Spain - The Best of Coto Donana

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 - 21 April 200911







Booted Eagle



Dartford Warbler



Wood Sandpiper

Report & images compiled by Byron Palacios

England



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

Alresford

Hampshire SO24 0NG

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Leaders: Byron Palacios

James Lees

Participants: Yvonne Kimber

Rachel Overton Walter Burns Ann Burns John Trotter Nick Moll

Christine Beall Beverly Smyth Ruth Robertson Rosemary Stewart

Introduction

The vast Doñana National Park offers not just incredible wildlife but also a lot of history, folklore, gastronomy and people. The breathtaking variety of landscapes, flora, fauna, and the history found in this hidden corner of Spain is clearly reflected in the unique sandy village of El Rocio, enriched by its variety and tremendous ecological wealth, these areas are the crown jewels of an unparalleled natural heritage that has been carefully protected and nurtured since the 1960's, when Spain became the first country in the world to enact specific laws ensuring the protection of these areas. The wide range of ecosystems found within this park include salt marshes, shifting dunes, marismas and dehesas provides support for an amazing variety of animal and plant life. This is what we came to see here, the hidden treasures and the best of Doñana...

Day 1 Monday 11th April

London – Seville (via Madrid) – El Rocio

We started very early today in order to get our flight from London Heathrow to Seville, going through Madrid-Barajas (some participants were already waiting for us in Seville). We had a bitter moment when we realized that our luggage did not make it, being still in Madrid and scheduled to arrive in the next flight into Seville (17:00). Although it was annoying, the airline personal promised to deliver all our bags at our hotel in El Rocio by dinner time – and they did so! – Hence, we continued with our plan driving towards this 'wildwest style' village in order to check into our comfy hotel and relax, enjoying the lovely surroundings.

In the late afternoon, we went for a walk around the village marshes which produced hundreds of Greater Flamingos, also Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Barn Swallow, Black-winged Stilt, Mallard, Red-crested and Common Pochards, Black Kite, Great Reed Warbler, Griffon Vulture, and lovely views of Booted Eagle. Following the track towards the Doñana National Park entrance, we spotted our first European Bee-eaters, Spanish Yellow Wagtail, Crested Lark, Goldfinch, Corn Bunting, Spotless Starling, Serin, amongst others. We then walked back to the hotel in order to get ready to enjoy some drinks and nibbles, followed by a delicious local supper.

Day 2

Tuesday 12th April

Doñana National Park (Valverde Visitors Centre, La Garvija) - La Rocina

Some of us woke up early in the morning in order to do a quick pre-breakfast check up to the marshes, watching the sunrise in the horizon as a promise of another sunny day! After a tasty breakfast, we met up with our local park guide in order to drive into some restricted areas of the northern basin of Doñana National Park. We started our exploration going through the three main habitats of the area (dehesa, marismas & wetlands), which produced very interesting birds such as Tree Sparrow, Black Kite, Eurasian Jackdaw, two perched Booted Eagles, Linnets, Little, Cattle and Great White Egrets, White Stork, Sardinian Warbler, Eurasian Magpie, Griffon Vulture, Carrion Crow, Glossy Ibis, Little Owl and much more.

Driving into the flooded marismas, we found a good amount of Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Spoonbills and Black-winged Stilt in the deep waters, whilst Crested, Calandra and Short-toed Larks were flitting along the track. Spanish Yellow Wagtail, Grey Heron, Glossy Ibis, Kentish and Ringed Plovers were also spotted on the way. Another stop near the visitors centre, allowed us to do a good birding walk which produced great views of Purple Heron, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns, Collared Prantincole, Common Coot, Common Pochard, Mallard, Little Grebe, Squaco Heron, Red Kite, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Reed, Sedge and Great Reed Warblers, Spanish Yellow Wagtail, and more.

