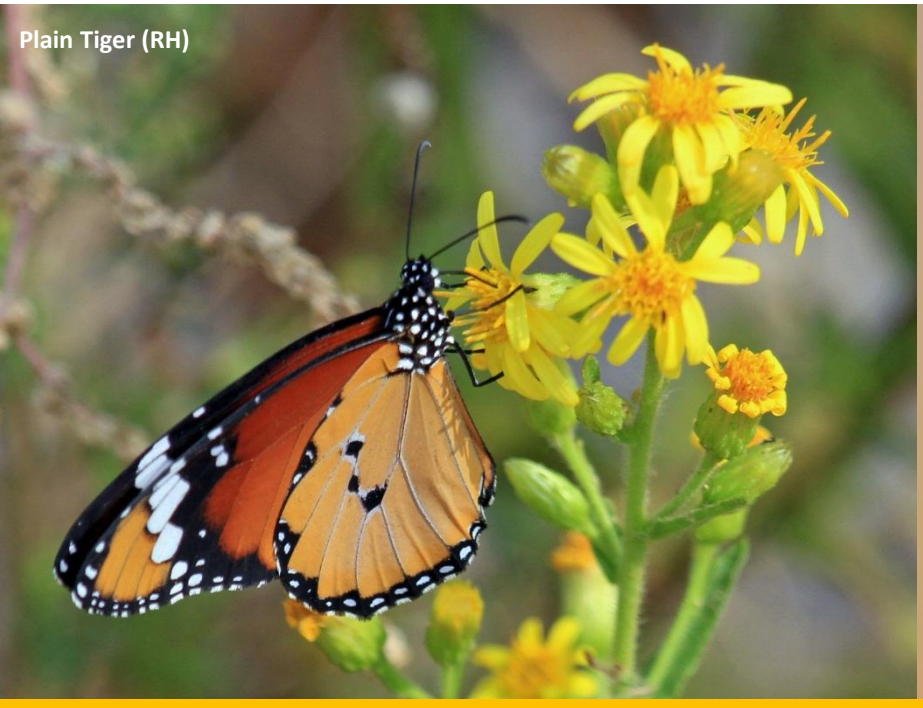
Red-knobbed Coot (RH)

Captive-bred **Red-knobbed Coot** mingled with common Coot and Moorhen, and a Purple Swamphen demonstrated its extraordinary feeding technique as it grasped aquatic vegetation in its claws and then passed it hand-like up to its big bright red beak.

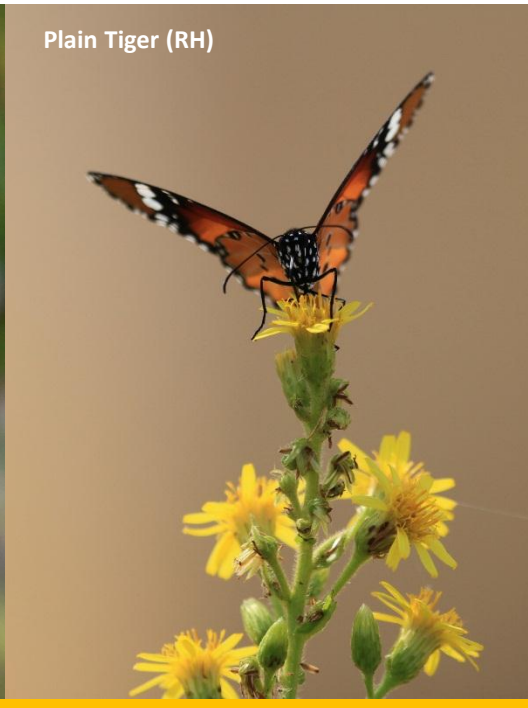
Great White Egret (LS)

Squacco Heron (RH)

In the visitor centre's garden we observed high numbers of **Plain Tiger** butterfly, including a white-morph variety, feeding on yellow ragwort-like flowers. From the wooden boardwalk we observed **Little Stint**, **Dunlin** and **Yellow Wagtail**. A **Kingfisher** flew past at high speed and a distant **Booted Eagle** soured high in the sky. A large flock of **Glossy Ibis** flew in front of the mountains as we 'pished' up first **Iberian Stonechat** and then **Bluethroat** from the low-growing salt-loving plants.



Plain Tiger (RH)



Plain Tiger (RH)

A quick stop at the tower layby at **Santa Pola saltpans** pulled in a distant **Osprey**, a large group of **Spoonbill**, and a **Slender-billed Gull**, in addition to repeat views of the birds seen here yesterday.

Next stop was **El Pinet lagoon** where **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Avocet** and **Sanderling** added to our wader list along with further views of Dunlin, Black-winged Stilt and Little Stint. Just to the right of the hide we observed a **Dartford Warbler** briefly as it skulked in the bushes before disappearing.

