

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 – 21 April 2015

Report compiled by Julian Gayarre



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Day 1

Friday 17th April

London – Seville – El Rocio

Our flight from the UK landed at Seville airport at 10am and after clearing immigration and collecting our luggage we left the airport in our minibuses. A very active flock of European swifts was flying overhead (they breed at the airport) and on our way to the Guadamar Reserve we spotted Cattle Egret, Black Kite, Booted Eagle and Spanish Sparrow.

At Guadamar, (a green corridor created to allow communications between isolated wild patches) we had a short walk by the river and enjoyed listening to the singing of Nightingale, Wryneck and Cetti's Warbler. It was a nice spot and we saw other species such as Greenfinch and Blue Tit, and warblers like Blackcap and Western Olivaceous Warbler. Common Waxbill, a rarity here, was spotted by the river too!

We had a quick picnic lunch as we wanted to arrive at El Rocio and leave our luggage in the hotel before visiting La Rocina. Half an hour later we arrived at the village of El Rocio and checked-in at the lovely hotel El Toruño, our base in the National Park of Doñana.

At 3.30pm we met again in the hotel reception to visit La Rocina. Before setting off, in the marshes of El Rocio we spotted some key species including Greater Flamingo, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill and Greylag Goose (including an albino individual).

It was only a 5-minute drive to La Rocina and on arrival we set off to walk in the forest that surrounds the observatories. The area is a combination of stone pine forest and a riverside forest full of ash trees and Mediterranean bushes. The first species that welcomed us was Azure-winged Magpie, and then we continued enjoying the sound of Nightingales, watching them singing deep in the bushes. Short-toed Treecreepers were very active and visible, as was a particularly good singing Iberian chiffchaff. Other species we spotted included

Iberian Grey Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, Tree Sparrow, Little Egret, Squacco Heron, White Stork, Common and Red-crested Pochard, Little Grebe and Greenfinch.

After a long but enjoyable day that had started for many very early in London, we returned to our hotel where we met at 8pm for dinner before retiring for the night.

Day 2

Saturday 18th April

Doñana National Park; La Dehesa de Abajo; Valverde Visitor Centre.

Our main goal today was to visit two iconic places: the Dehesa de Abajo and Valverde Visitor Centre.

Before leaving El Rocio we looked over the marshes spotting Bar-tailed Godwit and the Flamingoes of the day before. We drove north-eastwards past the limit of the national park and arrived at the village of Villamanrique de la Condesa where we were welcomed by a family of Azure-winged Magpies and plenty of Corn Buntings and Crested Larks. First we visited Dehesa de Abajo lagoon where a fair was organized over the weekend and we wanted to avoid the crowds.

Thanks to being early we were lucky to spot from the main road a Crested (Red-knobbed) Coot about 30 metres away from us, and some minutes later we founded a Marbled Duck swimming very close to the tamarisk. Other species we spotted where Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Black-necked Grebe, Whiskered Tern and Purple Gallinule.

From Dehesa de Abajo we took a parallel track to Caño del Guadiamar, and on the way to the Valverde Visitor Centre we stopped several times enjoying sightings of Spanish Sparrow, Great Reed Warbler, Black Kite, Booted Eagle, Purple Heron, Great White Egret, and a group of Lesser Short-toed Larks running on the same track as we were using.

Before arriving at Valverde Visitor Centre we enjoyed watching a colony of Lesser Kestrels that breed in an abandoned pumping station. Several Marsh Harriers, both males and females, were also spotted there.

At the Visitor Centre, whilst the picnic was being prepared, the group enjoyed watching the colony of Night Herons, Cattle and Little Egrets, and Grey and Purple Herons, together with Reed and Great Reed Warblers, Savi's Warbler, Common and Pallid Swifts, Spoonbill and Griffon Vulture.

After having a walk along the track parallel to the Visitor Centre we drove back to El Rocio, stopping again at the Dehesa de Abajo. We spotted a Short-toed Eagle flying very close to us, enabling a good view of her feather pattern.

Once back at El Rocio, at 8pm we had a delicious dinner at El Toruño Restaurant.

Day 3

Sunday 19th April

Odiel Marshlands; Maneli Dunes; El Acebuche Visitor Centre.

We started the day at 9am driving westwards towards the tidal marshes of the Odiel River, located only 40 minutes from El Rocio. The first species that welcomed us as we were parking at the Visitor Centre was the iconic Osprey. On our walk in the marshes we enjoyed watching Sanderling, Redshank, Curlew Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Grey Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Flamingo, Shelduck, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Slender-billed Gull, Little Tern, Caspian Tern, and a pair of Peregrine Falcons trying to catch something to eat!

