

The Best of Coto Doñana in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

19th – 23rd November 2022



Marbled Ducks



Spanish Imperial Eagle



Iberian Magpie



White and Black Storks, and Spoonbill

Tour report by Byron Palacios, images by Byron Palacios and Tracey Mantle



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Tour participants: Byron Palacios and Simon Woolley (leaders) with ten Naturetrek clients

Summary

Following the steps of Guy Mountfort's classic book 'Portrait of a Wilderness' and reviving its exciting reading, we embarked on an adventure that inspired many avid explorer's ambitions to visit the remarkable area of Doñana. The aim of the tour was to visit as many habitats in Doñana as possible, finding a wide selection of its most remarkable wildlife. We were not to be disappointed...! The landscape, the food, the manzanilla and its sandy tracks and villages kept us well besotted for a few days!

Day 1

Saturday 19th November

London Gatwick to Seville – Isla Mayor – El Rocio

We started today flying from London Gatwick to Seville arriving to a bright and sunny Seville, with a pleasant temperature of 17 Celsius. Some of us made their way to Seville earlier so we gathered the whole group at the airport and set off westwards towards Doñana. We made a stop in a country park not far from the village of Aznalcázar where we found a group of Griffon Vultures, Red Kites, Common Buzzard and a single Eurasian Black Vulture spotted amongst them. We then enjoyed our picnic lunch enjoying the surroundings.

After lunch, we drove a short distance to the area of Isla Mayor where we found a fantastic array of birds in the rice fields. Lots of Greater Flamingos, Glossy Ibis, Northern Lapwings, Western Marsh Harriers, Greenshank, Northern Shovelers and others were seen from here. We also found a pair of Ruddy Shelducks, and a flock of Spanish Sparrows here. We continued exploring the nearby rice paddies finding more flocks of Glossy Ibis, Northern Lapwings, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls, Green Sandpipers, Little Ringed Plovers, amongst others. After enjoying this fabulous site, we started our drive towards El Rocío where we arrived in time to enjoy the beautiful sunset on this unique village!

After a very pleasant day, we gathered together again at the hotel's bar in order to enjoy some drinks and a very good local style dinner!

Day 2

Sunday 20th November

Doñana National Park (El Acebrón Palace – El Acebuche – La Rocina)

After an early breakfast, we drove just a few minutes away from our hotel to El Acebron Palace, making a birding stop along the way which produced very interesting birds such as Thekla and Crested Larks, Dartford and Sardinian Warblers, Black-winged Kite, Eurasian Hoopoe, Iberian Grey Shrike, amongst others. Once at the palace, we walked along the trail which links the beautiful Mediterranean forest to the palace beautiful gardens where we managed to find a few new and interesting species for our list such as Firecrest, Crested Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits, Common Chaffinch, European Serin, European Kingfisher, and a beautiful Western Swamphen. After this enjoyable walk, we drove a short distance towards the coast, finding the area on El Acebuche along the way. We had a good look of the visitor's centre premises just before we had our delicious picnic lunch ready which we enjoyed it whilst watching Eurasian Hoopoes and Iberian Magpies nearby.

After lunch, we drove a short distance to La Rocina. This is part of the Doñana Natural Park and offers a variety of boarded walks and hides, perfect to locate a good sample of bird species of the area. We started our walk from the car park along the boardwalk having close views of Short-toed Treecreeper, European Serin, Red Kite, Common Buzzard, Grey Herons, Eurasian Spoonbills, Little Egret, Black-winged Stilts, Northern Shovelers, Green Sandpipers, Greater Flamingos, White Wagtails, Eurasian Teal, amongst others. We continued walking on the board walk along the marsh edge finding a flock of Common Waxbills, Common Chiffchaffs, plenty of European Stonechats, Goldcrest, Marsh Harriers, amongst others.

After a great birding time around this lovely area, we made our way back to El Rocio in order to take a break and get ready to enjoy drinks and nibbles followed by a nice dinner!

Day 3

Monday 21st November

Doñana National Park (Royal Track, Hierba Buena, FAO Visitor's Centre)