Avocet (RH)

Dunlin (RH)

Black-tailed Godwit (RH)

After a lunch stop at the Hostal Glacia on La Marina beach we moved on to **Vistabello Road**. Half the group visited the reedbed hide and half visited the recently re-opened hides near the South Gate. The first group observed a **Kingfisher** perched on the bridge over the irrigation channel but it flew off before anyone could get a photo! From the elevated hide we scanned the open water and observed small gatherings of **Black-necked Grebe** interspersed with the occasional Little Grebe and **Great Crested Grebe**. Five **Marsh Harriers** hawked and sparred over the top of the reed beds. The second group reported sightings of **Grey Plover** and **Grey Wagtail**. We re-grouped by the small pool on Vistabello Road and, as we observed eight feeding **Wood Sandpiper**, a pale form **Booted Eagle** flew right over the top of us giving us all spectacular views of its two tone black and white plumage.

Booted Eagle (RH)

Winchat (RH)

Southern Grey Shrike (RH)

Next stop was **Sandpiper Alley** which duly delivered multiple **Green Sandpiper**, and Palm Farm Track where a Little Egret posed nicely for photographs. Further down the track we picked up **Tree Sparrow**, **Whinchat**, **Red-legged Partridge,** Southern Grey Shrike and further sightings of Booted Eagle. As we headed back to the hotel our attention was drawn by Tim to some pheasant-like birds in the middle of a field. Closer inspection revealed approx. 20 **Little Bustard** – what a result! These birds are notoriously difficult to locate so the opportunity to view them was a real bonus.

Dinner at 8pm allowed everyone to compare trip lists and speculate on the birds we were likely to encounter on our trip inland tomorrow to the rolling plains of Bonete, Corral Rubio and Petrola.

Monday 10th October 2016: Bonete, Corral Rubio, Petrola and Yecla

We'd pre-arranged a takeaway breakfast of croissants, bread rolls, jam, and fruit juice so that we could leave the hotel relatively early at 7.45am and arrive at **Bonete** by 10am. After a quick coffee stop we turned off the main road and parked by the first field … and what a field! Within minutes we'd picked up 3 **Great Bustard**, 20 Little Bustard, 1 Stone Curlew and 8 **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. At one point we had Great Bustard and Little Bustard in the same scope view - "We can go home now" declared Trevor, just as a **Lesser Kestrel** flew overhead urging us to push on.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse (RH)

Little Bustard (RH)

Lottie (RH)

Great Bustard (RH)

Petrola (RH)

Petrola (RH)

Rural Spain (RH)

Rural Spain (EW)

Yecla to Caudete Track (RH)

Bonete (RH)

Next stop was **Corral Rubio** which had no water and sadly meant no birds so we moved on to **Petrola** lagoon. Here the water had a pungent aroma so we didn't stay long to observe the small flock of Greater Flamingo and a single distant **Pintail**. We re-joined the main road and took the next track to the far side of Petrola for a more fragrant lunch stop. Here Bryan started leaping around, dancing with joy as he locked a scope on a **Black-shouldered Kite** – what an awesome bird!

Black-shouldered Kite (RH)

Black-shouldered Kite (BT)

Northern Wheatear (RH)

Rock Dove (RH)

After an al fresco picnic lunch we moved on to the start of the Yecla to Caudete track which follows a valley bottom strewn with vineyards between two mountain ranges. Our attention was immediately drawn by the call of a corvid and as we looked up we saw two **Chough** mobbing a juvenile **Golden Eagle**! The Eagle then went on to deliver a once in a lifetime viewing experience as it circled effortlessly just a few hundred feet above our heads for 5 minutes. Eventually the bird tired of our company, peeled off and glided away disappearing over the ridge. After calming our excitement we continued along the track picking up **Northern Wheatear**, **Black Wheatear**, **Rock Dove** and a mixed flock of over 100 Chough and **Jackdaw** feeding on the ground. As we approached the end of the track we had distant views of two adult Golden Eagle circling high above the ridge.

What a day! At 6pm, with excited hearts and tired eyes we set off on the long 2 hour journey back to Santa Pola. There was only one topic of conversation at dinner that night – Golden Eagles. We had to remind everyone that we had started the day with Little Bustard, Great Bustard and Black-bellied Sandgrouse as these iconic birds had been usurped by the amazing once in a lifetime views of the Golden Eagle. I've only included a few of the many photos we took of this majestic bird otherwise we'd be in danger of filling this whole report up with images of just one bird … but what a bird!

Golden Eagle (RH)

Golden Eagle (RH)

Tuesday 11th October 2016: San Pedro, La Mata, Torrevieja and El Pinet

After breakfast we headed south to **San Pedro lagoon**. From the causeway between the lakes we got our first views of **Shelduck**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Common Sandpiper**, and repeat sightings of Slender-billed Gull, Sandwich Tern and Greater Flamingo. Dunlin posed nicely for photographs but a Kingfisher was not so obliging as it zipped at high speed up the drainage channel and out of sight.

Dunlin (RH)

Little Ringed Plover (EW)

Sandwich Tern (RH)

Bargain Birders at San Pedro (RH)

Next stop was **La Mata lagoon** where we shared our picnic lunch with the resident **Iberian Red Squirrels**. An Iberian Green Woodpecker, Hoopoe and **Robin** gave everyone reasonably close views. Other birds of note flitting amongst the tops of the pine trees included **Blackcap**, **Chaffinch**, **Long-tailed Tit** and **Great Tit**. Out on the lagoon itself there was a huge raft of Black-necked Grebe.

