

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	<u>Fly Seville & transfer to Coto Doñana</u>
Day 2/4	<u>Coto Doñana</u>
Day 5	<u>Return Seville; fly London</u>

Departs

February and November

Focus

Birds

Grading

A. A traditional birding tour with limited amounts of easy walking

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP09) or brochure

Highlights:

- Purple Gallinule, Marbled Teal, Crested Coot & Spanish Imperial Eagle
- Azure-winged Magpie, Hoopoe and Sardinian Warbler
- Mammals may include Red & Fallow Deer, Wild Boar & even Iberian Lynx!
- Comfortable, central base, in the characterful town of El Rocio



Images (from top to bottom):
Greater Flamingo, Azure-winged Magpie & El Rocio

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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

In winter we'll hopefully enjoy that lovely winter atmosphere over the marshes (full with water after winter rains we hope) and masses of visiting winter wildfowl. The vast majority of migrants will be long gone though.



Little Owl

Day 1

El Rocío

We depart today from London on a flight to Seville. On arrival at Seville airport we will drive south-west for a couple of hours to El Rocío, passing through the fertile farmland and orange groves that lie to the west of the great Guadalquivir River.

The remarkable village of El Rocío lies at the western edge of the Parque Nacional de Coto de Doñana. It has been described as a living relic, a step back to the days when the whole of this area was accessible only by horse. Even today its unmetalled sandy streets, lined with wooden hitching rails for horses and elegant white-washed buildings (that include a magnificent church) give more the impression of the American Wild West than southern Spain. Indeed, one instantly has the feeling of having stumbled across the set of a Spaghetti Western! Further, the village is also the site of a famous and spectacular pilgrimage fair, the Romería del Rocío, which draws up to a million people each year!

The village of El Rocío overlooks the adjacent 'Madre de las Marismas', a magnificent lagoon laden with Greater Flamingoes, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbills, waders and numerous other waterbirds, and a river and marshlands



European Bee-eater

that lie within the Coto Doñana National Park, one of the finest wetlands in Europe. The village makes the perfect base for four nights as we spend time enjoying the wealth of birds and other wildlife that this unique national park has to offer.

After settling in to our hotel - a most comfortable one, situated on the edge of the village; all rooms with private facilities - we may have time to explore the surroundings, including some areas of the Coto Doñana National Park or the Marisma itself.

Day 2-4

El Rocio

We have three full days in the environs of Coto Doñana during which we hope to search for the incredible birdlife both in its best and least known corners. Our daily itinerary will remain flexible in order to take into account weather and other local considerations.

We will certainly make a dawn start on one day in order to explore the mixture of marshes and woodland on the northern edge of the reserve known as the Coto del Rey. The sandy track to the east of El Rocío has been getting progressively more rutted and uneven over the years and the area is now only accessible by Landrover. The track leads east through Stone Pine Woodland and Mediterranean Forest before turning south into the marismas and entering the park at its northern boundary. This area holds the densest populations of raptors in the Coto Doñana. Both species of kite are common as are Buzzards and a very early Booted Eagle, if we are lucky. Griffon Vultures are often joined by Marsh Harriers and Goshawks and if we are fortunate we may even find one of the few pairs of the Spanish Imperial Eagles which breed in the Coto del Rey area. Recent Naturetrek groups, aided by local knowledge, have enjoyed spellbinding telescope views of this species. The Stone Pine woodlands are home to roving flocks of Azure-winged (Iberian) Magpies plus Eurasian Hoopoes, Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrike, Mistle Thrush, Iberian Chiffchaff and Black Redstarts. We will also search for the diminutive Dartford and Sardinian Warblers both of which breed in the low trackside scrub and the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker which favors the more open cork-oak areas. Naturetrek groups have even seen an Iberian Lynx here on and off over the past decade, although the population is critically endangered. Once out of the woodland and into the marismas the track passes alongside numerous marshes, ponds and flooded channels, many full of Flamingos, Spoonbills, Black-winged Stilts and the occasional Glossy Ibis and eventually arrives at the Juan Valverde Visitor Centre. This is one of the best places in the Park to look for the beautiful Marbled Teal and Little Bittern, the former one of Spain's rarest and without doubt most beautiful waterbirds.



Black-winged Stilt



Crested Coot

At this season wintering migrants should be numerous, amongst them storks, herons, waders, ducks, gulls and terns. Many of the marshes and ponds may be drier depending on recent rainfall patterns in Andalucia, but we hope to visit the fish ponds and flooded heartland nearby the visitors centre, as well as the Dehesa de Abajo where an amazing number and variety of these wetland species should be present. We will also look for some of the region's specialities, amongst them Purple Gallinule, Marbled Teal and Crested Coot. Adjacent rice paddies hold some of Spain's resident "exotics" such as Common Waxbill and Golden Bishop.

A day will also be spent visiting the marshland around Isla Mayor, entering to the park from the eastern boundaries which allow us to explore the farmland areas and different canales along the dirt tracks. Here we will be looking for Eurasian Stone-Curlew, Short-eared Owl, White-spotted Bluethroat, Black-capped Night-Herons, as well as Common Cranes and Calandra, Lesser and Greater Short-toed Larks, and with a bit of luck Long-eared Owl.

Day 5

London

This morning (depending on the time of our flight) we should have time for a final look around some of the nearby marshlands before we have to leave for the two-hour drive back to Seville in time for our flight back to London.



Clockwise from top-left: White Stork, Wood Sandpiper, El Acebuche and Great Reed Warbler

Grading

Grade A. This is a traditional birding tour with no strenuous walking involved although it does involve a few early starts. Suitable for all ages and for all degrees of fitness.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

Optional extensions

For those of you wishing to see the spectacular city of Seville we will be happy to arrange a couple of nights accommodation in the city at the end of your tour. Accommodation can be hard to find at this time of year however so the earlier you book the better chance we have of finding space and booking return flights.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



Some of the accommodation (left) and the living room area (right) of our hotel in El Rocio