

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana

Naturetrek Tour Report

8 - 12 November 2015



Bluethroat by Chris Piper



The Group by Sergio Martín



Black Stork by Chris Piper



Black-shouldered Kite by Jose Manuel Bernal

Report compiled by Sergio Martín
Images courtesy of Chris Piper; Jose Manuel Bernal and Sergio Martín



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Participants: Sergio Martín (leader) and six Naturetrek clients

Introduction

At a time when foreign travel was still a remote dream for most people, the account of the expedition in Guy Mountfort's classic book 'Portrait of a Wilderness' made exciting reading and inspired ambitions to visit this remarkable area. The aim of the tour was to visit as many habitats in Doñana area as possible and, with that, a good section of the wildlife. We were not to be disappointed...

Day 1

Sunday 8th November

London Gatwick – Seville – Guadiamar Reserve – El Rocío.

We started quite early today in order to get our flight from London Gatwick to Seville. Nevertheless, the efforts of being awake since very early morning didn't matter as we were all really looking forward to starting this tour. The group arrived to Seville airport at 1.20pm ready to begin our bird watching trip towards El Rocío.

After packing our baggage into the van, we made our trip to the reserve of the Guadiamar River, one of the rivers that reach the marshes, filling them with the water that is so necessary in this park. That river was polluted in 1998 by mines dumping which endangered the area, but it has now more than recovered. This was shown at our stop close to the river where we spotted Greenfinches, Great Tits, high flying Griffon Vultures and we heard Long-tailed Tits and Cetti's Warblers.

After that walk we followed our way to El Rocío, spotting some raptors on the way in the form of Common Buzzards and more Griffon Vultures. Crested Larks, Meadow Pipits and Cattle Egrets awaited us at one of the stops on the way to the Hotel Toruño. We finally arrived around to our Hotel at 4pm. 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 mother of the marshes, just behind our hotel.

We spotted there a group of Red Deer, together with Greylag Goose, Shoveler, Black-winged Stilts and Common Snipe. Perched in front of us was an impressive adult Spanish Imperial Eagle to welcome us to the Park. We also had a glimpse of Penduline Tits together with Reed Warblers and Common Chiffchaffs.

After this last stop we got back to our hotel to freshen up just as a shower - then some drinks, checklist and dinner!

Day 2

Monday 9th November

Doñana National Park (Isla Mayor, Valverde visitor's centre, Transformed Marshes)

Our second day in El Rocío began by the group taking a look at the back of our hotel in the Mother of the Marshes, where we spotted new species such as flying Spoonbills and a lonely Bluethroat very close to us. After this brief birding stop, we made our way to the north-eastern boundary of the Doñana National Park, an area that was once part of the marshes but now has been transformed into agricultural fields, creating new and diverse habitats for different species.

The first part of our route took us through Coto del Rey forest where, watching from the road, we saw Black Redstarts, European Robins, some Buzzards and Ravens perched on electricity pylons, and our first proper views of Iberian Magpies and Hoopoes. On our way to the Northern Marshes we stopped several times, and in some of those stops we had the chance to get nice views of Black-shouldered Kites, Common and Lesser Kestrels, our first Black Storks on the ground and big groups of Common Cranes and Greylag Geese. A Short-toed Eagle flew close to our van when we were near the lunch point.

As we were getting closer to Jose Antonio Valverde Visitor Centre, we decided to make a stop there to have our picnic lunch. While eating, we were able to watch some birds in front of us such as Little Grebes, Common Coots, Gadwall and flying Marsh Harriers.

After our deserved lunch we began our way back to El Rocío, stopping in the Pumps House (La casa de las Bombas) close to the Guadiamar River where we had the luck to see a big group of Black Storks together with Great White Egrets, Grey Herons, Spoonbills and Little Egrets. It was a worthwhile stop there. While driving, we had the chance to follow a Common Buzzard that was flying from fence to fence, performing nice movements for us to take pictures of it. We could also watch briefly our first Spanish Sparrows moving from bush to bush.

After having spent several hours in the field, we decided that it was time to drive back to the hotel for a break and to get ready for our lovely supper!

Day 3

Tuesday 10th November

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

Today we began quite early to have the better light at the National Park and the best opportunities to see the elusive Iberian Lynx. After breakfast, our guide Jose Manuel picked us up in our 4x4 van and we set off 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. We tried our best, searching for fresh tracks or any movement in the forest, but today the Lynx was hidden so we moved on to watch the rest of the highlights of the park as there was much more to see afterwards...

A big group of Red Deer and some Wild Boar were seen just behind the National Park fence and a very nice Black-shouldered Kite was waiting for us on the top of a dead Cork Oak. After that we got close to an area where there are lots of Rabbit warrens, and many predators go there to hunt them; we had great views of some Little Owls standing on top of the dead Eucalyptus roots that house the Rabbits. Lots of Stonechats and few Serins and Iberian Shrikes were spotted too.

After watching a juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle on the fence of the National Park, we decided to go for a walk in "la vera" (an intermediate ecosystem between the forest and the marshes), into another restricted area known as Hierba Buena. We made a loop around the lovely 'dehesa' or traditional Mediterranean forest. On this walk we had very nice views of a lovely Iberian Shrike perched on top of an Ash tree, while many Sardinian Warblers were heard but not seen in this area. When we were getting closer to the marshes, we had very nice views of a Short-toed Eagle, some Griffon Vultures standing close to the cows and a chase of a Peregrine Falcon, as it tried to take a Wood Pigeon, which luckily escaped from the predator in front of us. Just before Jose Manuel picked

us after the walk, one adult Spanish Imperial Eagle was seen on top of a pylon and some Bullfinches flew close to us.