Iberian Green Woodpecker (RH)

Hoopoe (RH)

Iberian Red Squirrel (RH)

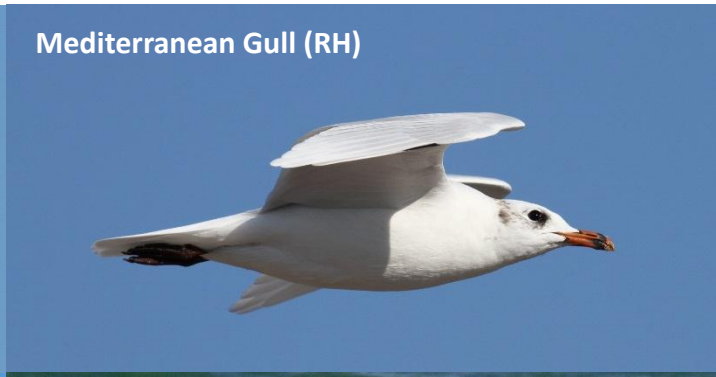
After lunch we drove to a site near **Torrevieja** famed for its resident population of Azure-winged Magpies and Monk Parakeets. We parked by the 'cat food gate' and walked down the track, instantly picking up the flock of c. 20 **Azure-winged Magpies** as they flitted from one side of the track to the other giving everyone repeated albeit very brief views. As we returned to the car 3 **Monk Parakeet** flew overhead, Long-tailed Tits perched on a wire and a **Firecrest** was feeding at the top of a pine.

Azure-winged Magpie (RH)

Long-tailed Tit (RH)

At 4pm we headed back to the beach at **La Marina** for liquid refreshments. From the balcony we observed a distant **Northern Gannet** out at sea, a small flock of Sanderling on the beach, Sandwich Terns plunging into the ocean after a fishy meal, and an impromptu gull ID lesson as Audouin's Gull, Mediterranean Gull and Yellow-legged Gull all drifted by at head-height. Bargain Birding with a beer!

Audouin's Gull (RH)



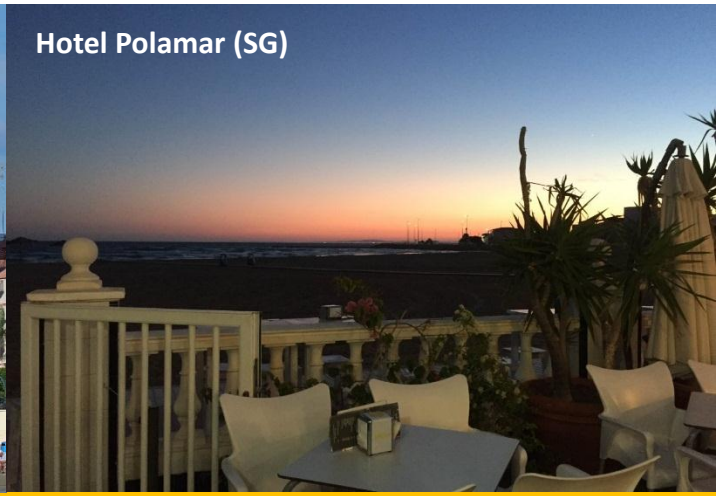
Mediterranean Gull (RH)

Yellow-legged Gull (RH)

Sanderling (RH)

We reluctantly tore ourselves away from the bar at 5pm and made a quick return visit to **El Pinet lagoon**. As before, Black-tailed Godwit, Avocet, Dunlin and Little Stint were feeding in the shallows, and Greater Flamingo resided in the deeper water. Bryan did get a brief view of a distant **Water Rail** and at the top of a pine tree a Southern Grey Shrike perched for all to see. At 6pm we returned to our hotel for dinner and an early night as we had to be up at 6am tomorrow to drive to Alcoy.

Hotel Polamar (RH)



Hotel Polamar (SG)

Wednesday 12th October 2016: Sant Cristofol Vulture Project & Font Roja

Today we set off at 7am as we had pre-arranged to meet Alvar Segui who leads the Griffon Vulture Conservation Project at Sant Cristofol near Alcoy. (NB: For those interested you can view videos of Alvar talking about his work at http://www.maquiaambiental.com/capturaderos-portatiles).

At 9.00am we arrived at the foot of the track leading to the feeding station and took a steady 30 minute walk to the top, picking up **Woodlark**, **Crossbill** and **Jay** on the way. At 9.30am we met Alvar at the entrance and after a brief introduction Alvar lead us through the gate and up the steps to the viewing hide. We slowly and quietly opened the hide flaps and could see 15 **Griffon Vultures** perched on the cliff ledge opposite, no more than 100m away. Alvar had arranged some bait in the form of a recently deceased camel which we observed being hoisted into place off the back of a lorry. We sat in silence in anticipation of a feeding frenzy. Indeed we sat for over 2 hours … with not a lot happening. Occasionally a vulture would walk to the cliff edge, hop off and soar high into the sky on the thermals. At one point there were over 30 vultures in the sky … but none showing even the slightest bit of interest in the dead camel. Guess that's birding for you … one day glorious Golden Eagle, next day lazy Griffon Vultures! Alvar filled the gap explaining that adult males of this magnificent bird of prey have a wingspan of 2.8m and weigh up to 13kg! At 12.30pm we decide to move on, and as we retraced our steps back down the mountain we picked up sightings of **Short-toed Treecreeper** and **Raven**.

