Clockwise from top left: Eurasian Griffon, Eurasian Black Vulture, European Bee-eater and Purple Swamphen. For a more extensive selection of photos taken on our Portugal tours please visit our Gallery feature at www.limosaholidays.co.uk

Tour Leader: Stephen Daly
This was a bird watching and nature holiday in two of the richest wildlife areas in Portugal. Our base for the first three nights was in the capital of the "Baixa Alentejo", in the old city of Beja. The area is known as Portugal’s bread basket and is laced with a patchwork of rich agricultural rolling hills with a mixture of vineyards, olive and cork-oak groves. This was all spectacularly bathed in a kaleidoscope of spring flowering meadows and was the perfect setting to explore and find different species of birds, as well as other stunning wildlife. White Storks sat on hundreds of nests on churches, posts or in trees, incubating eggs or caring for newly hatched chicks.

Butterflies were not so easy to find as the first few days were chilly and grey but it didn’t stop us seeing birds. Towards the end of the tour we did see Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady, Brimstone, Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown Green-veined White and Spanish Festoon. A Scorpion, some different cricket and grasshoppers species and an Oil beetle were also found.

We found many raptor species including the huge Black and smaller Griffon Vultures. Many Black winged Kites were enjoyed as well as the rare Bonelli’s Eagle, Short-toed and Booted Eagles, which were regularly encountered. Both Lesser and Common Kestrels were also watched and a distant Merlin, and migrating Honey Buzzards.

We has brief views of a Mongoose on the Alentejo and the beautiful Iberian Hare was also a delight to watch in the vast open landscape.

The second part of this eight day tour was spent in Sives, the oldest city in Portugal with ancient stories that reflect the turbulent backgrounds of invasion, battles and occupation, either by Romans, Vandals, Moors, or feuding royal families within Portugal. With the coastal estuaries and small lakes close by we watched the fantastic sight of flocks of Greater Flamingoes taking flight and we came across Eurasian Spoonbills in flight or resting as well as waders, terns, ducks and passerines of the salt-marshes of Castro Marim. Here, Stone Curlews, migrant Spectacled Warblers and the rarer Lesser Short-toed Larks displayed and sang and a Great Spotted Cuckoo flew close past us calling. Little Bittern also put on fly-pasts for us at Quinto da Lago where Purple Swamphens, Great Reed Warblers called constantly and Whiskered and Little Terns snapped up insects on the surface of the water or plunged dived for tiny fish.

At the Lands End at Cape St Vincent we took time to explore the seventy-five meter high limestone cliffs and headland on the most westerly point on the European mainland. The vegetation described as 'maquis' is unique and Cape St. Vincent National Park, contains one of the richest floras in Europe. This flora and vegetation is typical of a Mediterranean climate region, with plants adapted to survive long, hot, dry summers. These ‘xerophytic’ adaptations produce a typical ‘Mediterranean’ vegetation type of scrubby woody and spiny shrubs and bushes, interspersed with spring flowering annuals and bulbs. Peregrine Falcons, Red-billed Choughs, Blue Rock Thrushes, Black Redstarts and spectacular displays of mating Alpine Swifts performed breathtaking aerobatics, often at eye-level, at the southern cliffs.

We spent time at the steppe countryside in the south near Mertola and Castro Verde including the area Nature Park named Parque Natural do Vale Guadiana. This area is now sparsely populated but it was once a thriving copper mine source dating back to the Roman occupation. Great and Little Bustards performed on cue as did all the Iberian harriers with Montagu’s ‘dancing’ over the fields and Marsh, and Hen Harriers were watched hunting in various locations. Over the valleys, riverine valleys of reservoirs and rivers, we watched a male Golden Oriole sing as Nightingales, Great Spotted and Common Cuckoos flew past Southern Grey and Woodchat Shrikes. Stonechats and Corn Buntings were a common sight and an adult Black Stork flew close by our group.

Strolling through the countryside we saw and heard Hoopoes, Azure-winged Magpies and Jays calling from the cork oaks, holm oaks and wild olive trees, as Woodlarks, Crested Larks and Thekla Larks flew overhead singing and displaying.

This was a lovely spring tour that had all the essential elements of a good all-round birding and nature holiday. The weather brightened up warm enough to wear shorts in the south and we were fortunate to see some extraordinary nature sights as well as taste the local food, enjoy some of the architecture, history and culture of two of Portugal’s special places. Thanks to all for a great time and I’m sure that after such happy memories that our paths will cross again one day.

