

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 - 21 April 2009



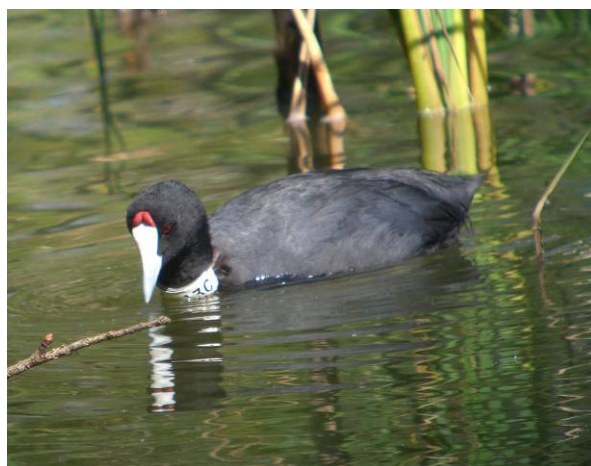
Little Owl



Great Reed Warbler



Red Fox



Red-knobbed Coot at Marismas de Odiel

Report compiled by Byron Palacios and Peter Dunn

Images by Peter Dunn



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Leaders:	Byron Palacios Peter Dunn
Participants:	John Spence Julie Spence John Kedward Barbara Kedward Marie Kedward Stephen Gatley Joe Montague Lyn Montague Paul Leyland Sue Leyland Rosie Filipiak Sue Jackson Deryn Hutchins

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 the Coto area and with that a good section of the wildlife. We were not to be disappointed...

Day 1

Friday 17th April

We started very early today in order to get our 06.20 flight from London Heathrow to Seville, going through Madrid-Barajas. Nevertheless, the efforts of being awake since very early morning didn't matter as we all were really looking forward to starting this tour. We finally arrived into a cloud-covered Seville, with a pleasant temperature of 16° C, and, as it was off peak time, it was a pretty easy driving task through the city heading towards El Rocio. First of all we spotted a large group of Collared Pratincoles flying right outside the airport. A few more birds such as Great-spotted Cuckoo, Azure-winged Magpie, White Stork and Black Kite were seen along the motorway. After an hour and fifteen minutes of driving, we finally arrived to the peculiar village of El Rocio. We took our assigned rooms while enjoying the nibbles and drinks they provided, and then had a very tasty picnic lunch outside afterwards.

The weather was pretty settled by the time we started our birding walk around the marshes located behind our hotel. We started the afternoon watching a very large group of Greater Flamingos spread out in the water and banks. We also saw Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, House Martin, Barn Swallow, Great Reed Warbler, European Reed Warbler, Pochard, Mallards, Collared Pratincoles, Black Kite, a juvenile Red Kite, Cattle Egret, Ruff and dozens of Black-tailed Godwits. We kept walking towards the end of the path and managed to see a pair of very active European Bee-eaters feeding near the ground, and Woodchat Shrike, Stonechat and a pair of Griffon Vultures soaring high in the sky.

We walked back towards the other extreme of the path when we heard a male Savi's Warbler calling from the reeds but could not manage to see it. Nevertheless, a Penduline Tit calling from the reeds in front of us changed our attention, we managed to see it well while it was constantly flitting, and for a second, it perched on top of the reeds! We ended the afternoon walking along the pavement around the marsh in front of the village's church. We decided to walk back to our hotel to freshen up just as a shower of rain started - then we went for drinks, nibbles and a very good local style dinner!

Day 2

Saturday 18th April

After a tasty breakfast, we drove just a few minutes away from our hotel to La Rocina. This is part of the Donana National Park and offers a variety of wooden trails, perfect to locate a good sample of bird species of the area. We started at the car park having close views of a pair of Short-toed Treecreepers and a beautiful male singing Serin. Walking further on the first wooden trail, the noisy Nightingales were singing from all over the bushes and hedges. Three Squacco Herons and a few Glossy Ibis landed right in front of us while we walked into the marshes. Also Cetti's, Reed Warblers were calling away, and we managed to get some views of them, as well as a singing male Savi's Warbler, perched right in the open. Minutes earlier, we had unexpected superb views of an adult Wild Boar and four gorgeous piglets. We decided to check the marshes from the hide, getting great views of Purple and Grey Herons, Common and Red-crested Pochards, Cuckoo, Goldfinch, Woodchat Shrike White Storks and plenty of Little Grebes. We continued into the other part of the trails getting close views of Booted Eagle, Pied Flycatcher, Bee-eaters, Sardinian Warbler and great views of a singing Iberian Chiffchaff. Before enjoying our walk and not far from the vehicles, a pair of Tree Sparrows, and at least eight Bee-eaters were perched on the telegraph wires.

