

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana

Naturetrek Tour Report

28 November- 2 December 2016



Penduline Tit by Peter Adams



Zitting Cisticola by Peter Adams



The Group by Sergio Martin



Black-crowned Night Heron by Patricia Wilder

Report compiled by Sergio Martin
Images courtesy of Patricia Wilder, Peter Adams & Sergio Martin



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Tour participants: Laura Benito & Sergio Martín (leaders) with 11 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 28th November

London Gatwick – Seville – Guadiamar Reserve – El Rocio.

The tour commenced with a morning flight from London Gatwick to Seville. We arrived at Seville airport at 1.20pm, where Laura and Sergio were waiting for us. After loading the vehicles, we drove to the Guadiamar River, one of the rivers that fill the marshes with the water that is so necessary to the park. The river was polluted in 1998 by mine dumpings which endangered the area, but it has now recovered. As an example of the recovery, we had a walk and were able to spot Common Chiffchaff, Sardinian Warbler, Great and Blue Tits, Common Buzzard, Stonechat and Zitting Cisticola.

After the walk we continued towards El Rocio and Hotel Toruño, spotting more birds on the way including Raven, Crested Lark, Meadow Pipit, Cattle Egret, and Eurasian and Iberian Magpies. We arrived at our hotel at 5.15pm and enjoyed local nibbles and drinks whilst our rooms were assigned.

The marshes behind our hotel were flooded because of recent rain, so we left them to check carefully over the following days when the water level would lower as it ran out of the marshes. We had time to freshen up with a shower before drinks and dinner.

Day 2

Tuesday 29th November

Odiel Marshlands – El Acebrón Palace

Today we headed out of the main Doñana area to give the marshes more time to drain, which would then give us more options for greater diversity on the following days. We had a 40-minute drive to the biggest tidal marshes on the Iberian Peninsula at the Odiel River. Our morning visit was timed to take advantage of the low tide when waders would be more active. We began by checking one of the lagoons close to the salt works where we saw Mallard, Little Stint and Shoveler. Close to the lagoon we saw many different species feeding including Flamingo, Whimbrel, Grey Plover and Dunlin. Some Sandwich Terns were perched on an old harbour.

After a comfort stop at the visitor centre, we made our way further into the protected area where we spotted Little Egret, Spoonbill, Grey Heron and Western Marsh Harrier. Then we stopped to check the area around the artisanal salt works where we saw Stone-curlews standing very still and an Osprey perched on a stick in the middle of the marsh surrounded by waders including Grey Plover and Whimbrel. Driving further on we spotted more Spoonbills, Cormorant, Black-winged Stilt, Common Buzzard, Iberian Magpie, and Black-headed, Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. We stopped at a newly formed beach thanks to a man-made dyke in the 1970's where we spotted a Peregrine Falcon standing behind a Samphire bush and Curlew, Grey Plover and Crested Lark walking on the sand. After having seen some interesting birds, we returned to the visitor centre for lunch, during which some of us spotted a Caspian Tern.

After lunch we drove to the Acebron forest, back in the Doñana area. We walked along the trail which links the Palace gardens with the parking, through beautiful Mediterranean forest. As the ecosystem was completely different to the one in the morning, we managed to see some new and interesting species. Sightings included

Short-toed Treecreeper, Blue, Great and Crested Tits, Chaffinch, Serin and Common Chiffchaff. An Iberian Green Woodpecker was heard and a very nice Dartford Warbler appeared on the top of a spiky Cistus.

Eventually we headed back to our hotel and a stroll around El Rocío. Later we met to do our checklist which was followed by a delicious dinner.

Day 3

Wednesday 30th November

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

Today we had an early start to make full use of the better light and to have the best opportunity to see the elusive Iberian Lynx. After breakfast our guides, both called Jose Manuel, collected us in 4x4 vehicles and we set off into the core area of Doñana National Park, along the Raya Real (Royal Track), which leads to the heart of the park. We searched carefully along a pristine area of Mediterranean forest and saw Rabbits and Red-legged Partridges before we spotted it: a very nice male Iberian Lynx walking near a Lentiscus bush! People in both vehicles saw its majestic silhouette before it vanished from view.

Such an impressive beginning to the day put us all in a good mood to enjoy other sightings. We saw several small groups of Red Deer quite close to the Cork Oaks where they feed at this time of year. Plenty of Wood Pigeons were flying around us in this lovely Mediterranean forest. We stopped to stretch our legs and got nice views of Sardinian Warbler plus a big flock of Goldfinches being chased by a Hen Harrier. Next we came to an area where there were lots of Rabbit burrows and we saw Stonechat, Red Kite and Black Redstart.

Next we went for a walk in 'la vera', an intermediate ecosystem between the forest and the marshes, in another restricted area known as Hierba Buena. We made a loop through the lovely dehesa or traditional Mediterranean forest. On this walk we had very nice views of several Southern Grey Shrikes perched on top of different bushes, Sardinian Warbler, a nice flock of Woodlarks, Hoopoe and Song Thrushes flying actively around. After the walk our vehicles took us closer to the marshes which were still quite flooded. We saw a Spanish Imperial Eagle on top of an electric pylon, Fallow Deer running through the marshes and a beautiful Black Stork standing on the ground. Peter was trying to get closer to the Stork to get a better picture when a Little Owl appeared from the tree he was using as a hide, giving us a good view!

