

Spain – The Best of Coto Doñana

Naturetrek Tour Report

14 - 18 February 2013



Black-crowned Night Herons



Little Owls at the eucalyptus stumps



Purple Gallinule



Short-eared Owl

Report and images compiled by Byron Palacios



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Day 1

Thursday 14th February

Gatwick – Seville – El Rocío

We left a wet and cold England and swapped it with a beautiful sunny morning in Seville! Some of us were already there as they arrived earlier. The rest of the group arrived from Gatwick and we reassembled and drove up out of Seville heading towards El Rocío. We made a stop half way in the village of Villamanrique de la Condesa to have a lunch stop and then we kept driving through Doñana National Park, where we saw a few interesting birds such as Azure-winged (Iberian) Magpie, Eurasian Hoopoe, House Martin, amongst others. We arrived to El Rocío and checked in to our hotel. After a quick break we walked along the marsh just behind our hotel where we saw some good birds such as Blackcap, Corn Bunting, Eurasian Stonechat, Eurasian Kestrel, Common Snipe, Reed Warbler, Glossy Ibis, Shoveler, Great Flamingo, and Eurasian Spoonbill, amongst others. We went to the visitor's centre where we spent a lot of time looking at four individuals of Spanish Imperial Eagle soaring around a nest in the distant eucalyptus trees. We saw them well through the scopes but we needed better views which we were hoping to have in the following days. We continued walking along the village where many birds such as Meadow Pipit, Serin, Goldfinch, Crested Lark, Corn Bunting, Stonechat, Linnet, Spotless Starling and others were seen. We enjoyed the day until the sun was disappearing on the horizon, so we retired to our rooms in order to get ready to enjoy our first delicious dinner together!

Day 2

Friday 15th February

Doñana National Park (Raya Real – La Garvija – Hierba Buena) and La Rocina

We woke early and full of energy to go into the Doñana National Park to explore this protected area. After a good breakfast, we waited for our 4x4 vehicles which local park guide Miguel Angel and myself drove on the sandy tracks. We dedicated the first couple of hours of the morning to search for Iberian Lynx by checking single tracks and bushy areas and worked quite hard but the rarest cat in the world was elusive. Groups of Red Deer were seen regularly along the tracks and birds such as Azure-winged (Iberian) Magpie, Iberian (Southern) Grey Shrike, Black Redstart, Serin, were also seen.

We continued on a different track along the dehesa habitat (cork oaks and lush meadows) making a stop at El Muro. We saw more Red Deer from here, plus Marsh Harrier, Common Kestrel, Common Buzzard, Stonechat, White Stork, Sardinian Warbler, amongst others. We carried on the main track and checked a group of eucalyptus stumps cleverly piled up in order to encourage rabbits to live there and for Iberian Lynx to hunt them effectively. Here, we found two beautiful Little Owls perched on top of one of the stumps, showing off themselves nicely; Corn Buntings were seen at every bush and fence along the drive. A few other birds such as Red Kite, Crested Lark, White Wagtail, Stonechat, White Stork, Calandra Lark, and Black Redstart were also seen here.

The weather was great as we continued our expedition driving on the sandy track which crosses the main area of the park and headed through the area known as El Coto del Rey. We saw a soaring Spanish Imperial Eagle just before the access gate; plus a nice pale-phase Booted Eagle, one of the first arrivals to the park! The sun was shining and warming the day up, just right to get to La Garvija, a nice refurbished shelter previously used as a rangers home in the past, now a perfect place to enjoy lunch surrounded by fields and marismas (flooded heath land).

We enjoyed the fantastic spread the locals prepared for us, and full and happy, we continued with our plan and drove to the dehesa of Hierba Buena in order to walk along this nice habitat. We decided to drive back to El Rocio and after a short break, we moved on to La Rocina, a very nice and pristine wetland area not far from the village where we enjoyed looking at the marshes through its hides. The afternoon was nice and sunny and we saw very interesting birds from the different hides such as Pochard, Shoveler, Marsh Harrier, Purple Gallinule, Glossy Ibis, Common Chiffchaff, Stonechat, and White Stork, amongst others. The sunset was beautiful as we drove back to the hotel.

