

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana

Naturetrek Tour Report

25 - 29 April 2016



Great Reed Warbler



The Group



Short-toed Snake Eagle



Centaurea sp.

Report and images compiled by Sergio Martín



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Day 1

Monday 25th April

London Gatwick – Seville – El Rocío.

The first day to discover Doñana was here and we were all looking forward to see what this almost mythical place had to offer us. The flight from Gatwick brought the majority of the people to the airport of Seville where the tour leader was waiting for them. The group arrived at Seville airport at 4.40pm, ready to begin our bird watching trip towards El Rocío.

The timing to get to El Rocío was not the best to do an intense birding day, but we did our best and, on the way to the hotel, we spotted Common Swifts, Western Cattle Egrets, Spotless Starlings and, getting to El Rocío, we saw our first Black Kite and some beautiful European Bee-eaters. On our way to the Hotel, we crossed a beautiful forest that belongs to the protected area, and it had plenty of Iberian Magpies, some Eurasian Hoopoes and other passerines as European Serins, European Goldfinches and Woodchat Shrikes.

We arrived to our hotel at around 6pm, then we had some drinks to refresh ourselves and delicious nibbles that the hotel provided, before a deserved rest. Later, we met to have our dinner.

Some of the group took the chance to check the lagoon just behind the hotel before dinner, where Greylag Goose, Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Spoonbills, and hundreds of Glossy Ibises were moving up and down. The Ibises and Western Cattle Egrets go to roost on the top of a big group of *Tamarix* trees, very close to the restaurant, so we saw them flying while having dinner. Even Red Deer appeared between the Tamarisks, along with White Storks and Mallards.

After having dinner with this show, we had some drinks and rest!

Day 2

Tuesday 26th April

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

Today we had planned an intensive birding day. We were going to spend our day in the north-eastern bounds of the park, an area that now agricultural fields with a wide variety of crops, but used to be a big part of the marshes. We began crossing an Umbrella Pine forest, where we spotted some Eurasian Hoopoes, Woodchat Shrikes, European Serins, and raptors such as Black Kites and Common Buzzards.

On our way to Dehesa de Abajo lagoon we had the luck to see a Black-winged Kite searching for food, and a large group of Glossy Ibises with White Storks, in a pond that had been formed with the last rains. We also saw Western Swampheens, Purple Herons, and a beautiful singing Great Reed Warbler on top of a Tamarisk. We had a short stop at the interpretation centre at Dehesa de Abajo to use the facilities, and then we scanned the lagoon in search of new stuff. There we got nice views of a couple of Red-knobbed Coots that were breeding close to the road, Red-crested and Common Pochard, and Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes. Gull-billed Terns were seen too.

After the profitable scanning, we made our way to another interesting spot, the J.A. Valverde Visitor Centre. On the way to get there, we had very nice views of Lesser Kestrels and Little Owls that nest on an abandoned building. We saw also some Black-crowned Night Herons roosting during the day, and a Short-toed Snake Eagle flew close to us.

As the day was getting warmer, we continued our drive towards the J.A. Valverde Visitor Centre where we had a good break while watching very close Greater Flamingos and many Glossy Ibis, Western Cattle and Little Egrets, Black Kites and Little Grebes. Shortly after this, we enjoyed our picnic lunch at the car park and then we continued to check other areas of the high marshes. Just outside of the Visitor Centre, we had one of the highlights of the day!! A couple of European Rollers were perched on top of an electric wire and stayed long and still enough for us to see them through the telescope. We also had a glimpse of our first Eurasian Golden Oriole as a yellow lightning, but that meant that they were around so we were encouraged to search harder for them. An elusive Eurasian Stone-curlew flew away and, on the trail, we had perfect views of Corn Buntings, Zitting Cisticolas and Spanish Yellow Wagtails. Some Common Stonechats were seen too.

We drove back to El Rocío while spotting some other species as Common Linnets, Crested Larks and Spanish Sparrows flying from bush to bush.

We had had a long day birding so we decided to get back to the hotel to have a deserved rest. After that we did our checklist while having a drink close to a thousand-year-old Wild Olive tree, and then enjoyed another great dinner!

Day 3

Wednesday 27th April

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

Our third day in El Rocío began early as it was getting quite hot to be birding at midday, so we decided to split our tour into the National Park in morning and evening trips. After breakfast, we boarded our 4x4 vehicle and set off with our park guide into the core area of Donana National Park, right along the Raya Real, the track which takes you to the heart of the park.