Griffon Vulture Conservation Site (RH)

Vulture Hide (SG)

Griffon Vulture (RH)

Griffon Vulture (RH)

Sun-bathing Griffon Vulture (RH)

Griffon Vulture (RH)

Griffon Vulture (RH)

Griffon Vulture (RH)

Griffon Vulture (RH)

Griffon Vulture (RH)

Alcoy (RH)

Alcoy (SG)

At 1pm we drove the short distance to **Font Roja** on the opposite side of the valley for our lunch stop. We hadn't realised that today was a Bank Holiday in Spain so Font Roja was overrun with families and friends enjoying a picnic in the park … with so much human activity birds were few and far between. We did manage to get good views of Firecrest (Goldcrest is absent from this part of Spain), **Blue Tit** (which is uncommon in this part of Spain) and numerous Robin which over-winter here having travelled to escape the colder climes of Northern Europe.

Suddenly a rain shower saw most Spanish picnicers running for cover. We stayed out in the rain hoping to use 'titbit's of nuts and cake to tempt Crested Tit and Coal Tit down on to the picnic tables … but alas, the birds were sheltering from the rain too. When the rain cleared a band of musicians approached our group and burst into song … Bryan (being a musician himself) didn't need much encouraging and before long everyone was singing 'Sweet Molly Malone'.

At 4pm we left Font Roja and headed back to our hotel in Santa Pola for dinner at 8pm.

Blue Tit (RH)

Bryan, Simon & Cheryl (RH)

Singing in the rain (RH)

Font Roja (TR)

Thursday 13th October 2016: San Felipe, El Pinet and backroads of El Hondo

Torrential rain this morning forced us to switch our itinerary around and delay our visit to Maigmo Mountain until tomorrow. We used today as a 'tick chaser' day and revisited San Felipe, El Pinet and the back roads of El Hondo to try to pick up birds we'd missed earlier in the week.

At 10am our first stop was **San Felipe visitors centre**. We began birding in the car park 'pishing up' numerous Bluethroat and our first **Chiffchaff**. As some of the group ventured off to get a photo of **Linnet**, Bluethroat and Southern Grey Shrike, Simon and a few others caught sight of a **Wryneck** perched on a post but it quickly flew off before the rest of the group could get on it.

From the covered deck area over-looking the enclosed pool we saw a Great White Egret standing tall amongst a mixed group of Little Egret and Grey Heron. Purple Swamphen, Coot, Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot and Little Grebe all swam in front of the viewing area. **Spotted Redshank** and Squacco Heron added to the moment and a Kingfisher flew past at high speed, perched briefly then flew off.

We then moved on to the raised boardwalk over the larger pool and quickly located **Temminck's Stint** amongst a mixed group of Little Stint and Dunlin. A **Cetti's Warbler** sang in full view for a few seconds and then disappeared into the undergrowth. Large flocks of Glossy Ibis flew overhead.

Bluethroat (RH)

Temminck's Stint (RH)

Glossy Ibis (RH)

Then an interesting Reed Warbler-like bird caught everyone's attention as it moved amongst the reeds. Simon grew in excitement as he quickly ruled out Reed Warbler. We all trained our bins and cameras on the little brown bird, hoping to pick out some distinguishing features … no supercillum, a faint white eye ring … could this be Paddyfield Warbler or Marsh Warbler? Analysis of the photos later drew everyone to the same conclusion that we had seen a **Marsh Warbler**!

Marsh Warbler (RH)

Trevor gave us all a lesson on dragonfly ID with **Red-veined Darter, Lesser Emperor** and **Blue-tailed Dragonfly** all noted, and **Marsh Frogs** were seen in the pond in the garden next to the deck.

Red-veined Darter (RH

Lesser Emperor (RH)

After lunch we set off in search of an irrigated field, criss-crossing the tracks around **El Hondo**. All roads seemed to bring us back to 'Nancy's sex club' and each junction had its resident 'talent' touting for business in the afternoon sunshine.

We eventually found a rice paddy being irrigated and picked out **Snipe**, **Water Pipit** and **Blue-headed Wagtail** amongst the more numerous Yellow Wagtail, White Wagtail, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Ruff, Mediterranean Gull and Cattle Egret.

Flooded Rice Paddy (RH)

Snipe (RH)

Water Pipit (RH)

Cattle Egret (RH)

We then took the track known locally as **Sandpiper Alley** which delivered numerous Green Sandpiper in the drainage channel, a Booted Eagle sitting in a field, and a Common Buzzard soaring on high.

We enjoyed a late lunch stop with a return visit to the beach bar at **La Marina**. Sandwich Tern dived for fish just offshore, several Northern Gannet flew in the distance, and a shout for 'Diver' saw everyone rushing for their bins and scopes only to be dashed seconds later with disappointed shouts of "Shag"!

Once suitably refreshed we paid a quick stop at **El Pinet** lagoon and observed a distant Grey Plover, and closer views of Greater Flamingo, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, **Greenshank**, Dunlin and Little Stint. Two **Serin** flew overhead providing another 'tick' for our trip list.