After a 10-minute stop in the Visitor Centre we drove eastwards, parallel to the coast, to the dunes to the south of the park. 30 minutes later we arrived at Pasarela de Maneli, a wooden track that goes into the dunes to the Atlantic Ocean. We had our picnic lunch here being visited by Serins, Long-tailed Tits and Great Tits.

We then walked into the dunes and enjoyed extraordinary views of Dartford Warbler, Southern Grey Shrike and Woodchat Shrike. A Short-toed Eagle was flying over our heads; this is a very good spot for them to catch sunbathing reptiles.

The day was quite windy and there was not much activity on the Atlantic coast so we moved to El Acebuche Visitor Centre. This was a very good place, especially for photographers, and we had great opportunities to photograph Azure-winged Magpie, Hoopoe, Serin, Red-rumped Swallow, Stonechat, Bee-eater and Corn Bunting.

This afternoon we decided to finish a little earlier, allowing time for group members to visit the village of El Rocio.

Day 4

Monday 20th April

Our main focus today was to enter the restricted area of the National Park, only accessible to a few companies. After driving along some sand tracks with our guides Sergio and Jose Manuel, we were dropped off in an open area where we were able to walk. We spotted Fallow Deer, Red Deer and Wild Boar, and some were lucky to see Egyptian Mongoose! We also saw a Spanish Imperial Eagle and several Short-toed Eagles perched on the top of pylons. We clearly saw the white shoulders on the Spanish Imperial Eagle, and also enjoyed her flight patterns.

Next we drove back to El Rocio and had our picnic in the Visitor Centre close to the marshes. We enjoyed watching Reed Warbler, Hoopoe and Black Kite; and a group of Collared Pratincoles were seen flying over the village of El Rocio.

On our afternoon visit to the National Park we visited La Escupidera where we enjoyed very close views of Bee-eaters, especially the photographers, as well as Iberian Grey Shrike. We looked for lynx activity by driving along sand tracks that cross their territories, but all we found were rabbits.

After some hours in the field we returned to our hotel where we packed our bags before enjoying our last dinner in the Toruño Restaurant.

Day 5

Tuesday 21st April

We had an early start as we needed to be at the airport at 8.15am. We left El Rocio at 6.45am, stopping en route at a petrol station. We had our breakfast at the airport before our flight back to the UK.

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Species Lists

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

	Scientific name	Common name	April			
			17	18	19	20
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓		✓
2	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		✓		✓
3	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓		✓
4	Black-crowned 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>Ardea 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 roseus</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	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>		✓		
20	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>				✓
21	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓	✓		
22	Pochard	<i>Aythya farina</i>	✓	✓		✓
23	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓		✓
25	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓		
27	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓			✓
28	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>				✓
29	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓	✓	✓
31	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			✓	✓
32	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		✓		
34	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			✓	
35	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrines</i>		✓		✓
36	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓		
37	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓		✓
38	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>		✓		
39	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓		
40	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		✓	✓	
41	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>				✓
42	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			✓	
43	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			✓	
44	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			✓	
45	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			✓	
46	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			✓	
47	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	✓			

	Scientific name	Common name	April			
			17	18	19	20
48	Redshank	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>			✓	
49	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		✓		
50	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓		
51	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>				✓
52	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>			✓	
53	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓	
54	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>		✓		
55	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>			✓	
56	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>			✓	
57	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrid</i>		✓		✓
58	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓		✓	✓
59	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓			
60	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓		✓
61	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		✓		✓
62	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓			
63	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓		
64	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
66	Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	H			
69	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>				H
70	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓
71	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓		✓
72	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>		✓		
73	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓	✓
74	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>			✓	
75	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓		✓	
78	Yellow (Iberian) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>		✓	✓	✓
79	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	✓	✓	H	H
80	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓		✓	
81	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓		✓
82	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>		✓		
83	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓		✓	✓
84	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>				H
85	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		✓		✓
86	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H		
87	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>		✓		✓
88	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓	✓		
89	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			✓	
90	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	H			
91	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓			
92	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>			✓	H
93	Western Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna opaca</i>	✓			
94	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>	✓			
95	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓		✓	
96	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓		✓	
97	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓		✓	✓
98	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓		✓	

	Scientific name	Common name	April			
			17	18	19	20
99	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	✓			✓
100	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	✓		✓	✓
101	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
104	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>				✓
106	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>				✓
107	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓			
108	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
109	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓	✓	H
110	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓			✓
111	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
112	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓			
113	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
114	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		✓		
115	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓
116	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	✓			