

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana

Naturetrek Tour Report

10 - 14 April 2012



Avocets at the hotel's marisma!



Birding Donana



Lesser Spotted Woodpecker



Eurasian Stone-curlew

Report & images compiled by Byron Palacios



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Introduction

We were lucky enough to visit many habitats within and around the Doñana National Park, and enjoyed its great array of wildlife...Iberian Lynx, Egyptian Mongoose, Spanish Imperial Eagle, etc; just to mention the best jewels of the Doñana region that we were lucky enough to see!

Day 1

Tuesday 10th April

London Gatwick – Seville – El Rocio – Doñana National Park's La Rocina.

We started early today in order to get our direct flight from London Gatwick to Seville, but this didn't matter as we all were really looking forward to starting this tour. We finally arrived in a sunny but windy Seville, with a pleasant temperature of 16°C, and, as it was off peak time, it was pretty easy driving through the city heading towards El Rocio. A few 'motorway birds' were already spotted; flying Black Kites, Booted Eagle, Azure-winged Magpie, Spotless Starling, White Stork and Eurasian Kestrel. After one hour and fifteen minutes of driving, we finally arrived at the village of El Rocio. We took our assigned rooms and enjoyed the welcoming nibbles, sweet strawberries and fruit, plus drinks they provided at the hotel, including the very refreshing sherry locally produced, followed by a tasty finger-food lunch outside afterwards.

The wind was getting stronger whilst we scanned 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 Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, House Martin, Barn Swallow, Shoveler, Mallards, Collared Pratincole, Black Kite, Cattle Egret, Ruff and dozens of Black-tailed Godwits. We then drove up a very short distance across the main road out from El Rocio, where the area of La Rocina lies on the upper marshes and dunes of the western end of the park. A good walk throughout the reserve and, its comfortable boardwalk produced magnificent birdlife such as European Bee-eaters, Serin, Short-toed Treecreeper, White Stork, Marsh Harrier, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Glossy Ibis, amongst others. We kept walking following the boardwalk and saw more interesting bird such as a pair of Iberian Chiffchaff, Crested Tit and Long-tailed Tit actively hopping amongst the pine trees. We continued crossing the various ravines and fords until we got to a mixture habitat of dunes, scrub and stone pine, combined with some very ancient wild olive trees and cork oaks.

From here, we checked more hides which produced more Glossy Ibis, Red-crested Pochard, Little Grebe, Eurasian Pochard, Purple Heron, and a hard-to-spot Savi's Warbler, which we constantly heard but never saw. A few European Bee-eaters were seen very well as we started to head back to the car park, together with some glimpses of Thekla Lark and Stonechat. We drove back to our hotel, after a long day, for a very well-deserved freshen up, followed for drinks, nibbles and dinner!

Day 2

Wednesday 11th April

Palacio de El Acebron (am) – El Acebuche Visitors Centre (pm)

After a tasty breakfast, and surprised by the lovely sunny morning as the weather forecast predicted an overcast day – we were ready to set off but we delayed our departure as the sunlight was beautifully set on the many wildfowl, waders and aquatic birds at the hotel's marshes, producing many Eurasian Spoonbills, Greater Flamingos, Shoveler, Glossy Ibis, Black-winged Stilt, Dunlin, Sanderling, Little Ringed Plover, Ruff, Ringed Plover, Whiskered Tern, Little and Cattle Egrets, amongst others. A very unlucky – and perhaps inexperienced – male Peregrine Falcon was after a flock of Dunlin and Ruff, and then after a few Black-winged Stilt...he definitely flushed almost all the birds at the marshes up! A few Black Kites flew around once the dust had settled!

Satisfied with the productive start, we set off towards el Palacios de El Acebron, located not far from El Rocio, right at the end of the track going through La Rocina. We made a quick stop along the scrub which produced Thekla Lark, Eurasian Stonechat, Corn Bunting, Eurasian Hoopoe, Sardinian Warbler, Booted Eagle, and some flying European Bee-eaters. We continued to the palace, and stated our walk across the Mediterranean forest. The walk produced good birds such as Blackcap, Wood Warbler, Nightingale, Crested Tit, Serin, Long-tailed Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, and Cetti's Warbler, amongst others. We finished the walk having fantastic scope views of the very scarce Lesser Spotted Woodpecker right at the palace's garden, superb!