Once we finished here, we jumped into our vehicles and continued our driving leaving La Rocina behind in order to go south to El Acebuche. On arrival, we decided to set up our lunch at the picnic area near the car park along with a few attendant Azure-winged Magpies. Rain was constantly threatening throughout the day, but some sporadic sunshine changed the expected forecast more than once. After lunch, we walked in to the visitor's centre to have some hot drinks, while some of us checked out a pair of Red-rumped Swallows making their nest in the rear part of the cafeteria building. Back on the wooden paths, we checked two of the hides and saw interesting birds such as Purple Gallinule, Spanish Yellow Wagtail, Great-crested and Little Grebes, plus one Crested Tit flitting among the trees above the hide.

Day 3

Sunday 19th April

We started very early on this day, ready to explore the heart of Donana National Park. After meeting up with our certified park guides, we followed the road into the main reserve on a morning where weather did not look that good at first. Once in the park area, things suddenly changed and we all enjoyed a lovely sunny morning. We made our first stop as we were approaching the main marisma. Here, a good amount of birds were actively moving and crossing the plains. A handsome Hoopoe, White Storks, Black Kites, Raven, Common Kestrels and Griffon Vultures were constantly flying right in front of us, and a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos - male adult and juvenile - were circling the area whilst a two Black-shoulder Kites were perched in a bare tree in the distance.

We continued driving along the main dyke obtaining great sightings along the track of Corn Buntings Calandra, Thekla, Crested, Lesser Short-toed and Short-toed Larks. More birds such as Spanish Yellow Wagtail, Little Owl, Stone Curlew, Montague's Harrier, Lapwing, Northern Wheatear, Black Kite, Griffon Vulture, Fan-tailed Warbler, Ringed Plover, Greenshank, Glossy Ibis, two pairs of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse were seen whilst walking on the heath (with a couple of flocks numbering up to 30 overhead), as well as a large flock of Collared Pratincoles, and many more.

We decided to walk along the track towards the Valverde visitors centre and do some birding along the heaths and marshy areas. Moorhens, Common Pochards, Coots and Great Reed Warbler were easily seen during the walk, also two Little Bittern – one flew in front of us and the other was seen in the reeds – more Great Reed Warblers and Squacco Herons were seen. Once in the visitors centre, large colonies of Cattle Egrets, Black-crowned Night-herons, Purple Herons and Glossy Ibis were perched on the bushes around the marshes. Also Gadwall, Mallard, Coot, Purple Gallinule, Moorhen, Great Reed and Reed Warblers and many more!

As lunch time was coming up, our local guides drove us to Coto del Rey to enjoy a very nice picnic lunch. Two nests of the local Spanish Imperial Eagle has been recorded in the area in recent years. Indeed, we were lucky to get great views in detail of this fantastic eagle. Happy and of course, well fed, we decide to explore some other tracks just in the park, hoping to see the very rare Iberian Lynx. Although is always a very hard cat to see, we were still very positive of any chances to see one. Lots of rabbits and three Wild Boar piglets and a Red Fox were seen, but not lynx this time... 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 4

Monday 20th April

On this beautiful sunny day, we drove along the coastal road towards Huelva, targeting the main wetlands and salt pans located on the surroundings of this town. After having problems finding the right access to our planned first stop Laguna de las Madres, we decided to keep going through the main port, taking the 'spider web' of roads and junctions, to finally arrive to Marismas de Odiel. An elusive Crested Coot (Red-knobbed Coot) rapidly disappeared into the reeds at first, but getting amazing views when we walked in search of it later on. Other birds such as Little, Yellow-legged and Black-headed Gulls, Little and Sandwich Terns, Greater Flamingos, Common Sandpiper, Redshank, Yellow Wagtail and more were seen around the pools.

After we had some refreshment time, we explored other pools which we found quite empty and with almost no bird activity at all which was unusual. After setting up our picnic lunch at the visitor's centre car park area, we went after a singing Bonelli's Warbler which was clearly seen after the tape playback. After that, we moved back on the main coastal road again, heading Matalascanas, in order to search the dunes of Asperillo located along Playa de Castilla. Some interesting birds were seen at the seaside such as Audouin's Gull and Cormorants, Gannets, Sandwich Tern and Yellow-legged Gulls in the distance. A few of us obtained great close views of Dartford Warblers on the way back to the car park. We finally drove back to El Rocio for a break, nibbles, drinks and to enjoy another delicious dinner.

Day 5

Tuesday 21st April

The southern shore of the marshes was covered by a dense strip of mist this morning. The day was very promising and it was indeed the warmest and driest of the whole trip. After having breakfast, we checked out of our hotel and drive up from El Rocío heading towards Seville, having yet plenty of time to do some birding en route.

Our first stop was made in a farming area near Hinojos, not far from Almonte. Our main target bird here was Rufous Bush-Robin but unfortunately we had no sign of it. However, the mixed habitat – cork, oaks and olive fields - offered an incredible bird activity, from which we could see Crested Tit, Azure-winged Magpie, Booted Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Tree Sparrow, Penduline Tit, Wryneck, Short-toed Treecreeper, Sardinian Warbler and more. An unexpected pair of Egyptian Mongooses meandering in one of the fields was an unusual mammal bonus of the day!

