

Spain – The Best of Coto Doñana

Naturetrek Tour Report

28 November – 2 December 2013



Common Snipe



Eurasian Hoopoe



Black-shouldered Kite



Cinereous & Griffon Vultures

Report and images compiled by Byron Palacios



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Day 1

Thursday 28th November

Gatwick – Seville – El Rocío – La Rocina

Weather: Dry and sunny

We left a cold England to land in a beautiful sunny day in Seville and drove through the city from east to west towards Huelva and diverting to El Rocio. Our hotel located right in front of the Marisma Madre (the mother of the marshes) was ideal for our wildlife purposes as it was full of water and hundreds of wintering waders, waterfowl, Greater Flamingos and geese. Even a perched Spanish Imperial Eagle welcomed us from the other side of the marsh - a great start to the tour! We had our picnic lunch right in front of the Marisma checking the bird activity; Zitting Cisticola, Common Chiffchaff, Stonechat, Booted Eagle, Griffon Vulture, Pintail, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Snipe, Teal, Mallard, and Grey Heron were seen, amongst others.

We then took a short drive to La Rocina, a beautiful mixture of habitats located right within the natural park. We walked along the boardwalk checking the hides from where we had great views of Western Marsh Harrier, Little Grebe, Purple Gallinule, and Cattle and Little Egrets. We continued on the boardwalk entering into the Mediterranean shrub from where we found Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrike and a Hoopoe in the distance. We looped around to the road and walked back to the car park admiring the sunset on the horizon. We drove back to our hotel and retired to our rooms in order to get ready to do our species log and enjoy our first delicious dinner together!

Day 2

Friday 29th November

Doñana National Park (Coto del Rey, La Garvija, Hierba Buena)

Weather: Sunny with chilly wind

A chilly start today on another lovely morning! It looked promising as the sunbeams covered the village from the early morning. After a good breakfast, we were collected by Jose Manuel our driver and local park guide, who drove us on thick sand into Doñana National Park where we soon started to track down the rarest cat in the planet: Iberian Lynx. We certainly searched lots of the tracks and accessible corners of 'La Raya Real', the main track which heads to the Palacio (Coto) del Rey. Lots of Red Deer and Fallow Deer were seen along the track and around the dehesa (cork oak meadows), a very unique habitat of the Mediterranean forest. After looking for the feline for the first couple of hours, we made a stop right on the border of the Mediterranean forest and the Marisma (seasonally flooded heathland) where hundreds of Meadow Pipits, Greylag Geese, Eurasian Crane and Goldfinch, Stonechat and Corn Buntings were seen.

Marsh Harriers and Common Buzzards were flying over the tree line, which lead us to the far side of the marisma where two Black-shouldered Kites were spotted and seen beautifully by all of us! A male Hen Harrier emerged from the same corner of the marisma gliding over the low vegetation from right to left giving us great views of this raptor. After this productive stop, we continued driving into the main marisma which was dry, yet it had loads of birds spread around the vast surface and not far from us at all! We spotted a good group of Griffon Vultures soaring in the blue sky, and then three more were down in the field next to a carcass. One of them was noticeably bigger than the Griffons, a Cinereous Vulture. A Northern Raven was with them trying to get some remains of the carcass. We had the chance to see the main differences between these two vultures by the time they took off the ground and flew right in front and over us! Crested Larks and a large flock of Northern Lapwings and European Golden Plover were also seen here!

Lunch time was around the corner, so we drove back to the sandy tracks of La Raya Real and drove through the Coto or Palacio del Rey, to the spot known as La Garvija, a former typical ranger's house refurbished and adapted to host visitors for lunches. We enjoyed our lunch in sunshine. After lunch, we left La Garvija and drove to an area not far from there, Hierba Buena, a very nice dehesa where we took a walk which produced a few Eurasian Hoopoes, Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrike, Sardinian Warbler, Stonechat, plenty of Meadow Pipits and Common Chiffchaffs, Woodpigeon and a very nice Short-toed Snake Eagle!

After the walk, we drove back into the Iberian Lynx core area, searching again for this rare and elusive cat. We had no luck with them today, but we did have luck by finding a group of Wild Boar not far from the main track. After this, we continued our drive back to El Rocío and to our hotel, where we had a break before going out again to check the mirador of the marshes located right behind our hotel premises. This produced lots of Greater Flamingos, Graylag Geese, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Snipe, Shoveler, Gadwall, Black-winged Stilt, and even another Spanish Imperial Eagle perched in a distant tree. A Red Fox was also seen flushing some wildfowl at the other end of the marsh. We then took a break in order to get ready to do our checklist of the day followed by dinner and wine!

