

# Southern Portugal

## 14-21 September 2004



*Cory's Shearwater, SW of Lagos 18.9.*

This is a brief and summarized report from a combined birding and family trip to southern Portugal during mid-September 2004. Except for a half-day at sea and a full day's excursion to Sagres most of the bird watching was restricted to the early morning hours.

Each morning was spent at Ponta Grande, a weakly defined point just west of Albufeira on the Portuguese south coast. This area consists mainly of shrub land with patches of more dense vegetation as well as orchards and smaller agricultural fields. In all the area seems to be well suited both for observations of migrating passerines and seabirds.

The weather during the week was fairly constant with clear sky and temperature around 30°C daytime, but dropped just below 20°C during nights and mornings. The wind was however rather variable and pended mostly between N and NE, and averaged approximately close to 4 m/s. The wind-speed often peaked during the nights and calmed just after sunrise. Nights with no or light wind produced a lot of resting and feeding passerines at Ponta Grande.

Some dissappointments: Very few raptors were noted during our visit, and some bird species that we expected to be numerous wasn't seen at all, e.g. European Turtledove, European Serin and Greater Short-toed Lark. The same thing was noted during a trip in this area seven years ago. Declining populations, wrong migration route, bad timing or bad luck?

### **Systematic list of observations:**

**Common Pochard** *Brunand Aythya ferina*

15 flying E at Ponta Grande 17.9. During the week another two flocks of diving ducks were seen migrating east. Probably this species as well.

**Red-legged Partridge** Rödhöna *Alectoris rufa*

3 seen at Ponta Grande 19.9. At least one was heard at the same location 20.9.

**Common Quail** Vaktel *Coturnix coturnix*

1 was flushed in the orchards/fields just E of Ponta Grande 19.9.



*Cory's Shearwater, SW of Lagos 18.9.*

**Cory's Shearwater** Gulnäbbad lira *Calonectris diomedea borealis*

Recorded daily at Ponta Grande in the following numbers: 15, 50, 30, 30, 5, 5, 70. At Cabo de Sao Vicente less than 10 were seen 15.9 and sea, SW of Lagos 50 were noted 18.9. The pattern of the under wing and bill size (later judged from photos) indicates the Atlantic subspecies *C. d. borealis*.

**Sooty Shearwater** Grålira *Puffinus griseus*

1 individual was seen briefly, but at close range, at sea SW of Lagos 18.9. It proved rather difficult to eliminate a dark Balearic Shearwater on plumage alone, but slower wing strokes, narrower and longer wings and a more well-built body gave clues.

**Balearic Shearwater** Balearisk lira *Puffinus mauretanicus*

At Ponta Grande following numbers were noted: 10 16.9, 8 17.9 and 30 20.9. At sea SW of Lagos 15 were seen 18.9. The plumage variation was rather extensive, but no bird came close to an average Mediterranean Shearwater *P. yelkouan*, and likewise, at the other end of the variation, no bird was as dark as a Sooty Shearwater.

**Northern Gannet** Havssula *Morus bassanus*

Recorded daily at Ponta Grande in the following numbers: 10, 50, 40, 30, 10, 5, 30. At sea SW of Lagos c.100 were seen 18.9.

**Great Cormorant** Storskarv *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Singles were noted at Ponta Grande and at sea SW of Lagos. All together less than 10.

**Cattle Egret** Kohäger *Bubulcus ibis*

By far the most common heron. Recorded daily in varying numbers. Largest concentration noted was 35 just E of Lagos 18.9.



*Balearic Shearwater, SW of Lagos 18.9.*

**Little Egret** Silkeshäger *Egretta garzetta*

Singles (or few together) were seen almost daily mainly in wet land habitat, but occasionally also in dryer areas.

**Grey Heron** Gråhäger *Ardea cinerea*

Not common and wasn't recorded daily.

**Black Stork** Svart stork *Ciconia nigra*

A juvenile bird was seen soaring together with 6 Egyptian Vultures just E of Sagres 15.9.

**White Stork** Vit stork *Ciconia ciconia*

1 at Faro airport 14.9 and 2 adult birds at their respective nest close to the marina in central Lagos 18.9. Surprisingly few.

**European Honey Buzzard** Bivråk *Pernis apivorus*

1 E of Albufeira 14.9 and 1 juvenile E of Sagres 15.9.

**Egyptian Vulture** Smutsgam *Neophron percnopterus*

6 subadults (probably 2y-birds) soaring together with a black stork just E of Sagres 15.9.

**Montagu's Harrier** Ängshök *Circus pygargus*

A juvenile bird was seen at close range soaring above Ponta Grande (and left towards Africa) 16.9.