Day 3

Saturday 16th February

Doñana National Park (Villamanrique, Valverde Visitors Centre)

Today we wanted to explore the northern and north-eastern part of Doñana. In spite of the mist that covered the area, we set off from el Rocio heading east through the village of Villamanrique de La Condesa; from there, we drove through Isla Mayor and entered the park, where a large flock of Serin and Meadow Pipits welcomed us to this part of Doñana. The mist was very heavy as we made a few stops along the tracks but we still spotted many birds such as Fan-tailed Warbler, Great Egret, Stonechat, Green Sandpiper, and even a very elusive European Kingfisher. We took a walk along one of the portions of the track finding two nice pairs of Lesser Kestrels which were a great surprise considering they're not a resident bird. We enjoyed watching them and then we moved on to the Valverde visitor's centre where we had some hot drinks and saw in detail many beautiful birds such as Greater Flamingos, Marsh Harrier, Shoveler, European Coot, Little Egret, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, and Purple Gallinule, amongst others. As lunch time was around the corner, we decided to set up our picnic lunch at the car park which we enjoyed a lot!

After lunch, the day cleared up from the earlier fog and the sun was even shining at times! We then continued along the loop track along the various fields and marismas and, just after we left the visitor's centre a Long-eared Owl was spotted perched on one of the Tamarisk bushes; we stopped the vans and had great views of this unusual wintering owl.

We continued our drive carefully looking along the track for new species; this paid off as a Bluethroat was heard from the van. We stopped straight away to find this lovely bird which came to us and perched in front of us showing off beautifully! We also had great views of Dartford Warbler, Common Cranes, Lesser Kestrel and two pairs of Short-eared Owls which were perched and soared above the fields in front of us. What a great spot!

After enjoying the sightings, we continued along the same track and then headed back towards Villamanrique looping through Isla Mayor and along the Guadiamar drainage channels and corridor. This portion of the track produced interesting birds such as Marsh Harrier, Griffon Vulture, and a very nice Black Stork. We also found a colony of Black-crowned Night-Herons, juveniles and adults, around an old water pump. We also found some Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Reed Buntings, White Storks and dozens of Common Cranes in one of the adjacent fields. The day was coming to an end, so we headed home to El Rocio in order to get ready to have another great night at our hotel's premises.

Day 4

Sunday 17th February

Doñana National Park (El Acebron – El Acebuche – Cuesta de Maneli – La Rocina)

The morning looked very overcast but quite mild, and it was getting clearer as we started our short drive towards El Acebron, a very nice area of the national park not far from El Rocio. As soon as we hit the road to El Acebron we stopped along a scrubland area, ideal habitat for the very elusive Thekla Lark which we enjoyed watching while he was perched on top of a gorse bush. We continued our drive but not for long as we spotted two Woodlarks along the track. Once we arrived at the car park, we started our walk along a trail through the Mediterranean forest which produced very important species such as Short-toed Treecreeper, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Bullfinch, amongst others. We stopped at El Palacio del Acebron where we used the facilities and enjoyed the views from the top of the building, but nothing special was spotted here, noting some House Sparrows and Eurasian Kestrel in the distance.

Lunch time was getting closer so we headed to El Acebuche, another nice area of the national park. A light shower was on and off at times, so we decided to set our picnic lunch in a shelter by the visitor's centre. We then proceeded to check the hides out but it was very quiet, so we decided to continue with our plan and drove towards the dunes at the point known as La Cuesta de Maneli. The boardwalk is ideal and crosses the dunes towards the seaside along the scrubland, where a Dartford Warbler was seen beautifully.

Once at the seaside, we enjoyed watching a very calm sea, and managed to spotted a few Gannets and a Great Skua in the distance, plus a Gull-billed Tern, Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls. We then walked back to the car park and still had some energy to continue exploring some other areas of the park so we drove back to La Rocina in order to walk another part of the reserve, checking the scrubland and some of the hides located in the other end of the boardwalk. The marshes offered more or less the same birds we had already seen on the previous days; Mallards, Glossy Ibis, Purple Gallinule, Shoveler, Great Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Stonechat, amongst others were seen here once again. As sunset was around the corner, we decided to make our way back to El Rocio enjoying the last of the sun's rays hitting the lovely pristine white buildings and the prominent church of the village.