En-route back to our hotel an **Osprey** flew over the **Santa Pola saltpan road**. At the hotel most headed straight for their rooms to get changed for pre-dinner drinks in the bar. Bryan, Simon and Tim opted for a quick spot of sea-watching from the harbour wall and were rewarded with distant views of **Balearic Shearwater** in amongst a flock of gulls tracking the incoming fishing boats.

Green Sandpiper (BT)

Greater Flamingo (RH)

Greater Flamingo (RH)

Little Egret (RH)

Friday 14th October 2016: Maigmo, Montnegre and Santa Pola

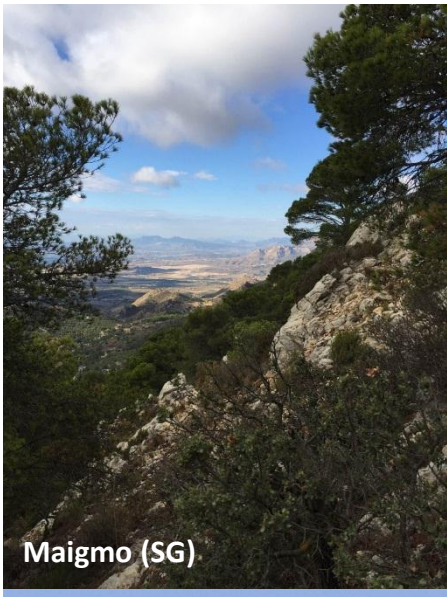
This was our last full day of birding day and we had high hopes of breaking through the 150 mark for our trip list. We began the day with a visit to **Maigmo Mountain** and on the lower slopes we quickly picked out two female Crossbill feeding on pine cones. Then a magic moment for Lesley as she caught sight of her first ever Crested Tit in a pine tree. Hugs all round and the odd tear from Lesley reminded everyone just how special birds can make you feel.

We drove to the car park at the top and observed a pair of Choughs 'playing' in the wind and a single **Crag Martin** dart across the sky. We took the short but steep walk to the summit and picked up Firecrest, Jay and **Short-toed Treecreeper** but dipped on the Alpine Accentor.

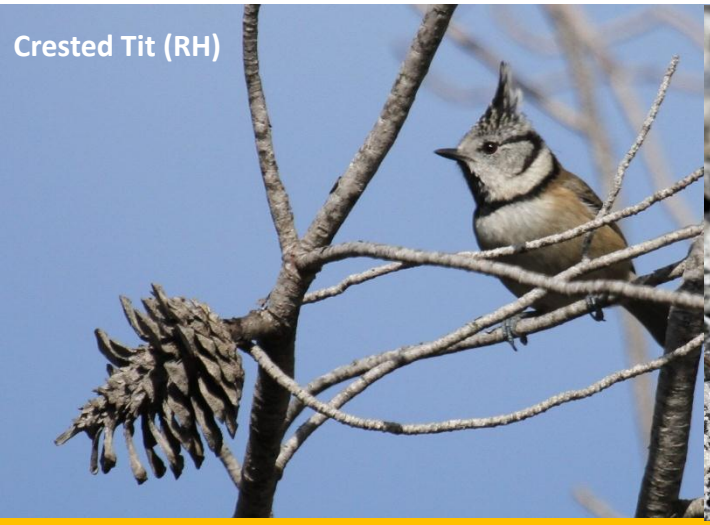
Next stop was **Montnegre**, a steep-sided valley known to be home to a pair of Bonelli's Eagle and Trumpeter Finch. From the bridge over the Rio Verde at Tibi we observed Grey Wagtail, Iberian Stonechat, Iberian Chiffchaff, House Martin, Barn Swallow, Hoopoe and Kestrel. Then Simon picked out a small flock of **Cirl Bunting** on hearing their call and confirm the 'tick' as four birds flew off into the distance.

Once in the valley itself we observed Chough displaying and Griffon Vulture soaring majestically on high. Then a few seconds of drama unfurled as a **Sparrowhawk** appeared, flew up the valley, turned 180 degrees, tucked in its wings, and jet-fighter-like swooped back down the valley at high speed.

We stopped for lunch in a layby overlooking multi-coloured rocks in a ravine and enjoyed views of Black Wheatear, Black Redstart, **Thekla Lark** and distant **Bonelli's Eagle** … but no Trumpeter Finch. On the road a **Praying Mantis** was eased gently to the safety of the verge.

