**PORTUGAL BIRDWATCHING - PLACES TO VISIT**

**Western Algarve - Alvor to Cape St Vincent & north to Aljezur**

**Alvor Estuary** - The west bank of the estuary does not get a mention in the site guide books but is well worth a visit, especially just before high tide. Access is from N125 at the east end of Odiáxere. Head for Val do Lama and after a few kilometres take the track on the left across the railway line towards the fish tanks and estuary. The road from Lagos via Meia Praia and Palmares golf course is now blocked.

**A Rocha** ringing station at Alvor is only open Thursdays from 10:00am. *Red-necked Nightjar* and *Little Owl* used to be common here but have largely disappeared over the last few years. An alternative site can be found by taking N125 east to Portimão, then north on N124 towards Monchique. At Porto de Lagos, turn right (east), staying on N124, towards Silves. After a kilometre or two and before reaching Odelouca, there is a small bar on the left hand side of the road, just before a bridge, with a dirt road running north between the two. This road runs through excellent *Red-necked Nightjar* habitat and the birds can sometimes be seen sitting out on the road after dark.

**Barranco Joao Vaz -** Leaving the **N125** at Raposeira take the first road/track on the right; this is an interesting drive down a river valley with diverse habitats to a deserted sandy bay. The road was blocked a little over half way in 2012 with what appeared to be temporary work taking place.

**Odelouca Valley -** from **N125** follow the **N124** road north of Portimão towards Silves and head towards Odelouca. The river can be viewed from a number of convenient roadside stops.

**Monchique** - Foia, the highest point in the Algarve at 2,959 feet is the target. There are a number of tracks into the woods from the car park near the summit.

**Casais** - 1.5 km west of the village of Casais is a nice looking area of cork oak woodland on either side of the road, where a dirt track angles away from the left hand side of the road, just after a white bus stop. There is just enough room to park one car at the start of this track. - *Crested Tit* and *Short-toed Treecreepe*r are possible.

**Morgardo de Reguengo** Golf Complex - From Portimão take the N124 north, signed Monchique. Within a couple of kilometres of passing the motorway is a left turn signed Reguengo and a Golf sign. Follow the golf signs which will take you to a dam with a lake on your right. 200 metres on is the clubhouse, turn right here and follow this track which will bring you to a second lake.

**Paul de Lagos** This small but intriguing area is situated just northeast of Lagos. The habitat differs greatly from the nearby Alvor estuary due to the existence of abundant freshwater and reedbeds and a number of birds are found here that are usually more difficult to find in other areas, such as *Penduline Tit* in the winter and *Great Reed Warbler* in the breeding season as well as a range of migrants and commoner breeding species. We didn’t try this site in 2012 but on our last stroll by the marina in Lagos we spotted a booth offering guided boat trips around the reedbeds. The web site <http://www.riverwatch-lagos.com> appears to have fallen into disuse but other contact details for anyone wishing to try a boat trip are +351 967 221 483 or +351 967 528 500 and email riverwatch\_lagos@yahoo.co.uk.

**Burgau Marsh -** Budens Marsh, or as it is known locally **Boca do Rio**, is just west of Burgau and between Burgau and Salema. The habitat comprises of marshy river valley, an old reed bed, scrub and some mature trees. Good for *Melodious Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Fan-tailed Warbler, Nightingale, Iberian ChiffChaff, Reed Warbler* and *Common Waxbill*.

**Almadena Sewage Works** - just off the N125 at the Almadena roundabout. 8 settling pools at the roadside viewed from the perimeter fence with convenient parking.

**Quinta dos Carricos** Water treatment works. - From Lagos heading west on **N125**, turn left towards Salema shortly after the town of Budens & water treatment works are 150 metres on the right. View the lagoons from around the perimeter fence.

