

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 8 April 2016



Darford Warbler by John Long



The Group by Laura Benito



Thekla Lark by John Long



Cytinus hypocistis by Laura Benito

Report compiled by 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

Participants: Sergio Martín and Laura Benito (Leaders) with 11 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 4th April

London Gatwick – Seville – El Rocío.

The awaited day had come. A very diverse group was going to join up at Seville Airport. Some were coming from Gatwick, some others from Stansted, meeting the tour leaders at Seville airport. All were looking forward to see what Donana had to offer us. The group arrived at Seville airport at 4.50pm, ready to begin our bird watching trip towards El Rocío.

The weather and the timing to get to El Rocío were not the best to do an intense birding day, but we did our best and, on the way to the hotel, we spotted some Common Swifts, Western Cattle Egrets, Spotless Starlings and, getting to El Rocío, we saw our first Black Kite and some beautiful European Bee-eaters.

We finally arrived around 6pm. 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 in the ‘mother of the marshes’, just behind our hotel. We did so from the hotel, as the weather was not pleasant enough to do it from outside but even from inside, we spotted Western (Purple) Swamphen, Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill and Greylag Goose between Glossy Ibises.

After a freshen up, we walked to the restaurant, had some drinks, dinner and rest!

Day 2

Tuesday 5th April

Doñana National Park (Dehesa de Abajo, J.A. Valverde Visitor Centre)

Today was going to be the first proper birding day so we were quite excited and our expectations were high. We were not going to be disappointed. After breakfast, we got into our vans and drove to the north-eastern part of the park where we have the transformed marshes: a very big extension of agricultural fields that once were part of the freshwater marshes, with a diversity of crops that are a perfect habitat for many different species.

On our way to that area we spotted some Corn Buntings, European Bee-eaters here and there, and many Black Kites. Booted Eagles and passerines as Sardinian Warblers, European Serins, Common Linnets and European Greenfinches were flying up and down. Even a couple of Tree Sparrows came along to say hello. We then decided to have a comfort stop at La Dehesa de Abajo, where there is an interpretation centre with facilities and a nice lagoon full of water. As the marshes were not very waterlogged, we found it very interesting in term of birds, with Common and Red-crested Pochards, a White-headed Duck, Greater Flamingos, Little Grebes and a very close couple of Red-knobbed Coots.

After this lovely stop we continued our way towards J.A. Valverde Visitor Centre, making several stops to see Lesser Kestrels and a couple of Little Owls, both species nesting in an abandoned building, Short-toed Snake Eagles looking for their meal, and some very still Black-crowned Night Herons perched on a *Tamarix* bush. Once at the visitor centre, we had our picnic stop while watching the nesting area of Glossy Ibis and a good variety of herons and egrets. This year, the surrounding marshes were very dry so not many birds decided to nest

there and we could see more of them close to our hotel in El Rocío. Despite this, we spotted Whiskered Terns, Griffon Vultures, Black-tailed Godwits and a lonely but beautiful Garganey.

After lunch, we followed the tracks through the transformed marshes and a beautiful Short-toed Eagle awaited us on top of an electric pylon, while we also saw some Zitting Cisticolas, Spanish Yellow Wagtails and Lesser Kestrels. We then made our way back to El Rocío, spotting some other birds while driving back home, such as many Black Kites, some Common Buzzards and lots of Woodchat Shrikes.

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 3

Wednesday 6th April

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

Today we got up very early to go birding into the core area of Doñana National Park, right along the Raya Real, the track which takes you to the heart of the park. In the early morning, we began searching for tracks and clues of where the Iberian Lynx could be hidden, but after a while seeking, we realised that today the cat was going to be away from our eyes. Just some Red Deer and European Rabbits were seen on our search. A beautiful Woodchat Shrike perched on top of an *Onopordum* thistle let us take a picture of him, and Red-legged Partridges and Black Kites were moving around the area. We made a stop to stretch our legs and some European Stonechats, Sardinian Warblers and Wild Boar were seen at that point.

Once back in the 4x4 vehicles, we had the chance to see a very nice, close male Subalpine Warbler and, further away, two Little Owls on top of Eucalyptus roots that are used as Rabbit burrows. Then, we drove to “La Hierba Buena” area where we had the chance to walk a bit in a very nice “Dehesa” forest (meadows and Cork Oaks together with Wild Olive trees). Here we spotted Southern Grey Shrikes, Booted Eagles, and a very nice Thekla Lark perched on top of a dead tree. While walking, a couple of Iberian Hares ran away from us, and we could see them quite close.

The day was divided into two as, at this time of year, it is too hot at midday to be birding in the protected area, so we drove back to El Rocío for our lunch break, where we saw the first Collared Pratincoles of the year. After having a nice lunch in El Rocío, we had a little rest till the sun was getting lower, and at 3.30 we were ready again to get into our 4x4's to visit this great protected area. First we drove through Coto del Rey forest and then we left the vehicle to walk. We heard European Serins, Short-toed Treecreepers and we saw Long-tailed Tits together with European Greenfinches. Getting to Palacio del Rey we saw many Iberian Magpies but they were moving all the time so we didn't have the best views of them.

