

Spain - The Best of Coto Donana in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

3 - 7 April 2017

Report compiled by Byron Palacios



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Byron Palacios (leader) with 12 Naturetrek clients

Summary

Many decades ago, Doñana was considered a fierce area due to its wild and harsh environment, but it is now regarded and valued as one of the most important national parks in Europe. We had the privilege to visit this unique area and were lucky enough to visit many habitats within and around Doñana National Park, seeing a great array of its wildlife. We were not disappointed and saw some of the best jewels of Doñana, and the visit will remain in our minds and memories forever!

Day 1

Monday 3rd April

London Gatwick – Seville – El Rocio – Doñana National Park

We started our tour with a noon flight from London to Seville, arriving on time at a sunny and pleasant Seville. It was a pretty easy drive through the city before heading towards El Rocio. A few 'motorway birds' were spotted en route such as Black Kite, Iberian (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 checked in at our lovely and well-located hotel, and were welcomed with local nibbles, fruits and drinks.

We then gathered together at the edge of the main marshes where we had a great time birding and watching species such as Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, House Martin, Barn Swallow, Northern Shoveler, Mallard, Collared Pratincole, Black Kite, Cattle Egret, White Stork and Griffon Vulture, amongst others. We then walked to the hotel's restaurant to enjoy our first and well-deserved drinks followed by dinner.

Day 2

Tuesday 4th April

Doñana National Park (El Acebron Palace – La Rocina)

After an early breakfast and a lovely sunrise, we set off on a short drive to el Palacio de El Acebron, located not far from El Rocio and at the end of the track which crosses through La Rocina. We made a quick stop along the scrub which produced Thekla Lark, Stonechat, Corn Bunting, Hoopoe, Dartford Warbler, Booted Eagle, and some flying European Bee-eaters. We continued our drive towards the palace, parking at the car park and immediately starting our walk across the Mediterranean forest. The walk produced good birds such as Blackcap, Nightingale, Crested Tit, Serin, Long-tailed Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Cetti's Warbler (heard loudly!), Iberian Chiffchaff and a secretive Tawny Owl. We finished the walk by arriving at the palace itself, where we enjoyed visiting this interesting place and its facilities.

Following the visit we moved further out and, near the reserve entrance, we did some birding from one of the hides which produced Tree Sparrow, Common Waxbill and Woodchat Shrike, amongst others. We then had lunch by another hide before retiring to our hotel in El Rocio for a birding break.

The sun was still strong when we went out again in the late afternoon, taking another walk along the board trails of La Rocina. We visited some of the hides which produced Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis, Cattle Egret, Marsh Harrier, Western (previously called Purple) Swamphen, Eurasian Coot, and Red-crested and Common Pochards, amongst others. There were plenty of White Storks and Black Kites soaring in the sky, and Nightingales singing

away their multi-vocal repertoire. On the walk back to the car park, a very elusive Western Olivaceous Warbler was seen skulking amongst thick willow trees. European Bee-eaters were seen flying and landing along the electric wires by the car park, having a good bee-catching dinner!

We drove back to El Rocio and some retired to our rooms to get ready for dinner and drinks beforehand. We enjoyed the sunset overlooking the gorgeous Marisma with hundreds of Sand and House Martins feeding!

Day 3

Wednesday 5th April

Doñana National Park (Coto del Rey)

Today we started very early, ready to explore the heart of Donana National Park. After meeting up with our certified park guide, we followed the road into the park along the Raya Real (Royal Track), which soon produced an amazing mammal when two Iberian Lynx were spotted crossing one of the tracks and giving us very close views - it was amazing! We then continued in the 4x4 vehicles, making a stop at the point known as El Muro, the biological limit between the Mediterranean forest and the Marisma (flooded part of the park). We saw many Red Deer here and also plenty of Black Kite, Booted Eagle, Sardinian Warbler and Common Kestrel, amongst others. We continued our drive to the man-made rabbit enclosure area (made from eucalyptus stumps) where Little Owl was seen perched on top of one of the stumps, with Red-legged Partridge running by the side.

We then moved to an area known as Hierba Buena where we enjoyed watching Booted Eagle, Hoopoe, Woodchat and Iberian Grey Shrikes, and dozens of Corn Buntings, Crested Larks and Stonechat, amongst others. After this lovely stroll, we caught up with our vehicles and drove back to El Rocio to enjoy a delicious lunch followed by a birding break at the hotel watching Moorhen, Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Common Sandpiper and Black-winged Stilt, amongst others.

After our break, we set off again into the national park. This time we drove straight to the flooded heathland areas which produced a phenomenal amount of birds such as Spanish Yellow Wagtail, Zitting Cisticola, Wood Sandpiper, dozens of Greater Flamingos, Little Owl, Calandra, Crested and Greater Short-toed Larks, Black-winged Stilt and a group of the very handsome Pin-tailed Sandgrouse which we enjoy watching very close for a long time. We then continued to an area with deeper water, finding great amounts of wildfowl such as Gadwall, Great Crested, Black-necked and Little Grebes, Red-crested and Common Pochards, Mallard and two pairs of the very rare White-headed Duck. We also enjoyed watching the dozens of Purple Herons, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingos and other wildfowl flying over our heads on their way to their roosting spots. Also noisy Great Reed Warblers were singing from the top of the reeds conspicuously very close to us.