Day 5

Monday 18th February

El Rocio – Dehesa de Abajo – Seville airport

Today was our last day and it was another very foggy start. Some stayed around the hotel while others did some light birding at the village's marsh and saw plenty of birds such as Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Great Flamingos, Eurasian Spoonbills, Black-tailed Godwit, Black-winged Stilt, Northern Lapwing, Common Snipe, Common Sandpiper, and Ringed Plover, amongst others. We all gathered together again at the hotel's lobby by noon to check the plan of the day again, and after deciding that some of us wanted to keep resting, the remaining group drove to La Dehesa de Abajo in order to check this important wetland area. The short visit here was paid off as the 'lake' was full of waterfowl, and some of them very important and new to our trip list, such as Black-necked Grebe, Long-tailed Duck and Red-crested Pochard. We also saw lots of Shoveler, Common Pochard, Little and Great-crested Grebe, Greater Flamingo, White Storks and Black Storks, and Great Egret. We had our picnic lunch in this area enjoying the bit of sun we had and, of course, the birds, including Skylark, Corn Bunting, Cormorant, Chiffchaff, Stonechat, Crested Lark, Lesser and Common Kestrels, Common Buzzard and Barn Swallow.

After lunch, we started to drive towards El Rocio scanning the different trees and dehesas of the area in search of the beautiful Black-shoulder Kite, but we had no luck with this one. We enjoyed watching other nice birds instead such as Eurasian Hoopoe, Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpie and a few Woodlarks. We were also lucky enough to bump across a small group of Egyptian Mongooses crossing the road through the designed crossing tunnels; we had good views of at least two of them!

Once in El Rocio, we collected the rest of the group and we set off to Seville; some of us to the airport in time to catch our evening flights back to the UK, and some others to the city in order to continue with their own plans at the end of the tour...

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Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; h = heard only)

	Scientific name	Common name	February				
			14	15	16	17	18
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	✓
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>					✓
4	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Gannet	<i>Morus bassana</i>				✓	
6	Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			✓	✓	
7	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			✓		✓
12	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
17	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓		
18	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		✓	✓		
20	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
21	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
23	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>					✓
24	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>					✓
26	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
27	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓		✓
28	Hen Harrier			✓	✓		
29	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
30	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca (adalberti)</i>	✓	✓			
32	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		✓			
33	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			✓		✓
35	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓		
40	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>					✓
41	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>		✓			
42	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>					✓
44	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		✓	✓		
46	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓		✓
47	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			✓		

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			14	15	16	17	18
48	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓		
49	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>				✓	
50	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
51	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓	✓	
53	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>				✓	
54	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓		
58	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>			✓		
59	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>			✓		
60	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			✓		
61	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
62	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>				✓	
63	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				✓	✓
64	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>				✓	
66	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓		✓
67	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓	✓		
68	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓		✓
71	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓				
72	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		h		✓	
74	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		✓			✓
76	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>			✓		
79	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	
81	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓			
82	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>				✓	
83	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			✓		✓
84	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		h	h	h	
85	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓				
86	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			✓	✓	
87	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓				
88	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		✓			
89	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>				✓	
91	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>		✓		✓	
92	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓		✓	
93	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	
94	Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pedulinus</i>			✓		
95	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				✓	
96	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		✓		✓	✓
97	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Scientific name	Common name	February				
			14	15	16	17	18
99	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		✓			
101	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓			
103	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
104	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓		
105	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
107	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
108	European Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				✓	
109	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>	✓		✓		✓
110	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓		

Mammals

1	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
2	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓			
3	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>				✓	
4	Pipistrelle spp. bat					✓	
5	Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>					✓

Other Taxa

1	Processionary Moth Caterpillar	<i>Thaumetopoea pityocampa</i>				✓	
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