Then we drove to La Garvija area where an old ranger's house was used as a comfort stop and here we spotted Purple Herons, Common Kestrels and Common Buzzards. We decided then to do our last stop of the day in the marshes and Bingo! An Egyptian Mongoose was seen on the way to the stop and there we saw both Northern and Black-eared Wheatears. A perfect picture to finish our day!!

Day 4

Thursday 7th April

Odiel Marshlands – Cuesta Maneli – Acebuche Visitor Centre

This morning, we drove outside Doñana NP to visit a close and very different ecosystem: the tidal marshes of the Odiel River near the city of Huelva, a 45-minute drive from El Rocío. Once there, we had great views of Greater Flamingos, together with Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet and Dunlin. After making a comfort stop at the visitor centre, we got back to the vehicles and we continued driving, spotting Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Dunlin and Grey Plover, plus some Eurasian Spoonbills. Driving along the dyke, we saw many Whimbrel, Common Greenshank, Common and Little Ringed Plover, Yellow-legged Gull and Kentish Plover with some Sanderling. A paradise for the waders indeed! We had the chance to see a couple of nests with Western Ospreys on them. We also 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 Gull and Sandwich Tern.

After watching all these waders in that Natural area, we made our planned picnic close to the visitor centre, so we could eat our lunch while spotting yet more waders, plus Sandwich Terns trying to fish their lunch.

After a lovely lunch we drove back to Doñana protected area to check the stabilised dunes. Here we saw new species in a beautiful Dartford Warbler; we also saw European Serins, European Stonechats and European Greenfinches. That was a short stop, and we did another one before getting back to El Rocío, in the Acebuche Visitor Centre where we had the desired proper views of the Iberian Magpies for the photographers.

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

Day 5

Friday 8th April

El Acebrón forest — Seville airport

This was our last morning at Doñana, and we used it to explore the Acebrón Forest. We had to be at Seville airport by 2.15pm, so we had enough time to check this beautiful river forest and its species.

We walked along the trail which links the Palace gardens with the parking, through a beautiful Mediterranean forest. We managed to find a few new and interesting species for our list such as Iberian and Common Chiffchaffs, nice views of Short-toed Treecreepers and a glimpse of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. We also recorded Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits, Common Chaffinch and European Serin, while House Martins were gliding actively around!

After checking this new landscape, we got to the 'mother of the marshes', to have our last picnic in front of the village of El Rocío where Collared Pratincoles and a lonely Scquaco Heron came to say "Hasta pronto, amigos!"

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

Species Lists

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

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			4	5	6	7	8
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	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>		✓			
7	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓		✓	✓	
8	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>		✓			
11	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓		
12	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>		h	h	✓	
13	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
14	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓	✓		
15	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		✓		✓	
16	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓			
21	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>					✓
22	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓		✓	✓
26	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>				✓	
28	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓	
29	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				✓	
30	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓		✓
31	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓	✓		✓
32	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
33	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
34	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		✓		✓	
35	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>					
36	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	
38	Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
39	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>		✓			
41	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
44	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		h			
45	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓	
46	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓	

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			4	5	6	7	8
47	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>				✓	
48	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>				✓	
49	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		✓		✓	
50	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓	
51	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓		✓	
52	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓	✓		✓	
53	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓			
54	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				h	✓
55	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				✓	
56	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				✓	
57	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>			✓	✓	✓
58	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>				✓	
59	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				✓	
60	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>		✓		✓	✓
61	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓	✓	h	
64	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓		
65	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarpis melba</i>	✓				
66	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓			
68	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>					✓
71	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>					✓
72	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>					h
73	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		✓			
74	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>					✓
76	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓		
77	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓		
79	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓		
82	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	
83	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			✓		
84	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓		✓
85	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		h	✓	✓	✓
86	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			✓
87	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>			✓	h	
88	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
89	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓			
90	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		h	h	h	h
94	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓	h	h
95	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			h		
96	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	h	✓

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			4	5	6	7	8
97	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>					✓
98	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>		✓	h	h	
99	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		✓	h	✓	h
100	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓		
101	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				✓	
102	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>			✓		
103	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>			✓	✓	✓
104	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					✓
105	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			h		✓
106	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
107	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
108	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				✓	
109	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		h	h		✓
110	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>				✓	
112	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>				✓	
113	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
114	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓	✓		
115	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓			
116	Spanish Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>		✓	✓	✓	
117	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>		✓	✓		
118	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
119	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	h	✓	
120	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓			
121	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
122	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
123	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
124	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓			

Mammals

1	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
2	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓		
3	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>			✓		
4	Fallow Deer	<i>Linx Pardina</i>			✓		
5	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			✓		
6	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>			✓		
7	Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>			✓		

Other Taxa

1	Large Psammmodromus Lizard	<i>Psammmodromus algirus</i>					✓
2	Turkish Gecko (Mediterranean House Gecko)	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>			✓	✓	
3	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>				✓	
4	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocerus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
5	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓	✓		
6	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	✓	✓	
7	Pimelia Beetle	<i>Pimelia costata</i>					✓

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