We made a quick visit to El Palacio de Acebron, looked around and used the facilities, and then we walked back to the car park and drove back to the edge of the main marshes around El Rocio in order to scan the southern corner of the marshes. Big flocks of waders such as Dunlin, Little Ringed and Ringed Plovers, Sanderling, Knot, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit and Black-winged Stilt were seen. We also saw Avocets, Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Spoonbills and the usual amount of Black Kites overflying the wetlands. We found supplies for our picnic lunch, and drove about 15 minutes from here to the next visitors centre known as El Acebuche, where we enjoyed our picnic lunch, along with a few attendant Azure-winged Magpies.

After lunch, we went to the visitor's centre and then walked on the wooden paths, and checked most of the hides seeing interesting birds such as Purple Gallinule, Spanish Yellow Wagtail, Great-crested and Little Grebes, Red-crested and Eurasian Pochards, Mallard, an unexpected pair of Ferruginous Duck, Purple Heron, and a Streak-necked Terrapin. Amongst the hides, some good birds like Woodchat Shrike and Dartford Warbler were well seen, considering the windy afternoon which is not good at all for small passerines. We drove back to El Rocio and some of us retired to our hotel rooms whilst others went around the marshes and the village for a stroll. Later on, another delicious supper was enjoyed by all!

Day 3

Thursday 12th April

Doñana National Park (Coto del Rey)

We started our day early, ready to explore the heart of Donana National Park. After meeting up with our certified park guide Abel, we followed the road into the main reserve on a morning where weather did not look that good at first. Despite this, everyone looked very positive and enthusiastic about our day ahead, and those good feelings paid off in the best way. Once in the park area, we started to scan every single corner of the bushes, trees and scrub areas; we were meandering in one of the best Iberian Lynx territories. Abel and I were checking the surroundings when suddenly Abel shouted “Lynx” and everyone jumped from our seats immediately! Two Iberian Lynx were spotted crossing one of the tracks, but we lost them as one of the farmer’s trucks was coming in the opposite direction of the track where we were on. Without wasting a single second, we rapidly drove through the woods and returned back to the main track, and there he was...a lovely male Iberian Lynx of approximately three-years-old, crossing the track and showing off beautifully to us, what a treat! We had one of the rarest cats in the world for more than a minute, and what a great view!!

Chuffed and absolutely excited after the sighting, we continued with the planned route through the Mediterranean forest scanning for more wildlife. We made a stop at the point known as El Muro, between the Mediterranean forest and the Marisma (flooded part of the park). We saw many Fallow and Red Deer here, also Red Fox, Black Kite, Booted Eagle, Montague’s Harrier, and Eurasian Kestrel, amongst others. We continued our drive up to the man-made rabbit enclosure area where a Little Owl was seen. The wind was blowing which did not make our work easier, especially when we tried to spot small passerines, which was a big disadvantage. As the Marismas were extremely dry due to the lack of rain during the last winter, we were able to drive through them admiring the fantastic landscape this interesting ecosystem offers. Once back en route, we took a stroll around the area aiming to see more wildlife, and had good views of two perched Booted Eagles, Eurasian Hoopoe, Woodchat and Iberian Grey Shrikes, and dozens of Corn Buntings Eagles, and we also had views of a good-sized male Egyptian Mongoose, which was crossing the a sandy track in front of us!

After this, we continued with the planned route to the area known as El Coto del Rey, where an ‘al fresco’ lunch awaited us! We had a great morning so far, but our luck ran out when we could not make it through a very thick bank of sand while we were crossing the main track into El Coto del Rey. There was no traction in the front wheels so a back-up Land Rover shortly arrived to help...we all jumped in to the 4x4 and went to the lunch point, while the van was finally extracted by a local tractor! Some European Bee-eaters and a perched Spanish Imperial Eagle were our highlights whilst we were enjoying lunch and drinks!

After lunch, we checked the area where some cattle were grazing and found some birds such as Fan-tailed Warbler, Iberian Yellow Wagtail, Wood Sandpiper, and Ringed Plover. The weather was unsettled, with sunny spells and then overcast clouds, and the wind made our birding task difficult. We decided to drive heading back to El Rocio in the mid afternoon for a break, and we eventually went out later on to do some birding from the visitors centre located in the west shore of the main marshes, just behind our hotel. We saw some European Snipe, Moorhen, Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Spoonbills, Common Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Red-rumped Swallow, a flying Merlin, and Red Fox and Iberian Hare, spotted on the opposite bank of the marshes. As the late afternoon started to threaten rain, we headed back to our hotel and worked on our checklist, followed by some delicious local nibbles, drinks and superb supper!