**Cape St Vincent/Sagres -** The best tracks are not shown in the site guide books, but start immediately after the **Taverna de Beliche.** Turning right by the Taverna, two tracks head north, straight inland and run either side of a small strand of trees for c1000m. At the end of the trees the tracks join and head right (east) along another stand of trees towards a trig point on a small hill, which is visible almost as soon as you first join the tracks. The main track, a little further along the road towards the Cape, is now tarmac as far as the dilapidated farm buildings, where it turns east and heads inland and continues as far as Vila do Bispo. Good for *Chough, Little Bustard, Tawny Pipit* and raptors on migration.

As regards **Sagres** itself, the best sea-watching spot is the headland by the Henry the Navigator luxury hotel rather than from the Fort. Turning left at the island at the end of the **N268**, follow the minor road through the town towards the harbour. The hotel is set back on the right almost at the end of the town and before the road starts going downhill to the harbour. The track at the end of the hotel road leads onto the headland.

**Martinhal -** Leaving Sagres on the **N268** towards Vila Do Bispo take the fist right turn leading Martinhal. The small tidal pool, which usually contains brackish water as only the highest tides breach the entrance, can contain a variety of waders and gulls. But, more importantly, the beach bar **Nortada** (not the first, surfers bar) has excellent food, is open all year and is ideal for lunch when visiting the area. In August 2012 the tidal pool was dry and appeared to have been this way for some time.

**Carrapateira -** North of Carrapateira in suitable habitat by the roadside and we have previously seen *Cirl Bunting* on most trips.

**Alzejur** - there is a good river valley stretching for 5 km and taking you through farmland, orchards, river-bank scrub, gallery forest, scrub covered hills, water meadows, and saltpans to a tidal lagoon, extensive dunes and a broad sandy beach. This valley is signposted from the **N120** about 1 km north of Aljezur as **Praia Amoreira**. Take the left turn at the side of the Swimming Pool/Leisure Centre and follow the road down the valley to the coast.

**Algarve Wetlands - East from Alvor to Castro Marim**

**Pera Marsh -** Can be a little difficult to find at first, but from **N125** east of Alcantarilhaat traffic light junction, take road to Armação de Pêra and almost immediately take a minor road left across a narrow bridge. Over the bridge veer right (straight on goes into Pêra) and follow this road around the outskirts of the town, going up a slight incline to an “island” at the top of the rise (circular building in fields to the right) and turn right (main road carries on to Albufeira) taking the small road down to the beach. This road and Pera Marsh are to the west of the golf course – Salgardos (aka **Lagoa dos Salgados**).

**Vilamoura** - There is a good freshwater lake viewable on the road north of Falesia beach and the nearby Laguna Golf Course is also worth a visit.

**Quinta do Lago/Ria Formosa -** I think the best way to view this extensive site is to head for the beach car park (fee €1.10 per hour) at Quinta do Lago at the end of the seven islands on the Ave André Jordon**.** Take Junction 12 from the E1 Motorway and follow the signs for Almancil and then Val de Lobo/Quinta do Lago. Turn left at the t-junction for Quinta do Lago and follow this road all the way to the Golf Complex and Shopping Mall (where there are public toilets) and the road merges into the Ave André Jordan. Turn left at the end of the car park, by the boardwalk across the saltmarsh, and follow the track around the edge of the golf course. There is now a hide overlooking some of the lagoons as well as the hide at the golf course lake. The track leading from the golf course (beyond the lake hide) to Ludo Farm has a sign for the emergency exit road from the airport – don’t worry. The salt pans between the golf course and the farm are excellent for waders etc.

**Ludo Farm**. At the main entrance/exit to the airport is a large roundabout with statues of various folk looking up. When approaching from Faro, turn right at this island and then take the next right. Follow the road until you come to an island at which turn left onto the good dirt road that leads to the farm area. The first km or so of the track is through fairly open woodland. Ludo Farm Lake usually has good numbers of various ducks, grebes and gulls. A little further on, the saltpans hold good numbers of various waders plus flamingos and yet more gulls. Drive on until the end of the track and park under some trees next to the golf-course. You can walk the track through the woods and onto the golf course path. Area is good for *Cetti’s Warblers*. After a while you reach the hide which overlooks the lake.

