

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana

Naturetrek Tour Report

26 - 30 April 2014



Great reed warbler by Mary Salter



The Group by Sergio Martín



Black Kite by Sergio Martín



Griffon Vulture by Sergio Martín

Report compiled by Sergio Martín
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Day 1

Saturday 26th April

London Gatwick – Seville – Guadiamar Reserve – El Rocio. La Rocina

We started early today in order to get our flight from London Gatwick to Seville. The group arrived in Seville airport at 10:00 ready to begin our bird watching trip towards El Rocio. First of all we spotted a large group of European Swifts by the airport, and some of the people from the group spotted Spanish Sparrows while packing our luggage into the van.

We made our trip to the reserve at the Guadiamar River, where we spotted Red-rumped Swallows, Serins, Great and Blue Tits as well as Greenfinches and Nightingales. We had our lunch at one picnic area and had a quick view of a Black Cap, and found a couple of Blue Tits nesting and a Cetti's Warbler. After lunch we carried on our way to El Rocio spotting some raptors on the way such as Booted Eagles, Common Buzzards and our first Black Kite. Purple Gallinule and Pallid Swifts were seen at one of the stops on the way to the Hotel Toruño.

We finally arrived around 15:00. We took our assigned rooms while enjoying the local nibbles and drinks they provided, and after a settle-in break, we began to watch birds at the marshes, just behind our hotel. We spotted Greater Flamingos, together with Greylag Goose, Eurasian Spoonbill and Glossy Ibis. After that, we did a little drive to finish our birding day at one of the observatories of las Rocinas. This is part of the Donana National Park and offers a variety of wooden trails, perfect to locate a good sample of bird species of the area. We had the chance to spot Common and Red Crested Pochards, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron and Black-winged Stilts. After this last stop we drove back to our hotel to freshen up just as a shower - then some drinks, checklist and dinner!

Day 2

Sunday 27 April

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

Our second day in El Rocio began early - we decided to split our tour to the National Park into morning and evening trips. After breakfast, we boarded our 4x4s and set off with our park guide into the core area of Doñana National Park, right along the Raya Real, the track which takes you to the heart of the park. We firstly searched carefully for Iberian Lynx along a very pristine area of Mediterranean forest, and after following very fresh tracks, we spotted it! What a great beginning...

One Black Kite sitting on a fence was at the entrance of the National Park. We also saw Wild Boar and a Black Shouldered Kite. Sardinian Warblers were singing and when we stopped and we could spot European Bee-eaters, Griffon Vultures, and Jackdaws. As we were getting into the high marshes we saw very close a juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle chased by a Black Kite, more Griffon Vultures and a Great Spotted Cuckoo. A big flock of Black Kites and later Griffon Vultures were seen as we were leaving to go to el Rocio for our lunch break.

After having a nice lunch in El Rocio we had a little rest until the sun was getting lower. At 16:00 we set off again. First we drove through Coto del Rey forest where we spotted many Serins, Sardinian Warblers, Greenfinches and Short-toed Treecreepers and Crested Tits were heard. Getting to the Kings Palace we had a very nice view of a Short-toed Snake Eagle perched on a dead tree. Turtle Doves, European Bee-eaters and our first Golden Oriole were spotted close to the palace as well as one Southern Grey Shrike.

We continued driving through “la vera” (an intermediate ecosystem between the forest and the marshes) to get into another restricted area known as Hierba Buena where we had a nice loop walk around the lovely dehesa or traditional Mediterranean forest. Here, some Black Kites were seen flying in and out from big old cork-oak trees where they had their nests, which had White Storks nesting in them too! We continued our walk watching several Woodchat Shrikes and also Sardinian Warbler, Crested Lark, Fan-tailed Warbler, Eurasian Stonechat, a few Bee-eaters and Goldfinches, and a very nice Thekla Lark on top of one of the bushes nearby. After that we had the surprise of finding a Black Vulture close to some Griffon Vultures and we finished our day spotting Little Owls with geckos perched right on top of some eucalyptus stumps which are man-made rabbit burrows. We got back to El Rocio to relax during the late afternoon and later enjoyed delicious local nibbles, drinks and superb supper!