Lunch time was around the corner, so we drove back to the sandy tracks through the Coto or Palacio del Rey. We found that the rain had destroyed the track which we had intended to use to take us to the picnic spot, so we changed our plans and had our picnic at the Palace itself. At the end of lunch a Natterjack Toad was found.

After lunch we drove to the marshes where there was plenty of action. We saw Northern Lapwing, Golden Plover, a glimpse of Stone-curlew, some Griffon Vultures in the distance, and a Peregrine Falcon waiting for some food to hunt. After an intensive day in the core area of the park, we returned to our hotel.

Once back at El Rocío and after a short break, some of us checked the lagoon where we saw plenty of birdlife including Greater flamingo, Spoonbill, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Common Snipe and Common Chiffchaff. After extensive searching we also found Penduline Tit and white-spotted Bluethroat. Later we enjoyed delicious local nibbles, drinks and a superb supper.

Day 4

Thursday 1st December

Doñana National Park (Dehesa de Abajo; Valverde Visitor Centre; Transformed Marshes)

Today we began by making our way to the north-eastern boundary of 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 we watched Black Redstart, some Buzzards and Ravens perched on electric pylons, Iberian Magpie and Hoopoe. Further on we stopped several times and had nice views of a couple of Black-shouldered Kites quite close; one on top of a Prickly Pear bush and the other on top of a leafless tree. As we drove we watched Common Buzzards perched along the fence together with Corn Buntings, Zitting Cisticola and Linnets.

We arrived at La Dehesa de Abajo lagoon. La Dehesa de Abajo is a stream that has been dammed, forming a lagoon. The lagoon was overfull and the surroundings rice fields had a layer of water which made it very interesting for birdlife. We found Squacco Heron, Black Stork, Common Crane and different gulls including Yellow-legged, Black-headed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

Next we drove further into the marshes and stopped at a white building known as 'La casa de las Bombas'. Here we saw hundreds of Glossy Ibises, Great Cormorants, Black-crowned Night Herons, several Western Marsh Harriers and a Short-eared Owl.

We arrived at the Jose Antonio Valverde visitor centre where we had our picnic watching Common Waxbills, Calandra Larks and Fallow Deer. After lunch we began to make our way back to El Rocío, stopping at several points where we saw Hen Harrier, Common Kestrel, Great Egret, Green Sandpiper, a Black Stork standing quite close to us, and a Short-eared Owl.

After a full day in the field, we returned to the hotel and later had our last supper together.

Day 5

Friday 2nd December

El Rocio – Dehesa de Abajo – Seville airport – London Gatwick

Today was our last day, but as our flight wasn't leaving till the early afternoon, we still had time to do some birding. After breakfast we checked the lagoon behind of our hotel to see if there was something we had missed: 'La Madre' (the mother of the marshes) is always a good bet for those who look carefully. We walked along the lagoon and had nice views of Common Snipe, Eurasian Teal, Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Common Chiffchaff, Penduline Tit and a very close Zitting Cisticola which made the day for the photographers.

After these last sights, we packed our bags into the vehicles and drove to the airport. We said thanks and goodbyes to Laura and Sergio and then caught our flight back to the UK, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

Species Lists

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

	Scientific name	Common name	November/December				
			28	29	30	1	2
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓			
3	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓		✓
8	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>				✓	✓
9	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓	
10	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓		
11	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</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	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>			✓	✓	
19	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>				✓	
20	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>				✓	
21	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓		✓	
24	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓	
26	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓			
27	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>				✓	
28	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>			✓		
29	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>			✓		
30	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
31	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			✓	✓	
32	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			✓	✓	
33	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>		✓			
38	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓			
39	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓	
41	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓			
43	Eurasian Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			✓		
44	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓			
45	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>		✓			
46	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	<i>Scientific name</i>	<i>Common name</i>	November/December				
			28	29	30	1	2
47	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		✓			
48	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓			
49	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		✓			
50	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</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>		✓			
55	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓			
56	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓			
57	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		✓			
58	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>		✓			
59	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓			
60	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓		✓	
61	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓		✓	✓
63	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>		✓			
64	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		✓			
65	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			✓	✓	
68	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>				✓	
69	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>				✓	
70	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓	
71	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</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	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
79	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>				✓	
80	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓			
82	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓			
83	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	h		
84	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>			✓		✓
85	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			✓		
86	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>				✓	
88	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓		
89	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			✓	✓	✓
90	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	✓	✓	✓	h
91	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓				
94	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓	✓		
95	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	<i>Scientific name</i>	<i>Common name</i>	November/December				
			28	29	30	1	2
96	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		h			
97	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	h	✓			
98	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			✓		
99	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
101	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓		
102	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>		✓	✓	✓	
104	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
107	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>				✓	
108	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>				✓	
109	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓		✓
110	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
112	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
113	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓	
114	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓		✓	
115	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
116	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓		✓	✓	
117	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>			✓		
4	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>			✓		
5	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama Dama</i>			✓	✓	

Other Taxa

1	Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>		✓			
2	Spanish Pond Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>		✓			
3	Natterjack Toad	<i>Bufo calamita</i>			✓		
4	Blue –winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulescens</i>			✓		
5	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓			
6	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓			
7	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata Magera</i>		✓			

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