Once at the visitors centre, we relaxed watching the dozens of bird colonies around the bushes ready to nest, whilst enjoying a nice drink. Many birds such as Marsh Harrier, Red-crested Pochard, Cattle Egrets, Black Kites, Purple Heron, Common Gallinule, Great Reed Warbler, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Glossy Ibis, Little Egret, and others, were very busy around the centre. As lunch time was getting closer, we kept going with our plan and driving towards Coto del Rey, where we were due to have lunch, obviously doing some birding en route. This brought us an unusual sighting of a Grey Heron lunching a Little Grebe, which actually led us to a spot a beautiful Crested (Red-knobbed) Coot, which was pleasantly bathing in the flooded marismas near the track. We had wonderful views we had of this rare and endangered bird!

We finally arrived at La Garvija, and were entertained by the many Eurasian Bee-eaters and Eurasian Hoopoes that we saw around this lovely spot. After lunch and a bit of a meander around Coto del Rey, watching breeding colonies of White Storks, Eurasian Bee-eaters and more Booted Eagles, we started to head back to El Rocio in order to take a break before our short excursion in the late afternoon - to La Rocina. As temperatures were slightly cooler, we took a good walk around the reserve checking the marshes from the hide and the pine woods. Birds like Savi's Warbler, Nightingale, Short-toed Treecreeper, Serin, Squacco Heron, Reed Warbler, amongst others were spotted within an hour. After walking the loop on the board walk, we drove back to our hotel in El Rocio in order to get ready for supper.

Day 3

2

Wednesday 13th April

El Acebuche Visitors Centre – Cuesta Manelli (dunes board walk),

We started very early on this day, ready to explore the south-western portion Doñana National Park. After breakfast, we drove to El Acebuche Visitor Centre were we spent the majority of the morning walking around the trails and checking the marshes from the different hides.

Dozens of Azure-winged Magpies were flitting around the trees as soon as we got to the reserve's car park; although the morning was slightly windy, we did not see many new species for our list from the hides, although there were some interesting birds such as Purple Swamp-Hen, Little and Great-crested Grebes, Red-crested and Common Pochards, Little and Cattle Egrets and a perched Savi's Warbler singing away. We kept walking from hide to hide, checking other species such as Stonechat, Northern Wheatear, Woodchat and Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrikes, Serin, European Bee-eaters, Azure-winged Magpie, Sardinian Warbler, Booted Eagle, Red-rumped Swallows, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Hoopoe and elusive Thekla Larks (although we tried hard earlier, it was seen later on in the morning). After exploring the board walk area and the visitors centre, we gathered together to have our picnic lunch by the car park and were surrounded by naughty Azure-winged Magpies nearby.

After lunch, we drove up heading south and towards the coast, drifting along the road parallel to the seaside and surrounded by pristine dunes. We stopped at a point known as Cuesta Maneli, were we took the board walk across the sandy dunes. We had great views of Sardinian and Dartford Warblers along here; but the birding highlight of the day was delivered by three males Montague's Harriers arriving from Africa and flying right over the seaside, and an exhausted Western Bonelli's Warbler which landed right next to one of the participants' rucksacks, amazing!! We saw them again as they flew towards a patch of bamboo near the sand banks.

Some of us enjoyed the very sunny and hot afternoon walking along the beach, and even going for a quick dip in the sea! We then walked back to the car park and drove back to El Rocio for a break at our hotel followed by a delicious supper out in the plaza.

Day 4

Thursday 14th April

Doñana National Park (Isla Mayor entrance)

Another beautiful sunny day, though promising to be a hot one, we drove along the narrow farm roads and tracks through the various landscapes of the northern part of Doñana National Park. Our first stop was made just at the border of the forest and farmland area to check a good patch of water by the river Arroyo del Partido. This produced a good number of various waders such as Wood, Common and Green Sandpipers, Little Ringed Plover, Black-winged Stilt and Greenshank; plus lots of Cirl Buntings, European Bee-eaters, Red-rumped Swallows, Iberian Yellow Wagtails, and Black Kites. We continued our drive watching lots of European Bee-eaters, Azure-winged Magpies, Woodchat Shrikes and Black Kites perched on the fences along the track, passing small villages and turning onto many small roads until we hit the dirt tracks into the national park. We made several stops along the way which produced great birds such as Common Whitethroat, Fan-tailed Warbler, Red-rumped Swallow, Iberian Yellow Wagtail, Lesser Short-toed, Crested and Short-toed Larks, Montagu's Harrier, a pair of Short-toed Eagles (perched and soaring), Spanish Sparrow and hundreds of Corn Buntings. The flooded marismas offered great birding too as there were many Black-winged Stilts, Glossy Ibis, Red-crested and Common Pochards, Moorhen, Coot, Purple Swamp-hen, Grey and Purple Herons, Great Crested Grebe, Great Reed Warbler and two Black Terns flying between several Whiskered Terns. After a short walk along the track, we found a nice place to set up our picnic lunch, right next to a nesting group of Lesser Kestrels.