**Dunas Douradas** - Following the **N125** and **E1** towards Faro leave the motorway for Almancil and follow the signs for Quinta do Lago. On the road between here and Quinta do Lobo take the road signed Dunas Douradas and follow this to the beach at Praia Garrao. To the right of several restaurants are two natural ponds, edged with a thick reed bed. There is also a small pine woodland here for *Turtle Dove* and *Crested Tit*. This is a delightful oasis amongst a great deal of development with *Little Bittern, Hoopoe, Azure-winged Magpie, Bee-eater* and *Serin* possible with *Red-Crested Pochard* on the water.

**Ria Formosa** reserve has its HQ and Educational Centre on the eastern side of the town of **Olhao** - Quinta de Marim: access is from a roundabout on the **N125** just as you leave Olhao in the direction for Tavira, the brown reserve sign is clearly visible as you approach the island, turn right then 250 metres through a small village brings you to the gates. (Follow the tourist signs to 'Ria Formosa' from the N125 on the eastern edge of Olhao, go across the railway and the entrance is an unobvious gate on the left.) There is a small entrance fee, currently €2.50. An interesting mixture of woodland, heathland, freshwater pools, saltwater marsh and saltwater pools that are flooded by the tide twice daily.

**Tavira Salt Pans -** Situated to the SE of the town and bordering on the Parque Natural da Rio Formosa. On the eastern outskirts of Tavira, signposted from a roundabout next to the large "Gran Plaza" shopping complex, are a series of salt pans divided by a narrow-ish road. Follow signs for the Hotel Vila Gale Albacora.

**Santa Luzia -** Approximately 2Km east of Pedras D’el Rei and south west of Tavira is the little fishing village of Santa Luzia. It’s well worth a visit because it has a number of excellent fish restaurants and lots of gulls hoping for an easy meal from the boats or just loafing about. Just beyond the village, on the left verge is a large anchor and just a few meters further on the right is a track which leads to a large area of salt pans. The track splits into two after a short distance. Drive to the end of the left hand track – past some pigeon lofts, and park just before another track goes off the right. Highlights can include *Audouin’s* and *Slender Billed Gulls* and *Caspian Terns*. The car parking area can also be productive with *Pied Flycatcher, Sardinian* and *Melodious Warblers* and possibly *Subalpine Warbler*. The whole area is excellent.

**Monte Gordo -** Pine woods for *Crested Tit* & *Short-toed Treecreeper* and possibly *Iberian Green Woodpecker* *Ssp*. *sharpei* and the Iberian race of *Long-tailed Tit* *Ssp. irbii.*

**Castro Marim -** The salt pans to the right/east of **N122** around Castro Marim are well worth exploring at any access point, for waders and also Little Bustard. Almost immediately after coming off the Motorway at the Castro Marim/Villa Real de Santo Antonio turn off and heading south towards the town there is a track on the left into the salt pans. The wetlands around this area are all part of the Reserva Natural do Sapal de Cartro Marim e Vila Real St. Antonio and there is a modern Visitor Centre with wash rooms which can be reached by taking the first track (which is signed for the reserve) on the right, heading north after coming off the Motorway.

“There is a site north of Castro Marim off the Mertola road at a place called **Azinhal**. Once through the village the road soon turned into a dusty track and we used the directions from the 'Breeding Birds of Portugal' as our guide. Our target birds here were *Rufous Bush Robin, Spectacled Warbler* and *Orphean Warbler*. The site consisted mainly of scrubland with dry riverbeds and patches of prickly-pear cactus.”

**Inland & Central – Baixo Alantejo**

**Castro Verde/Mertola**

Take the **A22-IC4** motorway to junction 10 then head north up the **A2-IP1-E1** motorway. There is a €5 toll for this road. Come off the motorway at junction 12 and take the **E803** east through Castro Verde and on to the **N123**.