The sun was drifting down in the horizon, so we started to drive back towards El Rocio, taking a good look for Iberian Lynx along the Royal Track - and there they were: we were so lucky to find two more Iberian Lynx. This time we had long and great close views of them. We couldn't believe how lucky we were by seeing one of the rarest cats in the world twice and in one day - incredible! We headed back to our hotel for a late dinner - but it was certainly worth it!

Day 4

Thursday 6th April

Doñana National Park (Northern area)

On a beautifully sunny day, we drove along the park's internal roads and through the village of Villamanrique de La Condesa (where a stop for fresh bread was made), finding the dirt sandy tracks into the north-eastern part of Doñana National Park. Our first stop was in the Natural Park area, at Dehesa de Abajo, where some wildfowl such as Red-crested and Common Pochards, Mallard, Great Crested and Little Grebes, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Coot and Gadwall were spotted. We continued further up the road, checking other ponds. One was full of Black-crowned Night Herons and two pairs of lovely Ferruginous Ducks. The second pond produced an even better bird: one of our targets, the very rare Marbled Duck. We had amazing views of this scarce wildfowl.

All happy and satisfied, we continued our drive, entering the other side of the reserve, passing farmland along the way and making our first stop in an area of fields and young heather Mediterranean scrub. This lovely patch produced important birdlife such as Short-toed Lark, Lesser Kestrel, Montagu's Harrier, Black Kite, Calandra Lark and Zitting Cisticola, amongst others. We continued our drive and checked the marisma, which was quite flooded due to the generous rainy winter. We spotted some Common and Green Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, Spanish Yellow Wagtail, and some flocks of Black-winged Stilts flying in the distance. We took a good walk along the track which produced Western Swamphen, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo and a colony of beautiful Lesser Kestrels. We finally arrived at the FAO Visitors Centre by lunch time, where we scanned the flooded marisma and surroundings, finding Garganey, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Common Redstart and Spotless Starling, amongst others.

After lunch we took a short walk along the tracks, finding a very nice male Montagu's Harrier. On the way back to El Rocio we found a pair of Lesser Short-toed Larks and a pair of Pied Flycatchers. We finally arrived at El Rocio for a break, nibbles and drinks; and to enjoy another delicious dinner, though sadly our last one.

Day 5

Friday 7th April

Donana National Park (El Acebuche). El Rocio – Seville airport. Fly to London Gatwick

Today we visited the natural park area of El Acebuche, where we had fabulous views of Iberian Magpies, Crested Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Savi's Warbler, Wood Sandpiper, Eurasian Hoopoe and a very nice Black-eared Wheatear. We then returned to our hotel in El Rocio to packed our belongings and have some lunch. We then left EL Rocio behind and drove towards Seville airport to catch our mid afternoon flight to London Gatwick.

The flight was on time and smooth once in the air. We arrived at Gatwick airport on time and gathered together for the very last time at the baggage claim area for the final farewell and best wishes, ready to start our journeys home after a great 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				
			3	4	5	6	7
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓				
2	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	✓				
3	Black Swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>		✓			
4	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓	
5	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				✓	
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				✓	
8	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>				✓	
9	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				✓	
10	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>				✓	
11	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>				✓	
14	White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>					
15	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>				H	
16	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓	✓	
18	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			✓	✓	
19	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
24	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓	✓	✓	
25	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			✓		
26	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓	✓	
30	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓	
32	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
33	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
35	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				✓	
36	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓			✓	
37	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			✓	✓	
39	Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓		✓	
40	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
41	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓	✓	
42	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
43	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓	
44	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓		
45	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓				
46	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			✓	✓	
47	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			✓	✓	

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			3	4	5	6	7
48	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>			✓		
49	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓	
50	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	✓		✓	✓	
51	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓		
52	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>			✓		
53	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>				✓	
55	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>			✓		
56	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓	✓
59	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		H	H		
60	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		✓	✓		
61	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			✓	✓	
62	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			✓	✓	
63	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		✓		✓	
64	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓	
65	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		H			
68	Lesser Sotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>		✓			
69	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓			✓
70	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				✓	
71	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>					✓
73	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓		
75	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓	✓	
78	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
79	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓			✓
80	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		H			
83	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓			✓
84	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			✓	✓	
86	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			✓	✓	
87	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala rufescens</i>				✓	
88	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>			✓	✓	✓
92	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H	H	H	H
93	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓		
94	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓	✓
95	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		✓			
96	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>				✓	
97	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	✓			✓	
98	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	H	H	✓	H	H

	Scientific name	Common name	April				
			3	4	5	6	7
99	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
100	Western Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais pallida</i>		✓			
101	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>		H	H		
102	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>		H		H	✓
103	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			✓	✓	
104	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓		✓	
105	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓			
106	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		✓	✓	✓	
107	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H			
108	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓	H		✓
109	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		✓	H	H	H
112	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>				✓	
113	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓			
114	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>				✓	
115	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
116	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			✓	✓	
117	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>					✓
118	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
119	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓	✓	
120	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓			✓
121	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>		✓			
122	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓			
123	Spanish Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
124	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				✓	
125	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓		
126	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓			
127	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓	
128	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>				✓	
129	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
130	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
131	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓

Mammals

1	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓		✓		
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>			✓		
3	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>			4		
4	Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>				✓	
5	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>				✓	

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