After breakfast, we boarded authorised 4x4 vans and set off with our park ranger into the core area of Doñana National Park right along the La Raya Real (Royal Track), the ancient way to get to Seville which lies along the heart of the park. We firstly searched carefully for Iberian Lynx along a very pristine area of Mediterranean forest, but despite of the efforts, nothing seemed to be around, just a lot of Red Kites, lots of active Iberian Magpies, amongst others. We kept driving along the track and entering the border area between the marisma and the Mediterranean forest, checking man-made rabbit burrows built using eucalyptus stamps which allow them to breed well. Here a pair of Little Owl were seen perched right on top of the stamps which was a good sighting for our trip list! More birds such as Skylark, Crested Lark, Eurasian Kestrel, Calandra Larks, Hen Harrier, Griffon Vultures, and a great group of Greylag Geese were also seen very well along the track in the flooded heathland. After checking out the man-made rabbit burrows once again on the way back, we continued driving back to La Raya Real (main track) and drove into another restricted area known as Hierba Buena where we had a nice time watching Eurasian Hoopoes, Woodchat and Iberian Shrikes, Sardinian Warbler, amongst others. We had stunning views of two Spanish Imperial Eagles (adult female and young adult) perched on two pylon tops, fantastic views of these iconic Iberian endemic bird! After a nice stroll in this lovely Dehesa habitat, we drove back to El Rocio in order to have lunch and take a little break.

After lunch, we gathered all together again to do our second leg of our excursion within Doñana National Park driving further afield and towards the flooded canals of the Valverde's FAO Visitors Centre. Here, we found plenty of wildfowl such as Red-crested and Common Pochards, Northern Shovelers, Black-eared, Little Grebes, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Teal, Greater Flamingos, amongst others. Plenty of Grey Herons were also seen with nearly two dozens of Marbled Ducks, Common Snipe, Eurasian Kestrel and others.

It was a great afternoon and after having a good one, we drove back to our hotel in order to take a break and a delicious local dinner together.

Day 4

Tuesday 22nd November

Doñana National Park (Dehesa de Abajo - Isla Mayor - FAO)

Another early start for us on this day, ready to explore the north-eastern bound of Donana National Park. After breakfast, we left El Rocio heading towards Villamarique de la Condesa and finally to the National Park entrance, just west of Isla Mayor. Lots of Marsh Harriers, Northern Lapwings, Grey Herons, Little, Cattle and Great Egrets were spotted along the way. Our first stop by the old water pump produced a great array of birds such as White and Black Storks, Great Egret, Western Swamphen and a colony of Black-crowned Night Herons which were very aware but tolerated of our presence. A little corner of the reeds produced a beautiful White-spotted Bluethroat which emerged beautiful to show off for us on a death branch...fantastic bird! We also had fantastic views of Eurasian Penduline Tit very close to us; besides, lots of Spotless Starlings, Spanish Sparrows, Hen Harrier a pair of elusive Lesser Kestrel.

After this great morning, we drove back to the outskirts of Isla Mayor making a lunch stop at the visitor's centre at Dehesa de Abajo. We had amazing views of the rice fields from over here, looking at large groups of Glossy Ibis and Greater Flamingos flying in the distance. After lunch, we drove straight to this rice fields finding great birds such as Western Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Hen and Marsh Harriers, lots of Greater Flamingos, Glossy Ibis, Northern Lapwings, Dunlin, Common Greenshank, Dunlin, Ruddy Shelduck, plenty of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Common Shelducks, Black-headed Gulls, amongst others! A pair of Bluethroats were spotted once again on a second stop made nearby.

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

Day 5

Wednesday 23rd November

El Rocio – Seville airport

We started today very early in order to get in time to Seville airport in order to catch our mid-morning flight to London Gatwick airport. We arrived on time at Seville's airport and after wishing a very warm "Adios 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 (H = Heard only, N = Near endemic)

		November 2022				
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22	23
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓		✓		
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	✓			✓	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			✓		
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>			✓		
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>			✓		
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	✓				
Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓		✓	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓		
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓		✓	✓	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			✓	✓	

		November 2022				
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22	23
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓				✓
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			✓		
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓			✓	✓
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓			✓
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓	✓	
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	✓				
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓			
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	✓				✓
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	✓			✓	
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓			✓	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>				✓	
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				✓	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓				
Eurasian Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	✓				
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓				
Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>			✓		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓	✓	
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				✓	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			✓	✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			✓		
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				✓	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>			✓		
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>				✓	

		November 2022				
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22	23
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				✓	
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>				✓	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓		✓	✓	
European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓			
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓		
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>				✓	
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓	✓	
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklæ</i>		✓	✓		
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			✓	✓	
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>					
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>		✓			
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H	✓	H	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓			
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		H		✓	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	H	✓	✓	✓	
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		✓			
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓			
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓		✓	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓	✓		
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓		
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓			
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>				✓	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓		✓	✓	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓			
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓			

		November 2022				
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22	23
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			✓		
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓		✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>			✓	✓	
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Others

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced		November 2022				
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22	23
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓		
Egyptian Mongoose - I	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>				✓	
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	✓				
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>			✓		
Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>		✓	✓		
Brown Long-eared Bat	<i>Plenitud auritus</i>		✓	✓		
OTHER WILDLIFE:						
Red Admiral						
Painted Lady						
Speckled Wood						
Crimson Speckled Moth						
Brimstone						