**Osprey** Fiskgjuse *Pandion haliaetus*

A probable Osprey was distantly seen migrating S at sea SW of Lagos 18.9.

**Common Kestrel** Tornfalk *Falco tinnunculus*

Singles were recorded less than daily.

**Eurasian Coot** Sothöna *Fulica atra*

A concentration of c. 30 was recorded in a water bunker on a golf course close to Villa Moura 17.9.

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** Strandskata *Haematopus ostralegus*

1 migrating E was seen at Ponta Grande 16.9.

**Black-winged Stilt** Stytlöpare *Himantopus himantopus*

A single bird was seen just E of Lagos 18.9.

**Common Ringed Plover** Större strandpipare *Charadrius hiaticula*

A few noted at Ponta Grande, Villa Moura and at sea SW of Lagos.

**Sanderling** Sandlöpare *Calidris alba*

A single juvenile bird was seen in the harbour at Sagres 15.9.

**Whimbrel** Småspov *Numenius phaeopus*

3 birds were recorded in the harbour at Sagres 15.9.

**Common Sandpiper** Drillsnäppa *Actitis hypoleucos*

Singles were heard or seen almost daily at Ponta Grande.

**Ruddy Turnstone** Roskarl *Arenaria interpres*

Singles were seen flying E at Ponta Grande 15.9 and at sea SW of Lagos 18.9.

**Pomarine Skua** Bredstjärtad labb *Stercorarius pomarinus*

A very probable pale adult (without streamers) was seen rather distantly at sea SW of Lagos 18.9.

**Unidentified Skua** Obest. labb *Stercorarius sp.*

1 at Ponta Grande 16.9 and 1 at sea SW of Lagos 18.9. Both very distant, and probably involved Parasitic or Pomarine Skua.

**Great Skua** Storlabb *Catharacta skua*

1 at Ponta Grande 15.9 and 1 at the same place 16.9. 2 were seen at sea SW of Lagos 18.9.

**Black-headed Gull** Skrattmåå *Larus ridibundus*

Commonly seen along the coast and in other wet land habitats.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** Silltrut *Larus fuscus graellsii/intermedius*

Very common along the Atlantic coast. Most individuals showed plumage characters and moult pattern that seemed to fit well with *L. f. graellsii*, but the variation was vast, and birds similar to the *L. f. intermedius* breeding in SW Sweden were also seen, as well as birds showing intermediate plumage. A few adult individuals were very dark mantled and seemed to approach *L. f. fuscus*, although they structurally differed. Some juvenile birds were very similar to Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* but based on the juveniles (of both species) that still seemed attached to their parents, the Lesser Black-backed Gull tended to show a broader black terminal bar in the tail, and a more unmoulted juvenile mantle. I do not know if those observations are relevant or not in a larger sample.



*Lesser Black-backed Gull, Ponta Grande 15.9.*

**Yellow-legged Gull** Medelhavstrut *Larus michahellis*

Very common along the Atlantic coast. Mostly adult and subadult birds; juveniles were surprisingly outnumbered. The primary moult of the adult birds was fairly consistent, and more or less all were in active moult somewhere in the outermost four primaries (many showed growing p8-10, whilst other showed a retained and abraded p10 and growing p7-9). See Lesser Black-backed Gull above for a short comment concerning the moult of the mantle in juveniles.



*Yellow-legged Gull, Lagos harbour 18.9.*

**Herring Gull** Gråtrut *Larus argentatus argenteus*

Some Herring Gulls were noted along the coast, but lack of time and knowledge made us less observant of their geographical origin. It seems probable though, that they belong to the subspecies *L. a. argenteus* from NW Europe.

**Sandwich Tern** Kentsk tärna *Sterna sandvicensis*

A few (in total close to 10) were seen along the coast during sea watching.

**Whiskered Tern** Skäggtärna *Chlidonias hybrida*

1 adult bird in transitional plumage was seen very close up when resting together with Black-headed Gulls on a wire over a small stream just W of Villa Moura 17.9.

**Feral Pigeon** Tamduva *Columba livia*

Commonly seen everywhere.

**Eurasian Collared Dove** Turkduva *Streptopelia decaocto*

Commonly seen everywhere.

**Little Owl** Minervauggla *Athene noctua*

At Ponta Grande singles were seen or heard almost daily. Also noted at Tavira 17.9 and Lagos 18.9.

**Pallid Swift** Blek tornseglare *Apus pallidus*

One very probable Pallid Swift was briefly seen from the car at Cabo de Sao Vicente 15.9.