Some seven kilometres east of Castro Verde on the **N123** there is a bridge over the Ribeira de Cobres: spot for *Rufous Bush-robin, Nightingale, Cetti’s Warbler, Bee-eater, Spanish Sparrow, Montagu’s Harrier* and *Red-rumped Swallow*.

“At Sao Marcos, the road opposite to the south is only a track with a gate across it and a sign indicating the area is a reserve for *Great Bustards*. It seems the map in Gosney is a bit inaccurate, and the road south to Rolao leaves the **N123** a few km west of Sao Marcos.

Retracing our route a little way on the N123, we then did the circuit shown in purple on the map. We proceeded south to Monte dos Viseus, but plenty of scanning produced no sign of Bustards. We then turned east and passed the tower described by Gosney, although there now seems no access to it from the road - plenty of keep out signs all around. Still no hint of Bustards, but just east of Monte das Serrais we had another stop and scan, which hit gold in the form of a splendid if distant group of at least 8 *Great Bustards*- the location is shown approximately by the green spot on the map.

From then on, driving around the 'Great Bustard circuit', we found well over 20 individuals in 5 - 6 different groups, including an obliging couple back on the Rolao to Monte dos Viseus road. The approximate locations are shown by the other green spots on the map.”



*Great Bustards* can also be found from a farm track near San Marcos de Ataboeria, but not on the Bustard Reserve, along with *Little Bustard* and *Quail*. Once the road enters the Guadiana Natural Park on the way to Mertola, *Booted Eagle* becomes a frequent roadside distraction and Minas de San Domingo sometimes has *White-Rumped Swift* and *Golden Oriole*.

The LPN reserve called Herdade de Sao Marcos stretches across the plains between Guerreiro in the south and Sao Marcos da Ataboeira to the north. This is not public access land, though in many of the site guides for the area it is marked as open access. The LPN own the land and will offer guided tours for just 17€ per person. The exit from the LPN land is directly opposite the turning in to Sao Marcos da Ataboeira. Heading west from the exit on to the N123 after a short distance there is a right hand turn on to a track to Aparica (a small farm). Down this track there is a small lake and between the track and the lake there is a chance of *Black-bellied Sandgrouse*. Passing the farm buildings there is a track alongside the lake/reservoir where you can park up to have a walk around. *Great Reed Warbler* is possible in the waterside rushes. A smaller pool of water further down the track is also worth a look.

**Access in the SPA Castro Verde**

It is thanks to the **Liga da Proteção da Natureza (LPN** <http://www.lpn.pt/Homepage/default.aspx?tabid=2164&code=en> **Birds in Castro Verde** - includes map of the area <http://projectos.lpn.pt/index2.php?id_projecto=29&layout=1&lang=3>**)** for the continued existence of high quality steppe habitats in this region. In 1993 the LPN purchased 5 properties in this area (total: 1700ha.) at a time when the whole region was under imminent threat of becoming forested with non-native eucalyptus forest. This would have meant the loss of one of the most important areas of its kind in Europe. Not only did the LPN manage to prevent this from happening on land they purchased but also, through a successful lobby, actually caused a complete turnaround within the government and achieved SPA status for the whole area in 1993.

Unfortunately, excessive pressure from visiting birdwatchers in recent years has driven the LPN to prohibit free access onto their land (all entrances have large green gates labelled LPN and usually clear signs depicting a design with a Little Bustard’s head and a tractor). These gates should always be closed but as some local farmers tend to leave them open it encourages un-informed birders to just drive in. (Always close them if you see them open!). Due to the increasing numbers of visiting birdwatchers and the proximity of the tracks to Great Bustard leks some disturbance has been unavoidable. Sadly, a few people have even walked across managed habitats in the breeding season, usually in attempts to get closer photographs. Because of this, the LPN have desperately been trying to halt access onto their land - this has been difficult because of lenient Portuguese laws and also because local farmers need to have access to their land by thoroughfare.