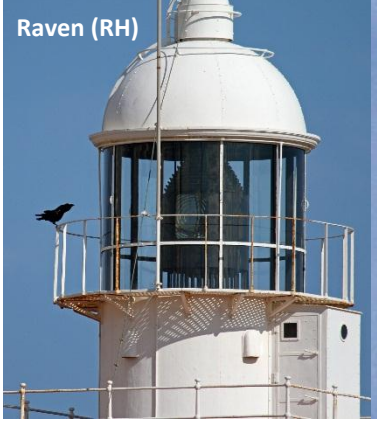

Maigmo (SG)

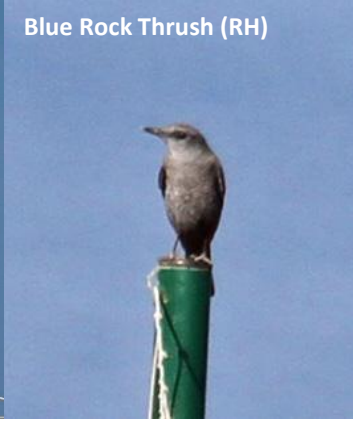
Crossbill (RH)


Crested Tit (RH)

Praying Mantis (RH)

Next stop was the scrub and cliffs around **Santa Pola lighthouse**. A Raven admired his own reflection in the parabolic mirror of the lighthouse lamp. Other birds of note included Hoopoe and **Greenfinch**. From the elevated sky-walk we scanned the cliffs below and soon picked out a pair of **Blue Rock Thrush**, first on the cliff face and then a little closer perched on a green fence post next t the lighthouse.


Raven (RH)


Blue Rock Thrush (RH)

Shag (RH)

Final stop of the day was **Santa Pola beach and harbour**. On the sand amongst the usual gathering of Audouin's Gull and Yellow-legged Gull were two **Lesser Black-backed Gull**.

Out at sea fishing boats were being tracked by mixed flocks of gulls and in amongst them we got distant but unmistakeable views of a **Balearic Shearwater** cutting a dashing figure with broad, rigid wings tipping one way then the other as it sheared just above the waves.

A Kingfisher whooshed past at high speed, and three distant Shags made their way back to their overnight roost on Tabarca Island … signalling that it was also time for us to head back to our own roost.

Bringing home the catch at Santa Pola harbour (RH)

After dinner a few in the group wanted to go looking for bats and Simon had a new bat detector he was keen to test out. First stop was a stand of pine trees on the Carabassi Road where Simon's detector picked up **Soprano Pipistrelle** and **Savi's Pipistrelle**. Next stop was the boardwalk leading to the beach at Los Arenals where the detector identified **Kuhl's Pipistrelle** and **European Free-tailed**. Last stop was the perimeter fence of the Clot de Galvany reserve where we added **Parti-coloured, Greater Noctule** and **Grey Long-eared** to our bat list. At 11.30pm we headed back to the hotel.

Audouin's Gull (RH)

Lesser Black-backed Gull (RH)

Yellow-legged Gull (RH)

Mediterranean Gull (RH)

Yellow-legged Gull (RH)

Saturday 15th October 2016: El Hondo North Gate

This was our last day in Spain, initially planned on the itinerary as a 'rest & relaxation' day to give everyone the opportunity for some birding down time and either just chill in the hotel or beach, or self-explore the sights and sounds of Santa Pola, Tabarca Island or Alicante town.

Pete, Cheryl, Lottie, Trevor, Steve and Sharon all chose the non-birding option, while the rest of the group chose to take advantage of the fact that the warden at El Hondo only opens the **North Gate** of the reserve for 3 hours every Saturday morning for a 'lock-in!".

We arrived at the North Gate at 8.20am and joined the queue of 8 other cars waiting for the gates to open at 8.30am. The warden duly arrived on time, unlocked the gate and the convoy proceeded down the track stopping off at various hides along the way. We began birding from the most distant hide, a 2-tier structure overlooking the lagoon.

Whilst eating our croissants we observed as the birdlife on the reserve welcomed in a new day. Coot, Moorhen, **Pochard**, **Red-crested Pochard**, Shoveler, Shelduck, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe and Black-necked Grebe were out on the open water.

Reeds echoed with the calls of Water Rail, **Little Bittern** and Cetti's Warbler. A Reed Warbler flitted amongst the vegetation in search of its first insect meal of the day.

A flock of feeding Little Egrets were rudely disturbed by the arrival of four much larger Great White Egrets which descended from on high in ever decreasing circles.

Kingfishers flew past repeatedly and in the distance a Marsh Harrier patrolled the reed beds. In the scope we got great views of two Water Rail feeding out in the open, and from the boardwalk we had close up views of White-headed Duck and Black-necked Grebe … but alas the Marbled Teal eluded us yet again.

Little Grebe (RH)

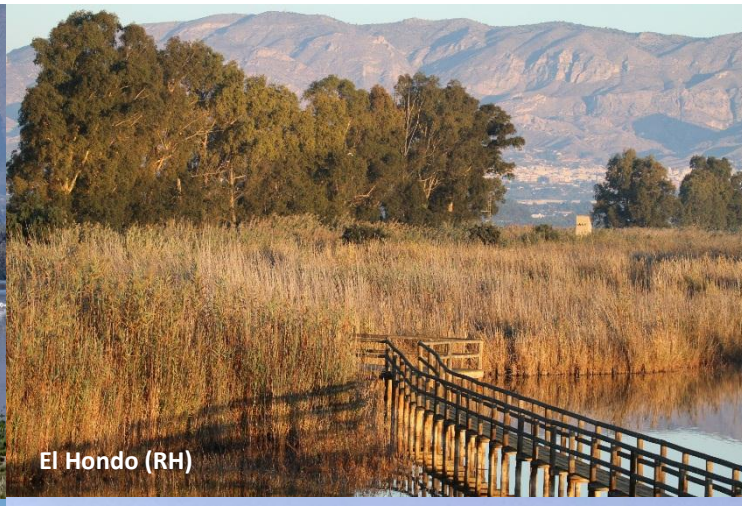
Black-necked Grebe (RH)