As the morning passed by, we continue our drive towards Seville but there was another important site to stop for some more birding and for picnic lunch too. We then arrived to the former botanical garden located in the outskirts of Aznalcázar, right on the north basin of the River Guadimar. The abundant Fan-tailed Warbler (*Zitting Cisticola*) was our very first bird at our arrival to the car park. We walked along the river and found a large colony of Spanish Sparrows moving actively from one tree to another, and managed to get good views of a few of them. A pair of Olivaceous Warblers was calling from the car park area, but just a few of us managed to see them, and we tried again after lunch but they had moved across the river where we could hear them singing. However a Garden Warbler was an added bonus for the trip. We set up our lunch in this comfortable picnic area and enjoyed our last one of the tour. We allowed ourselves a bit of time to re-organise and re-pack our bags before heading towards the airport. Minutes later, a beautiful European Roller was perched on one of the wires as we were about to hit the road, giving us a good farewell, and indeed a good way to finish our birding tour!

We arrived on time at Seville's airport where Pallid Swifts were patrolling around the building along with House Martins. 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)

	Common name	Scientific name	April				
			17	18	19	20	21
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		8	✓	2	
2	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		2	3		
3	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>				1	
4	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				6	
5	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	2	7	✓	8	2
6	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		2	✓	2	
7	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		8	✓	12	6
8	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	1	50		✓	✓
9	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>		3	6		
10	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		1	✓		
11	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>			2		
12	Eurasian White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	1	5	✓		4
14	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	10	18	11	10	7
15	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	300	80	100	200	✓
16	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		1		2	
17	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	4	6	8	✓	6
18	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	3	8	4	6	
20	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>		6	20	2	
21	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	1	20	60	6	
22	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			2		1
23	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			1		
24	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Eurasian Griffon	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	2		20		1
26	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		2		1	
27	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			2	2	1
28	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		2	2		2
29	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>			2		
30	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		4	2	1	2
31	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			12		2
32	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1	2		1
33	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		2	4		
34	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		H	1		
35	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		6	2	2	
36	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	6	✓		4	
37	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>			1	2	
38	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	6	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	90	✓	✓	✓
40	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			3		
41	Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichnemus</i>			2		
42	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	200		✓	2	
43	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			4		
44	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			2	H	2
45	Little Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			4		
46	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		250	300	1000	
47	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				1	

	Common name	Scientific name	April				
			17	18	19	20	21
48	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		4	4	60	
49	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				2	1
50	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>		1			
51	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			1	2	
52	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			3		
53	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>				1	
54	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>				1	
55	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				1	
56	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	12	20	100		
57	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	3		5	✓	
58	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>				1	
59	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	2	15		✓	
60	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		1		✓	
61	Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyæetus audouinii</i>				20	
62	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>				10	
63	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>				2	
64	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	150	50	✓	50	1
65	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>		1	1		
66	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				✓	
67	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>			30		
68	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	2	4	✓	3	✓
70	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	2	1			
71	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>	2		5		
73	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		2			H
74	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			2		
75	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	1			1	
76	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>					6
78	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	6	✓	✓	10	✓
79	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>					1
80	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	1	H	3		H
81	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>					2
82	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			20		
83	Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			✓		
84	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>			1		
85	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	2	10	✓	6	✓
86	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		3	3	2	
87	Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		1	1		
88	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	1	1	✓	✓	✓
89	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
90	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>		5	1	1	5
92	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>			1		
93	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				2	1
94	Spanish Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>		1	✓	✓	
95	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		3			
96	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		2	2	2	3
97	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	1	✓	1	H	2+H
98	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		1			

	Common name	Scientific name	April				
			17	18	19	20	21
99	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	1	5	1		2
100	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			2		
101	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		6			
102	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		1	5	5	
103	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		1		H	H
104	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	H	1	H	H	H
105	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	1	✓	H	1	1
106	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	1	2	18	6	3
107	Western Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais opaca</i>					1
108	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>					H
109	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		1	1		
110	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>				1	
111	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1			H
112	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>					2
113	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		1		3	
114	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		5	2	4	4
115	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		3			2
116	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		20	✓		✓
117	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			H		2
118	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	1	1			
119	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		1		1	
120	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		2	2		2
121	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>			3		
122	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		1		8	
123	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>		6	10		✓
124	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	4	20	15	6	20
125	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	1	4	6	✓	✓
126	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			✓		
127	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		8	4	1	3
128	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
129	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			✓	✓	✓
130	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>					20
131	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		6	2		6
132	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	3	✓	✓		H
133	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	1	2	5	2	✓
134	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
135	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>				4	
136	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
137	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	2	✓	✓	✓	✓

Other fauna & flora noted

Brown Rat	Wild Boar	Red Deer	Roe Deer
Red Fox	Rabbit	Iberian Hare	Egyptian Mongoose
Large White Butterfly	Small White Butterfly	Clouded Yellow Butterfly	Painted Lady Butterfly
Sand Lizard	Ant-lion	Violet Carpenter Bee	Cockchaffer sp.
Dung Beetle sp.	Yellow Ladybird		