**LPN Castro Verde Environmental Education Centre:** **“Centro de Educação Ambiental de Vale Gonçalinho”**

It is strongly suggested that anyone visiting the area for the first time makes a visit to this centre; it’s an ideal way to start the day being only some 10 mins drive north-east from Castro Verde. Tel: (00351) 286 328 309 (Usually closed on Sundays and Mondays).

One can visit this centre freely from 9am - 5 pm. There are free walking trails here that are very good for *Little Bustard, European Roller, Lesser Kestrel* and *Calandra Lark* and to a lesser extent, *Great Bustard* and *Black-bellied Sandgrouse*. The staff speak excellent English and will give birdwatching advice for the whole region, including details of recent interesting sightings. There is a selection of free informative leaflets (donations welcome!).

**To reach the Centro de Educação Ambiental de Vale Gonçalinho:**
Take the Beja road (IP2) from Castro Verde - soon one will see an adjacent (the old road) road to the right. Get on this at the first opportunity at around 2.5 kms from Castro Verde. Continue in the Beja direction and after around another 2 kms a well-made track to the right is clearly signposted for the centre. Drive down here for approx 1 km (looking out for *Calandra Larks* and *Little Bustards*!) until you come to a long white building - you are at the centre.

**CONTACTS**

**Georg Schreier** - <http://www.birdwatching-algarve.com/> Also does Pelagic trips from Fuzeta (between Olhoa and Tavira) Georg is based in Faro, Algarve, Portugal. 2½ to 3 hours €38pp. Contact Georg by *e-mail:* **georg@birdwatching-algarve.com** or call: ++351 936129716.

**Simon Wates** - <http://www.algarvebirdman.com> based in Lagos - For more information and bookings contact Simon by email: simonwates@sapo.pt or mobile phone (00351) 912 824 053

**Pescamar Sport Fishing** - Shark fishing trips from Lagos: up to 6 hours for €50 pp. <http://www.pescamar.info/html/the_boat.html>

**Birds & Nature** - <http://www.birds.pt/field-tours>

**TIDE TIMES - FARO** <http://tides.mobilegeographics.com/calendar/year/1881.html>

<http://www.hidrografico.pt/previsao-mares-faro.php> use Google toolbar to translate from Portugese.

**BIRDS TO LOOK OUT FOR:-**

**WESTERN ALGARVE**

Resident breeding species seen throughout the year include: European Shag, Little and Cattle Egrets, White Stork, Bonelli’s Eagle, Peregrine, Water Rail, Little Bustard, Stone-curlew, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover, Yellow-legged Gull, Hoopoe, Common Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker (Iberian race *sharpei*), Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Skylark, Woodlark, Crested and Thekla Larks, Black Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's, Sardinian and Dartford Warblers, Crested Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Southern Grey Shrike, Azure-winged Magpie, Red-billed Chough, Raven, Spotless Starling, Common Waxbill, Serin, Hawfinch, Cirl, Rock and Corn Buntings.

Migratory breeding species from April onwards include: Short-toed Eagle, Little Tern, Red-necked Nightjar, Alpine and Pallid Swifts, European Bee-eater, Wryneck, Short-toed Lark, Tawny Pipit, Red-rumped Swallow, Common Nightingale, Black-eared Wheatear, Reed, Great Reed, Melodious, Subalpine and Spectacled Warblers, Iberian Chiffchaff, Woodchat Shrike, Golden Oriole.

Wintering birds (in addition to the resident breeding species): Northern Gannet, Cory’s and Balearic Shearwaters (fairly regular), Common Scoter, Booted Eagle (occasional), Hen Harrier, Common Buzzard, Golden and Grey Plovers, Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Whimbrel, Snipe, Turnstone, Greenshank, Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Sanderling, Great Skua, Audouin’s Gull (occasional), Sandwich and Caspian Terns, Richard’s Pipit (difficult), Water Pipit, Crag Martin, Alpine Accentor, Bluethroat, Ring Ouzel, Firecrest, Penduline Tit, Spanish Sparrow, Rock Sparrow (occasional).