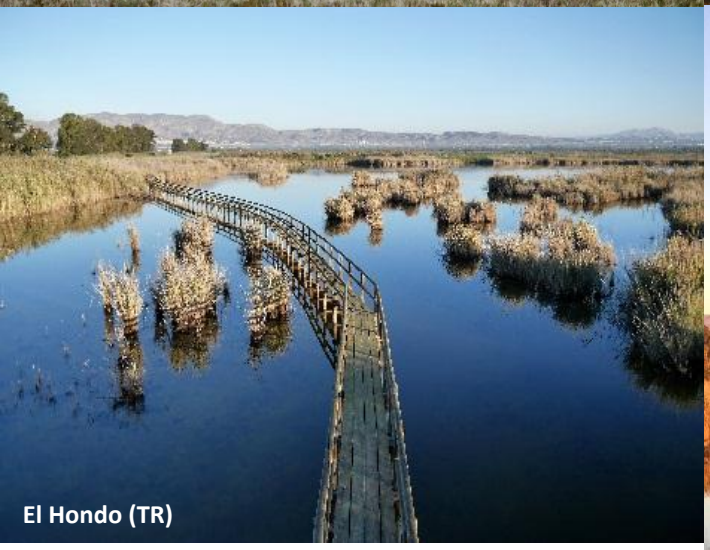
Great White Egret (RH)

White-headed Duck (RH)

We visited each of the other hides in turn and in the process observed an Osprey perched on top of a post; picked out **Gadwall** amongst a fixed group of duck; watched as a **Hobby** went in search of a dragonfly or two for breakfast; and caught the briefest of glimpses of a small flock of **Penduline Tit** working their way through the reeds. Robins were calling continuously all around us.

El Hondo (TR)


El Hondo (RH)


El Hondo (TR)

El Hondo (SG)

At 11.30am we made our way back to the entrance and drove to **San Felipe visitors centre** for one last go at Marbled Teal. However, on arrival we could see that the wardens had drained the main lagoon in order to cut back the reeds, leaving a muddy area devoid of birds apart from a few resilient Little Stint and Dunlin. So at 12.30pm we thanked Bryan for all his efforts and presented him with a card signed by all. Bryan was genuinely overwhelmed and admitted that he had thoroughly enjoyed the week and our company, just as much as we had enjoyed his.

We headed back to the hotel and dropped off our guests so that Bryan, Simon and myself could clean out the vans ready for our final journey back to the airport. We had time for one last meal in the beach-side restaurant which seemed a fitting end to a brilliant trip. Beef burger and chips for 4.5 euros never tasted so good! At 5.30pm we set off for the airport and caught our 8.10pm flight back to Gatwick, or in Shona's case, her 8.30pm flight back to Bristol.

Our final bird tally was **152 birds in 8 days**. The standout highlight for everyone was the amazing views we had of the juvenile Golden Eagle on the Yecla to Caudete track. Many in the group had 'lifers' on this trip including Simon (Black-bellied Sandgrouse) and myself (Balearic Shearwater). Nigel and Judy had no fewer than 31 'lifers' on this trip!

Our butterfly list comprised **Dappled White**, **Painted Lady**, **Clouded Yellow**, **Lang's Short-tailed Blue**, **Grayling** and **Plain Tiger**. Dragonflies noted were **Blue-tailed**, **Lesser Emperor** and **Red-veined Darter**. Significant others included **Praying Mantis**, **Green Marsh Frog** and **Iberian Red Squirrel**.

Thank you from 'Bargain Birding Club':

On behalf of 'Bargain Birding Club' thank you to all guests travelling on our second overseas trip to Spain. Special mention must go to Tim and Judy's eagled-eyed talent for spotting birds, and to Trevor's field skills and great knowledge of butterflies and dragonflies. Thanks as always in Alicante must go to Bryan Thomas. His passion for birding and life in general is infectious and he worked tirelessly to recce the sites weeks in advance of our trip. Finally, no Bargain Birding Club trip would be the same without Simon Ginnaw's amazing talent for identifying birds from their call and their jizz, and his always calm demeanour and passion to share his knowledge with all, tailored to each individuals skills and knowledge makes him one in a million! Thanks also must go to the staff at Hotel Polamar, and to Yolanda, Noelia and the ever-smiling Beatriz who made us feel welcome and looked after throughout our whole stay. We look forward to seeing you again in the spring!

"Thank you SO much for inviting me along and for allowing me the opportunity to guide in the impressive Costa Blanca region, and to work alongside the legend that is Bryan Thomas – I have learnt loads! I really am so grateful for the guiding opportunities you offer me as they are such valuable opportunities to share the wonder of the natural world. I am free on the dates given next year and would be hugely grateful for the opportunity to guide again in Spain." (Simon Ginnaw).