After lunch we, end up again at the Jose Antonio Valverde Visitors Centre, where we had a good relaxing time – although chillier under the shade – watching lovely Greater Flamingos, Squacco Heron, and the many nesting species such as Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis, Cattle and Little Egrets, Great Reed Warblers, amongst others.

We then drove up out of the centre and went slightly west of it in order to search some reed beds by a small bridge, which paid off well indeed as we managed to get great views of a pair of Little Bitterns very active amongst the brooms and reed beds. Also, two pairs of Black-necked Grebes were seen nearby.

After spending the whole day exploring this northern part of the park, we started our journey back to El Rocio in order to have a small break and to enjoy a good cool drink, home-made olives and, of course, a superb local-style supper in a traditional 'choza' (a typical house used by the locals in the past), certainly a pure local treat!!

Day 5 Friday 15th April

El Acebron - El Rocio - Aznalcázar - Seville

This morning was unusually cloudy and grey, a big surprise for all of us having been used to bright sunny and hot days since we arrived here - it was still very pleasant though. After breakfast, we went to El Palacio del Acebron where we walked around in search of wildlife. Apart for the many singing Nightingales, the morning was generally quiet and slow in terms of birding, having spotted a few Great, Blue and Long-tailed Tits around, Garden and Sardinian Warblers, Little Egrets, Short-toed Treecreeper (in its nest) and Crested Tit. After this enjoyable walk, we drove back to El Rocio to collect our luggage and check out of our lovely hotel, as the time to head back to Seville had, sadly, come.

We finally made a very last stop just on the outskirts of Aznalcázar to explore the River Guadiamar bank, right in the botanical centre, a great site indeed! We enjoyed a short walk by the picnic area and the river, which offered good species such as Wryneck, Western Olivaceous Warbler, Nightingale, Garden Warbler, a pair of Hawfinches in flight, Woodchat Shrike, and Corn Bunting, amongst others. As the time to head towards the airport was closer, we enjoyed our last picnic together, making a very last check around the bridge in order to get good views of Melodious Warbler; also Red-rumped Swallow, Fan-tailed Warbler, Serin, Goldfinch, Stonechat and more. Finally, we set off to the airport in order to catch our flight back to London Heathrow via Madrid.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The Naturetrek Facebook page is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

Birds (H = heard only: ✓ recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	April						
			17	18	19	20	21		
1	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis		8	✓	2			
2	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus		2	3				
3	Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus				1			
4	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo				6			
5	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	2	7	✓	8	2		
6	Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea		2	✓	2			
7	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta		8	✓	12	6		
8	Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	1	50		✓	✓		
9	Squacco Heron	Ardeola ralloides		3	6				
10	Black-crowned Night Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax		1	✓				
11	Little Bittern	Ixobrychus minutus			2				
12	Eurasian White Stork	Ciconia ciconia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
13	Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus	1	5	✓		4		
14	Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia	10	18	11	10	7		
15	Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus ruber	300	80	100	200	✓		
16	Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna		1		2			
17	Gadwall	Anas strepera	4	6	8	✓	6		
18	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos		✓	✓	✓	✓		
19	Shoveler	Anas clypeata	3	8	4	6			
20	Red-crested Pochard	Netta rufina		6	20	2			
21	Common Pochard	Aythya ferina	1	20	60	6			
22	Black-shouldered Kite	Elanus caeruleus			2		1		
23	Red Kite	Milvus milvus			1				
24	Black Kite	Milvus migrans	√	✓	✓	✓	√		
25	Eurasian Griffon	Gyps fulvus	2		20		1		
26	Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus		2		1			
27	Montagu's Harrier	Circus pygargus			2	2	1		
28	Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo		2	2		2		
29	Spanish Imperial Eagle	Aquila adalberti			2				
30	Booted Eagle	Hieraaetus pennatus		4	2	1	2		
31	Lesser Kestrel	Falco naumanni			12		2		
32	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus		1	2		1		
33	Red-legged Partridge	Alectoris rufa		2	4				
34	Water Rail	Rallus aquaticus		Н	1				
35	Purple Swamphen	Porphyrio porphyrio		6	2	2			
36	Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	6	✓		4			
37	Red-knobbed Coot	Fulica cristata			1	2			
38	Coot	Fulica atra	6	✓	✓	<u>−</u>	✓		
39	Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	√	90	✓	✓	√		
40	Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta			3				
41	Stone-curlew	Burhinus oedicnemus			2				
42	Collared Pratincole	Glareola pratincola	200		✓ ✓	2			
43	Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus			4				
44	Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula			2	Н	2		
45	Little Plover	Charadrius dubius			4				
46	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa		250	300	1000			
47	Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa Iapponica		230	200	1			