**ALGARVE WETLANDS**

Resident breeding species possible on visits to one or more wetland sites throughout the year include: Little and Cattle Egrets, White Stork, Red-crested Pochard, Common Pochard, Water Rail, Purple Swamp-hen, Little Bustard, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover, Yellow-legged Gull, Hoopoe, Common Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker (Iberian race *sharpei*), Crested and Lesser Short-toed Larks, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's, Sardinian and Dartford Warblers, Short-toed Treecreeper, Southern Grey Shrike, Azure-winged Magpie, Spotless Starling, Common Waxbill, Serin, Corn Bunting.

Migratory breeding species possible on visits to one or more wetland sites include: Purple Heron, Little Bittern, Little Tern, Collared Pratincole, Red-necked Nightjar, Alpine and Pallid Swifts, European Bee-eater, Short-toed Lark, Red-rumped Swallow, Common Nightingale, Reed, Great Reed, Melodious and Spectacled Warblers, Woodchat Shrike,

Passage and wintering birds possible on visits to one or more wetland sites (in addition to the resident breeding species): Northern Gannet, Balearic Shearwater, Common Scoter – all off-shore, Greater Flamingo, European Spoonbill, Shelduck, Wigeon, Gadwall, Common Teal, Pintail, Garganey, Shoveler, Red-crested Pochard, Common Pochard, Ferruginous Duck (rare), Tufted Duck, Osprey, Booted Eagle (occasional), Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard, Stone-curlew, Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Golden and Grey Plovers, Lapwing, Knot, Sanderling, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Ruff, Snipe, Black and Bar-tailed Godwits, Whimbrel, Curlew, Greenshank, Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Turnstone, Mediterranean Gull, Audouin’s Gull, Sandwich and Caspian Terns, Water Pipit, Bluethroat, Penduline Tit, Spanish Sparrow (occasional).

**BAIXO ALANTEJO**

Look for Calandra Lark, Corn Bunting, Montagu’s Harrier, Lesser Kestrel and Black Kite, Great and Little Bustard Short-toed, Booted and Bonelli’s Eagles all breed in the general area and use the grasslands as regular hunting grounds. Other species that breed in this region include Stone-curlew, Great Spotted Cuckoo, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Pallid Swift, Woodlark, Short-toed, Crested and Thekla Larks, Tawny Pipit, Crag Martin, Black-eared Wheatear, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Cetti’s, Great Reed and Melodious Warblers, Woodchat and Southern Grey Shrikes, Golden Oriole and Spanish Sparrow as well as the omnipresent Azure-winged Magpie and Hoopoe. Both Collared Pratincole and Gull-billed Tern occur in the area regularly and sometimes breed, depending on the water levels at key sites. In an undisclosed area Spanish Imperial Eagles have recently set up territories and by employing great care and patience they can often be seen soaring over the area. Eurasian Black and Eurasian Griffon Vultures use the area almost daily on their searches for carrion. Black-bellied Sandgrouse and Red Kite are common whilst Hen Harrier, the occasional Peregrine, Merlin and Golden Eagle are sometimes seen.

**BUTTERFLIES**

For details of all common butterflies see <http://www.algarvebirdman.com/default.asp?o=13080>

**BOOKS**

If you have the old version, the new **Gosney** update – **Finding Birds in Southern Portugal** – has 9 extra pages covering the following “new sites”:

\* Lago de Salgado (Pera Marsh)
\* Vilamoura area (Falesia lagoon and Parque Ambietal)
\* Portas de Rodao
\* Barroca d'Alva
\* Guerreiro

**David Mason** (with some thanks to several web sites)

**August 2012**