Our first target was the Iberian Lynx that moves at dawn and dusk, so we followed the tracks searching for clues of its movement. Fresh tracks of Badger, some Red Deer and European Rabbits were seen, but no signs of the Lynx. While searching the cat, we spotted some interesting birds as Woodlark and Common Chaffinches, and Crested, Blue and Great Tits were heard.

After an hour or so, we got to an area where we could stretch our legs and we saw more Red Deer, Sardinian Warblers and an elusive Melodious Warbler. After that, we got back to the vehicle just to drive a short distance to some Eucalyptus stumps that are used as rabbit burrows, and we saw there Little Owls perched, some Common Stonechats, Woodchat Shrikes and Red-legged Partridges.

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 walk, making a loop around the lovely “dehesa” or traditional Mediterranean forest. On that walk we had the luck to see our first Turtle Doves, Pallid

Swifts flying around us and some Southern Grey Shrikes perched on top of bushes. Even a baby Wild Boar ran in front of us to hide in the “dehesa” forest (meadows and Cork-oaks).

After the walk we got back to have a nice lunch in El Rocío and to have a little rest till the sun was getting lower. At 4pm we set out again to do some birding by the lagoon just at the back of the hotel, and half an hour after we were ready to get into our 4x4 again. In the walk at the lagoon, we had nice views of some Whiskered Terns, Greylag Goose with their chicks and Red-rumped Swallows. After that, we drove through Coto del Rey forest where we spotted many Serins, Sardinian Warblers, Woodchat Shrikes and European Bee-eaters.

We did another walk through an Umbrella Pine forest where we saw very nice Short-toed Treecreepers, Long-tailed Tits, Eurasian Hoopoe, a glimpse of a Common Cuckoo and a Short-toed Snake Eagle flying over us together with a Black Kite. After such a productive walk, we drove a bit more to get to the surroundings of the King's Palace where we spotted a couple of Golden Orioles! This time they were seen well with the telescope. Common Kestrel, Common Buzzard and many Red Deer were seen too. As it was getting late we decided to do our last stop in the high marshes where we had some Crested Larks and a migration group of Common Ringed Plovers.

We got back to El Rocío to enjoy the delicious local nibbles, drinks and superb supper!

Day 4

Thursday 28th April

El Acebrón forest – Las Rocinas – Acebuche Visitor Centre – Stabilised dunes.

Today was going to be a very diverse day in terms of ecosystems and we began visiting the Acebrón forest. On the way driving to the area, we saw some European Bee-eaters and a very nice Great Spotted Woodpecker in a small Pine tree. Nightingales and Great Tits were heard on our way and we saw a glimpse of a Thekla Lark together with Sardinian Warblers in spiky bushes. Once at the forest, we had nice views of Blue and Crested Tits, Short-toed Treecreepers, Common Chiffchaff, Eurasian Wren and, once we crossed a wooden path, we had perfect views of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Wonderful!

Following the trail we saw also Spotted Flycatchers, European Serins and another highlight: a beautiful Eurasian Wryneck calling in front of us!! Once we got to the Acebrón Palace we used the facilities, and then watched the area, getting Common Chaffinch, Common and Pallid Swifts with House Martins gliding around and also Griffon Vultures flying high!

After this interesting landscape we drove back to check Las Rocinas River. 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. From the hides we saw Common Chiffchaff, Tree Sparrows, Common Stonechats and Eurasian Spoonbills, together with Red-crested Pochards, Glossy ibis, Little Grebe and Western Swamphens. Following the trail we had views of Eurasian Reed Warbler, Black Kites and Iberian Magpies not quite still enough yet for photographs. It was getting late so we decided to have our lunch break at Acebuche Visitor Centre where there is a nice picnic area, and there we finally got the perfect pictures we had been searching for, of the Iberian Magpies. After lunch we did a stroll around and we got some Corn Buntings, Red-rumped Swallows and heard an Iberian Chiffchaff calling.

We decided then to get to a new landscape, the stabilised dunes of the park where we could see new and interesting species. Cuesta Maneli is a wooden trail that goes to the beach of the Natural area and makes it easy to get to that landscape to try to see birds. The afternoon was a bit windy and just some Yellow-legged Gulls and a Gannet were seen from the shore. Despite the lack of waders or seabirds, we had some interesting passerines such as Sardinian Warblers, European Serins and a beautiful Dartford Warbler. A perfect picture to finish our day!!