	Common name	Scientific name	April						
			17	18	19	20	21		
48	Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus		4	4	60			
49	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos				2	1		
50	Spotted Redshank	Tringa erythropus		1					
51	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia			1	2			
52	Common Redshank	Tringa totanus			3				
53	Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres				1			
54	Red Knot	Calidris canutus				1			
55	Dunlin	Calidris alpina				1			
56	Ruff	Philomachus pugnax	12	20	100				
57	Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus	3		5	✓			
58	Little Gull	Hydrocoloeus minutus				1			
59	Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis	2	15		✓			
60	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus		1		✓			
61	Audouin's Gull	Ichthyaetus audouinii				20			
62	Little Tern	Sternula albifrons				10			
63	Gull-billed Tern	Gelochelidon nilotica				2			
64	Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias hybrida	150	50	✓	50	1		
65	Black Tern	Chlidonias niger	150	1	1		_		
66	Sandwich Tern	Thalasseus sandvicensis			1	√			
67	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	Pterocles alchata			30				
68	Feral Pigeon	Columba livia 'feral'	√	√	✓	✓	1		
69	Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	2	4	✓ ·	3	✓ ·		
70	European Turtle Dove	Streptopelia turtur	2	1	· ·		, , ,		
71	Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	1		✓	√	✓		
72	Great Spotted Cuckoo	Clamator glandarius	2		5				
73	Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus		2]		Н		
74	Little Owl	Athene noctua			2		11		
75	Alpine Swift	Tachymarptis melba	1		2	1			
76	Common Swift	· ·	1 ✓	√	✓		/		
77	Pallid Swift	Apus apus	•	•	•	•			
		Apus pallidus		√	✓	10	6		
78	European Bee-eater	Merops apiaster	6		V	10			
79	European Roller	Coracias garrulus	1	***	2		1		
80	Hoopoe	Upupa epops	1	H	3		Н		
81	Eurasian Wryneck	Jynx torquilla			20		2		
82	Calandra Lark	Melanocorypha calandra			20				
83	Short-toed Lark	Calandrella brachydactyla			√				
84	Lesser Short-toed Lark	Calandrella rufescens		10	1				
85	Crested Lark	Galerida cristata	2	10	✓	6	√		
86	Thekla Lark	Galerida theklae		3	3	2			
87	Wood Lark	Lullula arborea		1	1				
88	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia	1	1	✓	✓	√		
89	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica		✓	✓	✓	✓		
90	House Martin	Delichon urbica	✓	✓	✓	✓	√		
91	Red-rumped Swallow	Cecropis daurica		5	1	1	5		
92	Tawny Pipit	Anthus campestris			1				
93	White Wagtail	Motacilla alba				2	1		
94	Spanish Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava iberiae		1	✓	✓			
95	Winter Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes		3					
96	Common Blackbird	Turdus merula		2	2	2	3		
97	Common Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos	1	✓	1	Н	2+H		
98	European Robin	Erithacus rubecula		1					

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