Day 3

Monday 28th April

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

We started early today, ready to explore the north-eastern bound of Donana National Park. After breakfast, we left El Rocio heading towards Villamarique de la Condesa and spotted a Tree Sparrow, some Woodchat Shrikes, Hoopoes and Serins on the way. We then entered the National Park through Isla Mayor, watching a lot of White Storks, Grey Herons and Black Kites. The first stop was by some eucalyptus trees where we spotted Spanish Sparrows nesting below some White Stork nests with other House Sparrows. Common Kestrels were there also and a very nice dark morph Booted Eagle flew away from us.

We continued our drive, watching at times some Crested Larks jumping in and out the track from the hedges. We also stopped when we saw a Collared Pratincole standing close to a couple of Mallards. We drove on and then stopped again when we heard Great Reed Warblers but it was too windy for them to get out from the reeds so we followed on a bit more and got to the old Guadiamar River, spotting Purple Gallinules, Little and Cattle Egrets, a large number of Purple and Grey Herons, hundreds of Glossy Ibis nesting in the *Tamarix spp.* trees, together with Red-crested Pochards, Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Spoonbill, , Little Grebes, Corn Buntings, and the a couple of Great White Egrets. That was a fantastic stop! On the top of a pitta cactus we had a perfect view of one Short-toed Lark close to a Crested Lark and an Iberian Yellow Wagtail. We also had fantastic views of Lesser Kestrels flying around an old building where they usually nest.

As the day was getting warmer, we continued our drive towards the J.Valverde visitor's centre where we watched very close Greater Flamingos and many Glossy Ibis nesting, and Cattle and Little Egrets which looked like decorated Christmas trees amongst the flooded marshes! Black-crowned Night-Herons, Purple Heron, Common Coot, and Little Grebes were seen here too. Some of us had the chance to spot a very fast flying Little Bittern. Shortly after this, we enjoyed our picnic lunch at the car park and then continued to check other areas of the high marshes. We had great views of, Common Sandpiper, Greenshanks and lovely views of Black-necked Grebe. We continued driving and watching a few interesting birds on the way such as Corn Bunting, Fan-tailed Warbler, and cracking views of Short-toed Eagle perched on a electric pylon were we could use our scopes. Lots of Grey Herons, Black Kites, Common Kestrels, White Stork and Common Buzzards, and others, were seen along the road.

We then decided to have a final stop of the day at La Dehesa de Abajo which was full of water and was very interesting in terms of birds; Common and Red-crested Pochards, Mallard, Greater Flamingos, Little and Black Necked Grebe were seen, as well as Avocets quite far away. We then returned to the hotel for the remainder of the day.

Day 4

Tuesday 29th April

Odiel Marshlands – El Acebrón Palace

For the morning we voted to make our way out of Doñana to check another ecosystem which is very pleasant at this time of the year (the tidal marshes of the Odiel River) so we drove 30 minutes to get to the start of those marshes which were in low tide during the morning. We had a great beginning with a very good view of a male Montagu's Harrier just in front of us in one of the lagoons close to the salt works. Mallard, Little Grebe and Gadwalls were seen also in that lagoon. Close to the lagoon we saw many different waders feeding such as Curlew Sandpiper, Knots, Little, Kentish and Ringed Plovers, Dunlins and Sanderlings.

After making a comfort stop at the visitor's centre we walked to the back of the building where we spotted Iberian Yellow and White Wagtails. A Marsh Harrier was seen from a hide too. We got back to the car and as we drove we were spotting Redshanks, Greenshanks, hundreds of Dunlins and more Knots; Black tailed Godwits were seen too along with some Eurasian Spoonbills. After a while we stopped again to see a Crested Lark and many Grey Plovers in breeding and non-breeding plumage. Whimbrels, Green Shanks and Dunlins were everywhere we looked. Five or six Marsh Harriers were seen on the way also (males and females). We stopped at a new formed beach thanks to a man-made dyke in the 70's - here we spotted Yellow Legged Gull, Lesser Black Backed Gulls and Sandwich Terns. We had our picnic close to the visitor's centre where we could eat our lunch while spotting some more waders and Sardinian Warblers.