Day 3

Saturday 30th November

Doñana National Park (Coto Del Rey – La Escupidera – La Garvija – Hierba Buena)

We left our hotel a bit earlier in order to make our excursion to one of the restricted areas of Doñana. Our local park guide Miguel Angel was waiting for us with another 4x4 vehicle for me to drive. We boarded both and set off for the park, searching for Iberian Lynx by checking every single track and bushy area in case it happened to be there, somewhere! We worked quite hard and the rarest cat in the world seemed to be very elusive. Groups of Red and Fallow Deer were seen regularly along the track as well as birds such as Azure-winged (Iberian) Magpie, Iberian (Southern) Grey Shrike, and Black Redstart, amongst others.

We continued on a different track along the dehesa habitat (cork oaks and lush meadows) making a stop at the place known as El Muro. We saw more Red and Fallow Deer from here, plus Marsh Harrier, Common Kestrel, Common Buzzard, Stonechat, and White Stork, amongst others. We carried on the main track and checked a group of eucalyptus stumps cleverly piled up in order to make good and accessible burrows to encourage rabbits to live there which enables Iberian Lynx to hunt them effectively. Here, we found two beautiful Little Owls perched on top of one of the stumps and showing off themselves nicely.

A pair of Black-shouldered Kites was spotted in the distance, so we moved further up the road and managed to see them in the scope, in the distance. We stopped at the point known as La Escupidera where we found a carcass of a domestic animal (likely a cow) and some Griffon Vultures feeding on it. It was to our surprise that we also found a beautiful Spanish Imperial Eagle perched nearby the carcass, getting fabulous views of this endemic raptor through the scope! Red Kites (two perched on the fence), Crested Lark, White Wagtail, Stonechat, Common Cranes and Black Redstart were also seen here.

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 stopped in a nice dehesa called Hierba Buena where we meant to have a pre-lunch walk, but the day was going well so far that we decided to go to our lunch stop first and take the walk later on. We then arrived to La Garvija, an nice refurbished shelter previously used as a rangers home in the past, now a perfect place to enjoy lunch surrounded by marismas (flooded heathland) and amazing wildlife. Two of the most emblematic birds were seen from here - Black Stork and Spanish Imperial Eagle. We enjoyed the fantastic spread the locals prepared for us, and full and happy, we continued with our plan and drove back to the dehesa of Hierba Buena, finding a nice Booted Eagle on the way, just by the palace of Coto del Rey; perhaps a late migrant or simply an individual who decided to stay and winter in the area. At the end of the day, the winter is relatively nice here!

We arrived at Hierba Buena and started our walk along the sandy paths watching a few Eurasian Hoopoes on the way. Also a few Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrikes were seen here, while Red Kites and Kestrels were constantly soaring and hovering around in search of food. I heard an unusual call, it was in fact a Lesser-spotted Woodpecker nearby; Julian checked an ash tree in front of us and there it was: a lovely male was seen by all of us, until it flew across the dehesa and stopped again in a cork oak tree not far from where we were. We quickly moved after him and, with a bit of playback assistance, we managed to bring him out to the open once again! One of the birds of the trip, without a doubt, considering how difficult and overlooked this particular species of woodpecker is! We found other birds during the walk such as Song Thrush, Woodlark, Raven, Woodpigeon, and Corn Bunting, amongst others.

We finished the loop around the dehesa, picked the vans up and drove back on the main track heading to El Rocio; scanning and searching for Iberian Lynx as we went. We kept looking around but we had to accept that we were not that lucky with 'el gato' on this day; well, perhaps another time! We headed back to our hotel in order to take a break and take a stroll around El Rocio. Then, we gathered together again to do our checklist homework followed by a delicious dinner.

Day 4

Sunday 1st December

Doñana National Park (Valverde visitor's centre – Isla Mayor – Dehesa de Abajo)

Weather: Nice & sunny

Today would be another exciting day as we were about to explore the northern and north-eastern part of Doñana. We set off from El Rocio on a sunny crisp morning whilst driving through lush stone pine forest until we got to the area of Aznalcazar; from there, we diverted east through Isla Mayor driving through productive fruit plantations and entered in the national park, where a pair of Black-shouldered Kite and a large flock of Serins welcomed us to this part of Doñana.

We started to make a few stops, the first one being quite productive with a pair of Marsh Harriers soaring over the high grass and also perched on the ground; a female Hen Harrier was also around too, but the main focus was a pair of perched Black-shoulder Kites. Once we made it to the entrance of the park the tarmac was replaced by a gravel and dirt road which crossed through large riparian areas, old water pumps and rice fields, ideal for many wintering birds such as Greylags, Avocets, Redshanks, Dunlins, Glossy Ibis, and Great Egret, amongst others. A group of wintering Black Storks were on the side of one of the fields. Marsh Harriers were spotted soaring over the fields with thousands of wintering Greylag Geese in the background.