*Stephen Daly, May 2009*
SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED
(Total number of species recorded by group = 132)

Birds

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*
- Fairly common seen most days in open farmland

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*
- Heard only on four days again in open farmland and grassy areas

Gadwall *Anas strepera*
- Present in small numbers at Ludo Farm, Faro on 27th and seen at Lagoa dos Salgados on April 30th and again on May 2nd

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
- Common throughout the tour

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
- Present in small numbers at Ludo Farm, Faro on the 27th and seen at Lagoa dos Salgados on the 30th and again on the 2nd

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*
- Seen on the 27th at Ludo Farm then again on the 3rd at Quinto da Lago laguna

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*
- As above

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
- Seen on the 27th at Ludo Farm then over 20 birds at Lagoa dos Salgados on the 30th and once again on the 3rd of May

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*
- Two birds seen displaying at Quinto da Lago on the 3rd

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*
- 80+ birds seen feeding then flying in an extraordinary display at Lagoa dos Salgados on the 30th

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*
- On adult bird seen flying in the Alentejo on the 28th

European White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*
- Common and widespread

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*
- Few birds seen at Ludo Farm on the 27th and again at Lagoa das Salgados on the 2nd

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*
- Two males and one female seen on the 3rd at Quinto da Lago laguna

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
- Common

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
- Common

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
- Widespread and common at rivers, wetlands and marsh areas

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*
- Distant views out into the Atlantic on the 1st at Cape St. Vincent

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
- Seen in the salt marshes on the 27th at Ludo Farm and again on the 30th at Lagoa dos Salgados

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*
- Two seen on Cape St. Vincent on the 1st

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
- Common, seen most days

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*
- Two, a male and a female at Cape St Vincent on the 1st

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*
- Two birds seen in the Alentejo on the 28th

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*
- Two seen on the 28th and one on the following day in the Alentejo region

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
- Seen every day, very common

Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus*
- Seven birds seen on the 30th in the Alentejo

Eurasian Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus*
- Twelve birds seen on the 28th in the Alentejo and six birds on the 29th near Mertola

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*
- Seen most days in small numbers

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
- Singles seen on the 30th near Beja and on the 2nd at Castro Marim

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
- One on the 28th near Beja and three on the 30th near Castro Verde

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
- A few seen most days

Bonelli’s Eagle *Aquila fasciata*
- One adult seen on the 28th in the Alentejo
Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*
Four birds seen on the 28th north-east of Beja, four birds on the 30th near Castro Verde, one near Sagres and one bird on the 2nd at Lagoa dos Salgados

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*
Nine birds on the 29th and four on the 30th near Castro Verde

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*
Six on the 29th near Castro Verde and four on the 30th near Mertola

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*
Eight birds seen on the 30th at Lagoa dos Salgados, two on the 2nd at Castro Marim and six birds at Quinta da Lago on the 3rd

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
Seen in suitable habitat

Common Coot *Fulica atra*
Common in the right habitat

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*
Three on the 29th near Mertola and one on the 30th near Castro Verde

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Common in suitable habitat

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Seen in small numbers on the 27th at Ludo Farm, again on the 30th and 3rd

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
Two birds seen on the 30th near Castro Verde

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
A few birds on the 27th at Ludo Farm, six birds on the 30th and the 2nd at Lagoa dos Salgados

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
A pair seen on the 2nd at Castro Marim

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Common in suitable habitat

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*
Surprisingly twelve birds seen on the 2nd at Lagoa dos Salgados

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
Seen on the 1st at Ludo Farm and again on the 2nd in greater numbers at Lagoa dos Salgados

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
One bird seen in flight on the 3rd at Ludo Farm

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Common in suitable habitat

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Fairly common in suitable habitat

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Several seen at a number of sites in small numbers

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
One at Ludo Farm on the 27th and again at Castro Marim on the 2nd

Sanderling *Calidris alba*
Fairly common with other waders in suitable habitat

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*
Seen in small numbers at Ludo Farm on the 27th and on the 3rd

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
Ten birds at Ludo Farm on the 27th and six on the 3rd, twenty plus birds at Castro Marim on the 2nd

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*
Fairly common in suitable habitat

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*
Fifteen on the 30th at Lagoa dos Salgados, two on the 2nd at Castro Marim and one bird on the 3rd at Ludo Farm

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
Common and seen most days

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus intermedius/graeellsii*
Very common and seen most days

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
Fairly common and seen most days

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*
Seen on the 27th and the 4th at Ludo Farm and also at Castro Marim

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*
One bird seen on the 30th near Beja

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*
One bird seen at the 30th at Lagoa dos Salgados and again three there on the 3rd

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*
Six birds seen on the 2nd at Castro Marim

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*
Six birds seen on the cliffs of Cape St. Vincent on the 1st

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*
Twelve birds seen on the 29th near Castro Verde
Rock Dove *Columba livia*
Feral pigeons noted widely and daily, but wild-type Rock Doves seen more in the Alentejo and at Cape St. Vincent’s cliffs.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*
A few birds seen or heard most days.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
Very common.