**Alpine Swift** Alpanseglare *Apus melba*

Recorded daily in low numbers at Ponta Grande. Largest concentration noted was a flock of 8 flying E 20.9.

**Common Kingfisher** Kungsfiskare *Alcedo atthis*

1 at Ponta Grande was seen or heard most days (probably the same bird), and 1 was seen at the marina in Lagos 18.9.

**Eurasian Hoopoe** Härfågel *Upupa epops*

At Ponta Grande following was noted: 1 14.9, 1 16.9 1 17.9, 3 19.9 and 2 20.9.



*Eurasian Hoopoes, Ponta Grande 19.9.*

**Crested Lark** Tofslärka *Galerida cristata*

Commonly seen every day.

**Wood Lark** Trädlärka *Lullula arborea*

1 at Ponta Grande 17.9.

**Sand Martin** Backsvala *Riparia riparia*

Singles or small concentrations were seen at Ponta Grande several mornings.

**Barn Swallow** Ladusvala *Hirundo rustica*

Common (but not in large concentrations) all over the region.

**Red-rumped Swallow** Rostgumpssvala *Hirundo daurica*

At Ponta Grande the following daily totals were noted: 10, 15, 7, 8, 15, 13, 3. Red-Rumps were also seen in singles or in small flocks at many other locations in the region, e.g. 6 together along the road in the W part of Albufeira 14.9.

**Common House Martin** Hussvala *Delichon urbicum*

Commonly seen every day.



Tawny Pipit, Ponta Grande 19.9.

**Tawny Pipit** Fältpiplärka *Anthus campestris*

At Ponta Grande 3 were noted 17.9 and 3 on 19.9. Figures include both migrating and resting birds.

**Tree Pipit** Trädpiplärka *Anthus trivialis*

Commonly noted on migration at Ponta Grande every morning.

**Yellow Wagtail** Gulärta *Motacilla flava ssp.*

Numbers between 1-10 were recorded every morning at Ponta Grande. Unfortunately no one was seen on the ground (despite hard work), and therefore we do not know which subspecies was involved. Probably *M. f. flava/iberiae/flavissima*.

**Grey Wagtail** Forsärta *Motacilla cinerea*

Smaller numbers were noted on migration at Ponta Grande every morning: 1, 5, 4, 2, 2. 1 was also heard above the marina in Lagos 18.9.

**White Wagtail** Sädesärla *Motacilla alba alba*

1 adult at the artificial lakes in the low hills NE of Silves 19.9 was the only observation.

**Bluethroat** Blåhake *Luscinia svecica cyanecula*

1 adult male was seen feeding on the ground near a leaking water pipe at Ponta Grande 16.9. The bird showed a more extensively blue throat-bib than *L. s. svecica* does this time of the year. The white spot was rather ill-defined at the upper end, and a pale-buff area continued on the upper throat, towards the bill.

**Black Redstart** Svart röstjärt *Phoenicurus ochruros*

1 male was seen at the Fortress of Sagres 15.9.

**Common Redstart** Röstjärt *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Singles noted at Ponta Grande (not daily).

**Winchat** Buskskvätta *Saxicola rubetra*

Fair numbers recorded every morning at Ponta Grande. Daily maximum c. 10 16.9.

**Common Stonechat** Svarthakad buskskvätta *Saxicola torquatus*

1 male at Cabo de Sao Vicente 15.9, and 1 male crossing the highway E of Lagos 18.9. Surprisingly uncommon.



*Common Stonechat, Cabo de Sao Vicente 15.9.*

**Northern Wheatear** Stenskvätta *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Regularly seen in small numbers (much like Winchat above). The only recorded wheatear-species.

**Common Blackbird** Koltrast *Turdus merula*



Commonly seen in gardens.

**Cetti's Warbler** Cettisångare *Cettia cetti*

2 birds at different locations W of Villa Moura were heard singing 17.9.

**Zitting Cisticola** Grässångare *Cisticola juncidis*

Rather common in dry areas and recorded daily in numbers up to c. 10 20.9.

**Melodious Warbler** Polyglottsångare *Hippolais polyglotta*

At Ponta Grande 2 were seen 16.9 and 1 on 20.9. All were juveniles and studied up close. Strangely I did not find the colour of the legs as brown-toned as I remember from previous observations of the species (although they were not quite as cold grey as in Icterine Warbler *H. icterinus*). Age related, light conditions or variation?