Lunch time was around the corner, so we drove back to the sandy tracks 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 in front of a big group of Fallow Deer and a Common Buzzard which was flying in the surroundings. After leaving our lunch spot we had the luck to spot a family of Egyptian Mongooses running away from us. We continued searching for the elusive Iberian Lynx through the forest but we had no luck today although we saw lots of Red Deer, Red-legged Partridge and Iberian Magpies instead.

We drove back to El Rocío to have a short break and to go for a walk at Las Rocinas stream. This is part of the Doñana National Park and offers a variety of wooden trails, perfect to locate a good sample of bird species of the area. Here we saw many Stonechats, our first Kingfisher, and a nice male Common Pochard.

We got back to El Rocío to relax during the late afternoon and later to enjoy the delicious local nibbles, drinks and superb supper!

Day 4

Wednesday 11th November

Odiel Marshlands – El Acebrón Palace

For the morning on this day we voted to make our way out of Doñana to check another ecosystem which is very interesting at this time of the year: the tidal marshes of the Odiel River. We drove for 40 min to get to the beginning of those marshes which were in low tide during the morning.

We began searching for waders in one of the lagoons close to the salt works. Mallard, Little Grebe and Gadwalls were seen in that lagoon. Close to the lagoon we saw many different species feeding, such as Greater Flamingos, Whimbrels, Ringed Plovers, Dunlins and Black Tailed Godwits. After making a comfort stop at the Visitor Centre, we followed the way further into the protected area where we spotted Little and Great White Egrets, and Eurasian Spoonbills everywhere we looked with our binoculars. Redshanks, Greenshanks and very nicely perched Ospreys were spotted too. We got back to the van and moved on, spotting more Eurasian Spoonbills, Sanderlings, Black-headed, Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Some Sandwich Terns and Curlews were spotted too. We stopped at a newly formed beach, thanks to a man-made dyke in the 70's, where we spotted Yellow-legged Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Sanderlings.

Having collected some new records for our trip, we decided it was time to go back to the Doñana area where we had our picnic surrounded by Iberian Magpies and House Sparrows.

After lunch we drove to the Acebrón Forest. We walked along the trail which links the Palace gardens with the parking, a beautiful Mediterranean forest. In spite the hot afternoon, we managed to find a new and interesting species for our list: Short-toed Treecreeper. Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits were seen too. Chaffinch, Serin and Chiffchaffs were flitting actively around!

We finished our day having a look at the Marismas close to El Rocío where we had a nice sunset with Snipe, Shoveler, Greylag Goose and lots of Common Coot, with the Red Deer on the horizon.

We headed back to our hotel in order to take a break and a stroll around El Rocío. Then we gathered together again to do our checklist homework followed by our last delicious dinner in El Rocío.

Day 5

Thursday 12th November

El Rocío – Dehesa de Abajo – Seville airport

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. We drove through Villamanrique de la Condesa, getting to the transformed marshes, and we crossed for the last time the Guadiamar River where we spotted Crested Larks, Corn Buntings, and Spanish Sparrows on some bushes. Just after we passed the river, we saw lots of Eurasian Spoonbills, Little and Cattle Egrets and our first Squacco Heron of the tour. All these records were from the rice field area just before our last stop of the tour: La Dehesa de Abajo. La Dehesa de Abajo is a stream that has been dammed, so there is a lagoon instead. This stream was full of water and, as the marshes were not very waterlogged yet, we found it very interesting in terms of birdlife. Red-crested Pochards, Mallard, Greater Flamingos, Little and Black-necked Grebe were seen, as well as Avocets quite far away. Jackdaws were spotted flying and Spotless Starlings murmuring up and down. A great last stop for our trip.

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



Little Owls by Jose Manuel Bernal

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

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

	Scientific name	Common name	November				
			8	9	10	11	12
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		✓		✓	
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓		✓	
7	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>					✓
8	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya farina</i>			✓		✓
9	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓		
10	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓			✓
12	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>					✓
13	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>		✓		✓	✓
14	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>		✓			✓
15	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>					✓
17	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		✓		✓	✓
18	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>					✓
19	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓		✓	✓
23	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				✓	
25	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		✓	✓		
26	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
27	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓	✓		
28	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	✓		✓		
29	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
31	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓	✓		
33	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>				✓	
36	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>					✓
38	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓	
40	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓	
41	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>				✓	
42	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
43	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
44	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓	
45	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>				✓	
46	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				✓	

47	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>				✓	
48	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓			
49	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓	
50	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				✓	
51	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				✓	
52	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓		✓	✓
53	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		✓		✓	✓
54	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				✓	
56	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
58	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓		
59	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			✓		✓
60	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				h	
62	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		✓			
63	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓		
65	Iberian Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>					✓
69	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
70	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	h				
71	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓			✓	
72	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	h	✓	✓	h
73	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	✓			✓	
74	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓			x	
76	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	✓				
77	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	✓	h	h	✓
78	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	h		h	✓	
79	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		✓			
81	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		✓	✓		✓
82	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓		✓		
83	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	h	✓	✓	✓	✓
84	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			h		
85	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				✓	
86	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓			
87	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				✓	
90	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>		✓		✓	✓
92	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			✓		
94	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓			
97	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>		✓			

98	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
99	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	h	✓	✓	✓	
101	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓		h	✓	
102	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓			
103	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
104	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓		✓
106	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia (domest.)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
107	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓		
108	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		✓	✓		

Mammals

1	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>		✓			
3	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>			✓		
4	Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>			✓		
5	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓	✓		

Other Taxa

1	Iberian Tree Frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>	h	✓	h	h	h
2	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓		✓	
3	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>			✓		
4	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓		
5	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓	✓		
6	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>				✓	
7	Pimelia Beetle	<i>Pimelia costata</i>				✓	
8	Lemonia Moth	<i>Lemonia philopalus</i>		✓			

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