Guest Testimonials:

"Hi Richard, can't thank you enough for teaching me, showing me what birds are, and inspiring me by capturing natures precious moments. It's been such a great holiday and I've also made great friends along the way to. Looking forward to birding again soon, camera in hand. I will be sure to educate my friends". "So impressed with your knowledge Simon! Take care". (Lottie Saville).

"Fabulous trip … thank you so much for the wonderful bird guiding" (Nigel and Judy Davies).

"Great tour Richard, many thanks for all your hard work. Excellent!". "Thanks Simon, a great week - thanks for sharing your knowledge - look forward to seeing you on the tele!" (Tim Rea).

"Well done Richard, Simon and Bryan – we had a really wonderful week of super birds, great accommodation and food. The birding camaraderie has been very enlightening and we have enjoyed every minute of it". (Lesley Frizell & Ed Woodhouse).

"A great big thank you for such a lovely trip and a Crested Tit xx" (Lesley Frizell).

"Thanks for a wonderful holiday!" (Ed Woodhouse).

"Well done Richard! Really enjoyed my first birding trip! Awesome!" "Dear Simon, thank you so much, you are now my oracle on birding. Amazing!" (Cheryl Hicks).

"Thank you Simon! Brilliant advice. We've learnt so much!" (Sharon & Steve Wells).

Greater Flamingo (RH)

Useful references:

- Costa Blanca Bird Club (www.costablancabirdclub.com)
- Griffon Vulture Project (www.maquiaambiental.com/capturaderos-portatiles)
- A Birdwatching Guide to the Costa Blanca (Malcom Palmer, 1994)
- Where to watch birds in Southern Costa Blanca and surrounding areas (Graham Critchell)
- Field Guide to Birds of Britain & Europe (Paul Sterry, 2010)
- Photographic Guide to the Butterflies of Britain & Europe (Tom Wolman, 2001)

All photos in this trip report were taken by and reproduced with kind permission from Richard Hanman (RH), Simon Ginnaw (SG), Ed Woodhouse (EW), Charlotte Saville (CS), Tim Rea (TR) and Bryan Thomas (BT).

TRIP LIST - 152 BIRDS (8th Oct. to 15th Oct. 2016)

Grey Heron	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	Little Bustard	Robin
Squacco Heron	Red-legged Partridge	Great Bustard	Bluethroat
Glossy Ibis	Stone Curlew	Iberian Green Woodpecker	Black Redstart
Little Egret	Ringed Plover	Wryneck	Black Wheatear
Cattle Egret	Little Ringed Plover	Short-toed Treecreeper	Northern Wheatear
Great White Egret	Kentish Plover	Booted Eagle	Iberian Stonechat
Little Bittern (H)	Grey Plover	Bonelli's Eagle	Whinchat
Eurasian Spoonbill	Lapwing	Golden Eagle	Blackbird
Greater Flamingo	Black-winged Stilt	Marsh Harrier	Song Thrush
Common Crane	(Pied) Avocet	Hen Harrier	Blue Rock Thrush
Shag	Dunlin	Common Buzzard	Spotless Starling
Cormorant	Little Stint	Osprey	Zitting Cisticola
Little Grebe	Temminck's Stint	Black-shouldered Kite	Cetti's Warbler
Great Crested Grebe	Sanderling	Griffon Vulture	Reed Warbler
Black-necked Grebe	Turnstone	Common Kestrel	Marsh Warbler
Coot	Common Sandpiper	Lesser Kestrel	Sardinian Warbler
Red-knobbed Coot	Green Sandpiper	Hobby	Dartford Warbler
Purple Swamphen	Curlew Sandpiper	Peregrine Falcon	Chiffchaff
Moorhen	Wood Sandpiper	Sparrowhawk	Blackcap
Water Rail	Redshank	Little Owl	Firecrest
Common Pochard	Spotted Redshank	Southern Grey Shrike	Crested Tit
Red-crested Pochard	Greenshank	Barn Swallow	Coal Tit
Mallard	Ruff	Red-rumped Swallow	Blue Tit
Teal	Snipe	House Martin	Great Tit
Pintail	Bar-tailed Godwit	Crag Martin	Long-tailed Tit
Shelduck	Black-tailed Godwit	Sand Martin	Penduline Tit
White-headed Duck	Woodpigeon	Yellow Wagtail	House Sparrow
Shoveler	Collared Dove	White Wagtail	Tree Sparrow
Gadwall	Rock Dove	Blue-headed Wagtail	Rock Sparrow
Black-headed Gull	Azure-winged Magpie	Grey Wagtail	Chaffinch
Audouin's Gull	Magpie	Skylark	Greenfinch
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Carrion Crow	Crested Lark	Goldfinch
Yellow-legged Gull	Jackdaw	Thekla Lark	Serin
Slender-billed Gull	Raven	Calandra Lark	Linnet
Mediterranean Gull	Chough	Woodlark	Corn Bunting
Sandwich Tern	Jay	Meadow Pipit	Cirl Bunting
Northern Gannet	Hoopoe	Tree Pipit	Kingfisher
Balearic Shearwater	Common Crossbill	Water Pipit	Monk Parakeet

Squacco Heron (BT)

Painted Lady (RH)

Glossy Ibis (CS)

Birding the Costa Blanca

Great Bustard (library photos courtesy of BT)