**Subalpine Warbler** Rödstrupig sångare *Sylvia cantillans*

At Ponta Grande 4 (2 adults and 2 juveniles) were seen 16.9, 1 juvenile 17.9 and 1 juvenile 20.9. All were feeding in fields with an unknown plant (see photo). This plant attracted lots of Sylvia's and Phylloscopus' and seemed to be very important for refuelling before the migration over the Atlantic and Sahara. Unfortunately, all birds were silent, and gave no practice of the call of the nominate subspecies.



*Subalpine Warbler, Ponta Grande 16.9.*

**Sardinian Warbler** Sammetshätta *Sylvia melanocephala*

Very common all over the region. At Ponta Grande following daily totals were noted: 5, 10, 15, 8, 20, 25, 5. Additionally several of 10's were seen elsewhere in the region.

**Common Whitethroat** Törnsångare *Sylvia communis*

Singles were noted at Ponta Grande almost daily.



*Sardinian Warbler, Ponta Grande 16.9.*

**Western Bonelli's Warbler** Bergsångare *Phylloscopus bonelli*

1 gave great views while feeding in shrubs at Ponta Grande 16.9. The great surprise of the trip! Unfortunately the bird was silent, but it was observed at close range and displayed all characters well.

**Chiffchaff** Gransångare *Phylloscopus collybita* sp.

At Ponta Grande singles were noted less than daily except for 16.9 when, following a calm night, at least 20 were recorded. Most looked like nominate *Ph. c. collybita* but a few showed a more obvious pale yellow wash to breast and supercillium. Unfortunately all were silent and gave no vocal clue to subspecific origin.

**Willow Warbler** Lövsångare *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Recorded in fair numbers at Ponta Grande most days. Each day more numerous than Chiffchaff, except for 16.9. Most birds looked like nominate, but a few individuals were greyer like *Ph. t. acredula*.

**Spotted Flycatcher** Grå flugsnappare *Muscicapa striata*

Seen with several individuals most days, mainly at Ponta Grande and in the gardens close by.

**European Pied Flycatcher** Svartvit flugsnappare *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Recorded just like Spotted Flycatcher, perhaps slightly more numerous.

**Great Tit** Talgoxe *Parus major*

Small numbers noted most days at Ponta Grande.

**Southern Grey Shrike** Ökenvarfågel *Lanius meridionalis meridionalis*

3 were seen at different localities along the smaller roads between Lagos and Sagres 18.9.



*Woodchat Shrike, Ponta Grande 16.9.*

**Woodchat Shrike** Rödhuvad törnskata *Lanius senator senator*

3 juveniles and 1 adult were seen well at Ponta Grande 16.9. The juveniles all showed a buffish, ill-defined, and 'beaming' primary patch which exceeded the length of the white adult ones. This is somewhat contrary to the information given in some literature. The juvenile birds looked indeed juvenile and no adult characters were yet developed (like e.g. red or black feathering on the head).

**Eurasian Jay** Nötskrika *Garrulus glandarius fasciatus/lusitanicus*

3 individuals at the artificial lakes in the low hills NE of Silves19.9.



*Azure-winged Magpie with Eurasian Hoopoes, Ponta Grande 20.9.*

**Azure-winged Magpie** Blåskata *Cyanopica cyanus*

C. 15 were seen together a couple of kilometres N of Lagos 15.9. At Ponta Grande 6 were noted 17.9 and 5 19.9. Additionally 4 were seen along the highway E of Lagos 18.9.

**Western Jackdaw** Kaja *Corvus monedula*

Small numbers were noted daily at various locations.

**Spotless Starling** Stare *Sturnus unicolor*

At Ponta Grande 2-6 were recorded each morning (possibly the same flock). A couple of smaller flocks (<10) were also noted from the car at several locations. At Ponta Grande Spotless Starlings were continuously heard singing during the week. We did not find the song very similar to Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, but instead some penetrating elements rather recalled the loud calls of Tristram's Grackle *Onychognathus tristramii*.



*Spotless Starling, Ponta Grande 17.9.*

**House Sparrow** Gråsparv *Passer domesticus*

Common.

**Common Waxbill** Helenaastrild *Estrilda astrild*

Once the call was learnt by us, the species was recorded with 4 19.9, 5 20.9 and >1 21.9 at Ponta Grande. The call slightly reminded us of the Twite's *Carduelis flavirostris*, but was shorter and had a more electrically and nasal bounce in it.



*Common Waxbill, Ponta Grande 20.9.*

**European Greenfinch** Grönfink *Carduelis chloris*  
Commonly seen in small numbers at Ponta Grande.

**European Goldfinch** Steglits *Carduelis carduelis*  
Recorded daily in small numbers at most of our destinations.

**Common Linnet** Hämpling *Carduelis cannabina*  
Small numbers were seen almost daily at Ponta Grande.

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