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*
Two birds seen on the 30th north of Beja and one bird seen at Castro Marim on the 2nd.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
Heard most days of the tour.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*
Stunning views of ten birds at Cape St. Vincent.

Common Swift *Apus apus*
Low numbers most days.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*
Very common, seen each day.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
One bird seen on the 3rd in Silves.

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Seen in low numbers on every day.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*
Very common in the Alentejo, less birds in the south, but seen every day.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
Seen in low numbers in suitable habitat.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
Seen in ones and twos most days.

Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus*
Seen every day mainly in flight.

Common Magpie *Pica pica*
Seen every day in the Alentejo.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
At least fifteen at Cape St. Vincent on the 1st.

Eurasian Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*
Common at Cape St. Vincent.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*
Low numbers each day in the Alentejo, scarcer in the south.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*
Fairly common most days.

Great Tit *Parus major*
In suitable habitat.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*
In suitable habitat.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
Low numbers in the Alentejo.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
Very common, seen every day, some feeding newly fledged young.

Northern House Martin *Delichon urbicum*
Very common.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*
Seen most days of the tour in low numbers.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*
Good numbers on the 29th above Beja and a few seen on the 1st near Cape St. Vincent.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachyactyla*
Fifteen plus seen on the 1st near Cape St. Vincent.

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*
Six seen on the 2nd at Castro Marim.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*
Common.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*
Seen in low numbers on most days of the tour. Common at Cape St. Vincent.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Few at Cape St Vincent on the 1st.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
More common in the Alentejo.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*
Seen most days.

Cetti’s Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Fairly common and widespread, good views from the hotel at Silves.
Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*
One heard on the 27th at Ludo Farm and one seen there on the 3rd

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*
Four seen on Quinta Lago on the 3rd

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
One seen and heard singing at Quinta do Lago on the 3rd

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*
One heard on the 3rd Quinta do Lago

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
A few seen here and there

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*
One seen in flight at Castro Verde on the 30th

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*
Two seen on the 1st near Cape St. Vincent and one male singing and displaying on the 2nd at Castro Marim

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*
Fairly common and widespread

Northern Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
One seen at Silves plus one or two heard

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*
Fairly common and seen every day

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Common and widespread

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
More usually heard than seen

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
Heard most days, but seen three on the 1st at Silves

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Four on the 1st at Cape St. Vincent and one female seen on the 3rd above Loulé

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*
Widespread and common

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*
One female at the 1st at Cape St. Vincent

Western Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica*
Two males on the 29th near Castro Verde and one at Cape St. Vincent on the 1st

Blue Rock-thrush *Monticola solitarius*
Good views of these lovely birds on the 29th near Castro Verde, on the 30th close to Almodaovar and again above Loulé on the 3rd

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Common

Spanish Sparrow *Passer Hispaniolensis*
Fairly common in the Alentejo with great views of large flocks

Yellow-backed Weaver *Ploceus melanopechphalus*
One bird seen on the 3rd at Quinto da Lago

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*
Present at our Hotel at Silves with great views on a pre-breakfast walk on the 2nd and again on the 3rd

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
A few Lagoa dos Salgados and at Ludo farm and Quinto da Lago

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Three Lagoa dos Salgados

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*
One seen on the 29th in the Mertola area and three birds seen on the 1st at Cape St. Vincent

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
A few birds seen in mostly in the north

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*
Fairly widespread and common

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Very common and widespread with lots of juvenile birds to be seen

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
Fairly common on the tour

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*
Locally common and widespread in both areas

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*
Two adults seen at Mertola on the 29th

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirtus*
One juvenile bird seen at Mertola on the 29th
Mammals
Mongoose
Iberian Hare
Roe Deer
Common Rabbit

Reptiles
Moorish Gecko
Iberian Rock Lizard
Iberian Wall Lizard
Stripe-necked Terrapin

Butterflies and Dragonflies
Brimstone
Clouded Yellow
Painted Lady
Moroccan Orange Tip
Green-veined White
Common Blue
Tortoiseshell
Red Admiral
Meadow Brown
Spanish Gatekeeper
Spanish Festoon
Small Copper

Other Insects
Scorpion *Buthus occidentalis*
Oil Beetle
Mammoth Wasp *Scolia flavifrons*
Carpenter Bee *Xylocopa violacea*
Egyptian Grasshopper *anacridium aegyptium*
Migratory Locust *Locusta migratoria*