Day 4

Friday 13th April

Doñana National Park (eastern part)

On this beautiful sunny day, we drove along the park's internal roads and through the village of Villamanrique de la Condesa (where a fresh bread stop was made) into the eastern part of Doñana National Park. Once in the park territory and passing the many farms on the way, we made our first stop in an area of fields, young heather and Mediterranean scrub. This lovely patch produced good birds such as Short-toed Lark, Stone Curlew, Short-toed Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Montague's Harrier, Black Kite, Calandra Lark, Fan-tailed Warbler, and Pallid Swift, amongst others! We continued our drive, checking the marisma, which was dry and with only a few patches of water left around. We spotted some Lesser Yellowlegs, Greenshank, Iberian Yellow Wagtail, and some flocks of Avocet and Black-winged Stilt flying in the distance. We found a small colony of nesting Lesser Kestrels of which we had amazing views. After this, we continued towards the visitors centre of the area, but made a quick stop on the way to scan a vast muddy patch of the drained marisma where lots of Purple Gallinule, Glossy Ibis and Moorhen were gathered together, alongside a group of eight Wild Boar who were happily feeding in the mud. This was a great sighting of an easily spooked species of mammal!

We finally arrived to the Valverde visitors centre by noon, where we scanned the flooded marisma patch intensively in search of some wanted species. The area was full of Little Grebe, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill and Spotless Starlings. A few Mallard, Shoveler, Gadwall and Purple Gallinule were also seen here. We made a break to enjoy our picnic lunch at the premises. After lunch, we drove on the loop route following the water canal and rounding the starting point of the park entrance we had taken in the early morning. We had more interesting birds such as Short-toed Lark, Lesser Kestrel, White Stork, amongst others. We finally arrived to El Rocio for a break, nibbles, and drinks; and to enjoy our last delicious dinner together.

Day 5

Saturday 14th April

EL Rocio – Seville airport. Fly to London Gatwick.

After an early start, we packed our things up and left our lovely hotel and El Rocio behind, hitting the road towards Seville airport in order to catch our 10.20 flight to London. The flight was on time and we arrived at Gatwick airport and gathered together for the very last time at the baggage reclaim area for the final farewell and best wishes, ready to start our journey to our respective homes after an enjoyable 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			
			10	11	12	13
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓		
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓
4	Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓			
5	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>		✓		
7	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>				✓
9	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				✓
16	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		✓	✓	✓
18	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>		✓		
23	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓		✓	✓
25	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			✓	✓
26	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			✓	
28	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca (adalberti)</i>			✓	
29	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
30	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>				✓
31	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				✓
33	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓		
34	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>			✓	
35	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓	
36	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	h			
37	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓		
41	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichnemus</i>				✓
42	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓		✓
44	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	✓	✓		✓
45	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓	✓		✓
47	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>		✓		

	Scientific name	Common name	April			
			10	11	12	13
48	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓
49	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				✓
50	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓		
51	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓		✓
52	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		✓		✓
53	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>		✓		✓
54	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓	✓	✓
55	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		✓		
56	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>		✓		✓
57	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓
58	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		✓		✓
59	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓		✓
60	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		✓		✓
61	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>			✓	
62	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓		✓	✓
63	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓	
64	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>				✓
65	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>		✓		
66	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓	
67	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	✓		✓	✓
68	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		h	✓	
72	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			h	
73	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			✓	
74	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>				✓
75	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓
78	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		✓		
79	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓	
80	Lesser-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>		✓		
81	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓
82	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓		
83	Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>		✓		✓
84	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>				✓
85	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓		✓
86	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓		
87	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>		✓	✓	
88	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓		✓	✓
91	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓		
92	Yellow (Iberian) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava (iberiae)</i>		✓	✓	✓
93	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	h	h		
94	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	h	h		
95	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	✓	✓		
96	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓	✓		
97	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			✓	✓
98	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Scientific name	Common name	April			
			10	11	12	13
99	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinoides</i>	h	h		
100	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			h	✓
101	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	✓	h	
102	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>			h	✓
103	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	h		✓	✓
104	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓		
105	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓		
106	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓		
107	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>	✓			
108	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		✓		
109	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>	✓	✓		
110	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
111	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	
112	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓		
113	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	✓	✓		
114	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>			✓	✓
115	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
116	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
117	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓
118	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
119	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			✓	
120	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>				✓
121	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓	✓	
122	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
123	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	
124	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
125	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	h	✓	✓	
126	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
127	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓

Mammals

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>			✓	✓
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			✓	
3	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>			✓	
4	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓	✓
5	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>			✓	
6	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			✓	
7	Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>			✓	
8	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>				✓