We continued driving along the tracks checking on hundreds of Common Cranes wintering along the dry rice fields, with lots of Cattle Egrets amongst them. We also found White Storks, Grey Herons and Great White Egrets along the irrigation canals and lots of Crested Larks, Meadow Pipits and flocks of Goldfinches crossing by as we continued our drive. We made a couple of stops in order to check some interesting Green Sandpipers wandering along the wet marisma, when we suddenly found a smaller bird skulking along some dry vegetation by the shore of the water, and it turned up to be a beautiful White-spotted Bluethroat, a bird we wanted to see badly! We got off the van in order to get more views of it and he certainly performed really well for us! We continued driving towards the Valverde Visitor's Centre, watching a single pair of Lesser Kestrels which were still in the area, one of the unusual wintering records in Doñana. At the visitors centre, hundreds of Common Cranes and Greylag Geese were seen, plus closer views of Marsh Harriers – both, female and male – and plenty of Teal, Shoveler, Mallard, Coot and two Purple Gallinules.

We left the visitor's centre and continued our drive, making a loop and heading back to Isla Mayor, and stopping by an old water pump building where we had great views of Black-crowned Night-Herons roosting by the water; lots of Common Kestrels, Grey Herons, Black Redstarts and Zitting Cisticolas. After lunch, we drive through Isla Mayor and made a little diversion to visit La Dehesa de Abajo, a nice wetland area, home to lots of wildfowl and wintering birds which congregate here in large numbers. We found hundreds of Greater Flamingos, Shoveler, Teal, Mallards, Coots, Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Great-crested and Little Grebes, and many others. We also found a very close Black-shouldered Kite which we put in the scope for closer views; it was the best views we had of this lovely raptor on this trip! We walked along the visitor's centre of Dehesa de Abajo invited by its manager, taking a quick stroll down to the shore and coming back for a coffee break in their restaurant. The day was coming to an end, and happy and satisfied with the wildlife seen, we started our drive back to our hotel in El Rocio in order to get ready for another great night at our hotel's premises!

Day 5

Monday 2nd December

Doñana National Park (Hinojos Guadiana Corridor) – Sevilla airport

Weather: Nice and sunny

Today was our last day but our flight left in the early afternoon, so we decided to have a 'birding-on-the-go' day. We had breakfast and checked out from our hotel, heading to the north of Doñana, driving through Almonte and then into Hinojos where a beautiful Mediterranean forest lies across a stone pine woodland. It was a chilly morning, but sunny. We took a stroll along one of the forest tracks finding a nice flock of birds, mainly Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits, also having a great view of a Crested Tit! We also found a nice Cirl Bunting male amongst them.

We walked a bit more along the lush Mediterranean habitat and we picked the hammering and call of a Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, but it was very elusive. The always numerous Azure-winged (Iberian) Magpies, Stonechats, Common Chiffchaffs and Chaffinches were moving around us non-stop! We finished there and continued our drive towards Seville using cross country roads, making a final stop to check the Guadiamar Corridor, a riparian area usually great for some key species; but it was fairly quiet, some Corn Buntings, Blackcaps and Goldfinch were seen here. We decided to make a coffee stop in the village of Aznalcazar where we enjoyed a nice hot drink and some of us had typical Iberian ham tapas!

Afterwards, we prepared ourselves to drive to Seville airport, our minds full of unforgettable memories of the gorgeous Doñana!!!

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Species Lists

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

	Scientific name	Common name	November/December				
			28	29	30	1	2
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓	✓	
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓		✓	✓	
3	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓		✓
4	Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			✓		
5	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			✓		
7	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
8	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>			✓		✓
9	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			✓		
11	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</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	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>			✓		
19	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓		
21	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓			
26	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
27	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓			
28	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
29	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		✓	✓		
30	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
31	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca (adalberti)</i>	✓	✓		✓	
33	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓		✓	✓	
34	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓			
35	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			✓		
37	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓			
38	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	h				
39	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓		✓		
42	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓	✓		
45	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			✓		
47	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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			28	29	30	1	2
48	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓		
49	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			✓		
50	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓		
51	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			✓		
52	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>			✓		
54	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>			✓		✓
55	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓		
56	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
58	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓			✓	
59	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓		✓	
60	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓	
61	Lesser-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Picoides minor</i>				h	
62	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	✓			✓	✓
63	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓	
64	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>				✓	
65	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
66	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
67	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		h	h		
69	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	White-spotted Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>				✓	
71	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Song Thrush	<i>turdus philomenos</i>		✓	✓	✓	
74	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
76	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	h	h	✓	h
77	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				✓	
78	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
79	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		✓		✓	
80	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		✓		✓	
82	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>				✓	✓
83	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>				✓	✓
84	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>				✓	✓
85	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	✓
86	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				✓	
87	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	✓	✓		✓	
88	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			✓		
92	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓		✓
93	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓				
96	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>		✓			
97	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>			✓		

	Scientific name	Common name	November/December				
			28	29	30	1	2
99	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>		✓	✓		✓

Mammals

225	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓			
226	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			✓		
227	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓			
228	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓			

Butterflies

Small Copper

Clouded Yellow

Small White

Red Admiral

Painted Lady



Wild Boar