We drove back to the Acebron Forest (back to the Doñana area) and on the way spotted a couple of difficult species such as a Golden Oriole perched on a pine tree and a Thekla Lark on the top of a spiky bush – a very good beginning to the afternoon. We walked along the trail which links the Palace gardens with the parking area and a beautiful Mediterranean forest. In spite of the hot afternoon, we found a few new and interesting species for our list such as Crested Tits that had been heard but not seen up until then and Pied Flycatcher; plus, European Bee-eaters, Short-toed Treecreepers, Blue and, Great and Tits, Chaffinch, Serin and European Swifts with House Martins gliding actively around!

We were told by other birdwatchers that one Crested Coot had been seen at the marismas, close to our hotel, so we made our last try to spot it. Despite trying hard we didn't catch it, but Ruff, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns and a very nice flock of Collared Pratincoles were spotted instead. After spending several hours in the field already, we decided that it was time to go back and get ready for our last lovely supper!

Day 5

Wednesday 30th April

El Rocio – Seville airport

After an early breakfast, we checked out of our hotel and drive up from El Rocio heading towards Seville; a few European Bee-eaters were spotted, alongside lots European Swifts, House Martins and Barn Swallows around the airport.

We arrived on time at Seville's airport and after wishing a very warm “Hasta pronto, amigos!”, we were then ready to start our journey back home to Gatwick, after a great trip, with plenty of good moments, adventures and new friendships!

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Species Lists

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

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			26	27	28	29	30
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	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	✓	✓	✓		
11	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	✓		✓	✓	
15	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓				
16	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓	
17	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓		✓	✓	
19	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓		✓	✓	
20	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓		✓	✓	
21	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓		✓		
22	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓			
24	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓			
25	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓		
26	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				✓	
27	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			✓	✓	
28	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		✓			
29	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
30	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca (adalberti)</i>		✓			
31	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
32	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓	✓		
33	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			✓		
35	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓			
36	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓		✓	✓	
37	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓		✓	✓	
38	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓		✓		
39	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓		✓	✓	
40	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓				
41	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>			✓	✓	
42	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓	
43	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>				✓	
44	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>				✓	
45	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓	
46	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>				✓	

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			26	27	28	29	30
47	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				✓	
48	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>				✓	
49	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>				✓	
50	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓			✓	
51	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	✓			✓	
52	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓	
53	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				✓	
54	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				✓	
55	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			✓	✓	
56	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓		✓		
57	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓			
58	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>				✓	
59	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓	
60	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	✓		✓	✓	
61	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>				✓	
62	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>				✓	
63	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	✓			✓	
64	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
65	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		✓			
68	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		h		h	
69	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>		✓			
70	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓			
71	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓				
72	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓	
76	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓	✓	✓	
78	Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			✓		
79	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	✓	✓	✓		
80	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				✓	
83	Yellow (Iberian) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava (iberiae)</i>		✓	✓	✓	
84	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	✓	h		h	
85	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓	✓	✓		
86	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	✓	h	h
88	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	h	h	h	
89	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	h		✓	h	
90	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			✓		
91	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓		✓	
92	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		✓		✓	
93	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓				
94	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓	
95	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				✓	

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			26	27	28	29	30
96	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>	h	h		✓	
97	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓		✓	
98	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓		✓	
99	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		h		✓	
100	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		✓			
101	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
104	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		✓			
107	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
108	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			✓		
109	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓		✓		
111	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓		✓	
112	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	h	✓	h
113	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓		
114	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓		
115	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	h
116	Black necked grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			✓		
117	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>			✓		

Mammals

1	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓			
2	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓			
3	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓			
4	Iberian Lynx	<i>Linx Pardina</i>		✓			

Other Taxa

1	Red-tailed (Spiny-footed) Lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus erythrurus</i>	✓				
2	Large Psammmodromus Lizard	<i>Psammmodromus algirus</i>		✓		✓	