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! Talking during the dinner, we decided that we didn't have enough birding for the day so we tried to get some nocturnal birds close by, and we got to hear Red-necked Nightjar in the shrubland, but he didn't show himself.

Day 5

Friday 29th April

The Odiel Marshes – Seville airport

For the last morning, we made our way out of Doñana to check another ecosystem which is very busy at this moment of the year (the tidal marshes of the Odiel River) so we drove 45 minutes to get to the beginning of those marshes. Once we got there we had very good beginning, with a group of Curlew Sandpipers in breeding plumage, Dunlin, and another group of Common Ringed Plover on migration, together with lots of Greater Flamingos and Eurasian Spoonbills. Checking the lagoon close to the salt works, we spotted Red-crested and Common Pochard, Spanish Yellow Wagtail and Ruddy Turnstone. Mallard, Gadwall and Yellow-legged Gull were flying around too. After making a comfort stop at the visitor centre, we walked to the back of the building where we spotted Iberian Yellow and White Wagtails. A Western Marsh Harrier was seen from a hide too.

We got back to the vehicle and we continued driving, spotting Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Dunlin, Eurasian Spoonbill and, in a tidal lagoon where we stopped to see better some Grey Plover, suddenly a Western Osprey appeared looking for a fish to have for lunch. A Common Snipe flew above us and, following the dyke, we saw a dozen Whimbrel and a couple of Curlew, Little Stint, Sanderling and Kentish Plover.

After getting such a variety of waders we got back to the interpretation centre so have lunch and use the facilities as we had to drive back to Seville airport. On the way to get to the lunch spot, we had the chance to see a nice male Western Marsh Harrier and at least three Montagu's (males and females), together with Sandwich Terns and Little Terns. We ate our lunch while spotting some more waders and Spotless Starlings.

As we had to take the flight back to London Gatwick we packed our telescope and we drove to the airport. 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!

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Species Lists

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

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			25	26	27	28	29
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		✓	✓		
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓		
7	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓			
9	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		✓			
10	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓	✓	✓	
15	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		✓	✓	✓	
18	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓	✓		
19	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>					✓
21	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		✓			
22	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
23	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓	✓		
24	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓			✓
26	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		✓			✓
27	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>				✓	
28	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓		
30	Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓		✓	
31	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>		✓			
33	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>		✓			
35	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓			
37	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>					✓
38	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			✓		✓
39	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>					✓
40	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					✓
41	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>					✓
42	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>					✓
43	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>					✓
44	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>					✓
45	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>					✓
46	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>					✓

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			25	26	27	28	29
47	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>					✓
48	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>					✓
49	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>					✓
50	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓			✓
51	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>				✓	✓
52	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>		✓			
53	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>					✓
54	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>					✓
55	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>			✓		
56	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			✓		
58	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			✓	h	
60	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓		
61	Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>				h	
62	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>			✓	✓	✓
64	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>		✓			
65	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
66	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>				✓	
68	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓	
69	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>				✓	
70	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		✓			
71	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>			✓	✓	
73	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		✓	✓		
75	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓			
78	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	
79	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		h		✓	
80	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>				✓	
81	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		h	✓	✓	✓
82	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓	✓		
83	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓		✓	
84	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓	✓	
86	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	✓	h	h	
90	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓	✓	
91	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓	
92	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>				✓	
93	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	h	✓	h		
94	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓	
95	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>			✓		
96	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	h	✓	✓	h	

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			25	26	27	28	29
97	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				✓	
98	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	h	✓	✓	✓	✓
99	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				✓	
100	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			✓	✓	
101	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓		✓	
104	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		h	h	h	
105	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
106	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
107	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓			
108	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>				✓	
109	Spanish Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>		x		h	✓
110	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>					✓
111	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓		✓	✓	
112	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
113	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓		
114	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
115	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
116	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Mammals

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

Other Taxa

1	Montpellier Snake	<i>Malpolon monspessulanus</i>			✓		
2	Large Psammmodromus Lizard	<i>Psammmodromus algirus</i>			✓	✓	
3	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>		✓	✓		
4	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓	✓		
5	Dunes Dung Beetle	<i>Scarabaeus semipunctatus</i>			✓	✓	
6	Pimelia Beetle	<i>Pimelia costata</i>			✓		

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