

The Best of the Coto Doñana in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd – 26th March 2026



Iberian Grey Shrike



Spanish Sparrow



Penduline Tit



Squacco Heron

Tour report by Sergio Martín
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Tour participants: Sergio Martín (leader) with 14 Naturetrek clients

Summary

After several years of drought, this winter had been wet in southern Spain, and the marshes of the Doñana National Park were ready to welcome the birds and us. We were not to be disappointed!

Day 1

Monday 23rd March

Sevilla Airport – Dehesa de Abajo – El Rocío

The flight arrived ahead of schedule and after passing through customs we were soon ready to set off. As it was noon, we made a short break in a local restaurant, but soon we were driving south-west, to where the wild areas of Doñana were awaiting us. On the way, we spotted our first Black Kites, Spotless Starlings, Buzzards and Cattle Egrets, among other birds, and after crossing an attractive area of Mediterranean forest, we approached the transformed marshes, and the Natural Reserve of Dehesa de Abajo, where we were welcomed by hundreds of White Storks, Barn Swallows and Black Kites. It was almost 26°C, and the raptors were enjoying the thermals right above us. We managed to see at least four Booted Eagles of both pale and dark morphs around us.

We walked among the White Stork nests, taking pictures, and headed towards the lagoon where a hide sheltered us from the heat, and we began to scan the lagoon finding interesting ducks. Among them were the three most endangered ducks in Europe: Marbled, White-headed and Ferruginous. Red-crested and Common Pochards, Greater Flamingoes and Spoonbills were spotted too. After a while enjoying the different species, we made our way to the vehicles, spotting a smart Woodchat Shrike, Common Kestrel, more Black Kites and Jackdaws, among others.

We wanted to have a closer view of the furthest corner of the lagoon, so we drove a bit further and we had great views of the Spoonbills, plus lots of Night Herons and hundreds of Cormorants. Great Crested Grebes and Zitting Cisticolas were spotted too.

We decided then that it was now time to head towards our headquarters for the week, so we drove towards El Rocío, spotting Bee-Eaters, Greenfinches, Crested Larks and Iberian Magpies along the way.

Once at our hotel, we had a deserved rest, and we did our checklist with a drink to celebrate such a good beginning. We proceeded to the restaurant, where we had a superb dinner and then went to bed.

Day 2

Tuesday 24th March

Doñana National Park (core area)

Today we had an early start, and after our breakfast we jumped into the special vehicles provided by our local partners. We drove out of El Rocío and were soon on the Raya Real (the old pilgrims' track), where we tried to spot the elusive Iberian Lynx. We scanned the bushes and firebreaks in search of any sign; José Manuel soon spotted some Lynx footprints. Iberian Magpies and Spanish Sparrows were spotted along the track. We kept on

searching, but no cats appeared; several Black Kites, Wood Pigeon, White Storks and Black Redstart were spotted instead. We entered on a more restricted area, where we saw several Red Deer and lots of Rabbits. Red-legged Partridge, Spoonbill and Booted Eagles were there waiting for us.

We had a break at the edge of the marshes and the Mediterranean forest, right after spotting an excellent Little Owl perched on some Eucalyptus stumps. The comfort break was very productive in terms of birds: we discovered a group of Great Spotted Cuckoos flying over the marsh. Some of them were chased by Eurasian Magpies, which don't like them being around. Sardinian Warblers, Little Owls and Corn Buntings were there too.

As there were more vehicles approaching, we decided to move on, and headed towards the Coto del Rey, the former's royal hunting estate, to have a walk on private *finca* land, where Doñana was going to explode into action. We parked close to a flooded area, and a Hoopoe was there to welcome us. A number of different birds were present: Gull-billed Tern, Greater Flamingoes, Little and Great Egrets, Black Kites, Woodlark, Glossy Ibis and Black-winged Stilt, among others. Woodchat Shrikes were visible on several bushes and we spotted Buzzard, Sardinian Warbler, Bee-eater and Crested Lark, and more besides.

At the end of the walk, we managed to spot a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles in the distance, as well as Black-tailed Godwit, Shelduck and more Booted Eagles, together with Black Kites. It was a great scene! It was now time to head back to the village for lunch, but a pair of Western Black-eared Wheatears made us stop to enjoy a stunning view.

After our meal in a local bar, with cold drinks, we had a walk along the promenade in front of the hotel, and we saw a distant Griffon Vulture, more Flamingoes, Spoonbill, Greylag Goose and others, but it was rather quiet as it was the hottest part of the day. We all had a bit of time to rest.

After the break, we headed towards the National Park again, but focused our attention this time on the marshes. We crossed the forest, watching some Red-legged Partridges, Red Deer and Black Kites, among other species. When we arrived at the marshes, we stopped to scan the flooded area, where we saw a big group of Black-winged Stilts, with Black-headed Gulls, Gull-billed Terns and Little Ringed Plover, among others. We drove a bit further and found more interesting birds such as Marbled Teal, Squacco Heron, Black-necked, Great Crested and Little Grebes, thousands of Glossy Ibises, Marsh Harriers and Red-crested Pochards. As we drove carefully towards a colony of Lesser Kestrels, one of the vehicles saw an Egyptian Mongoose crossing in front of them, and close to the colony we found some Red-knobbed Coots nesting, and both Purple Herons and Purple Swampheens. What a place!

It was then time to head back to our hotel, where we had a delicious dinner and drinks to celebrate a wonderful day!

Day 3

Wednesday 25th March

Rio Guadiamar – Doñana National Park (public areas)

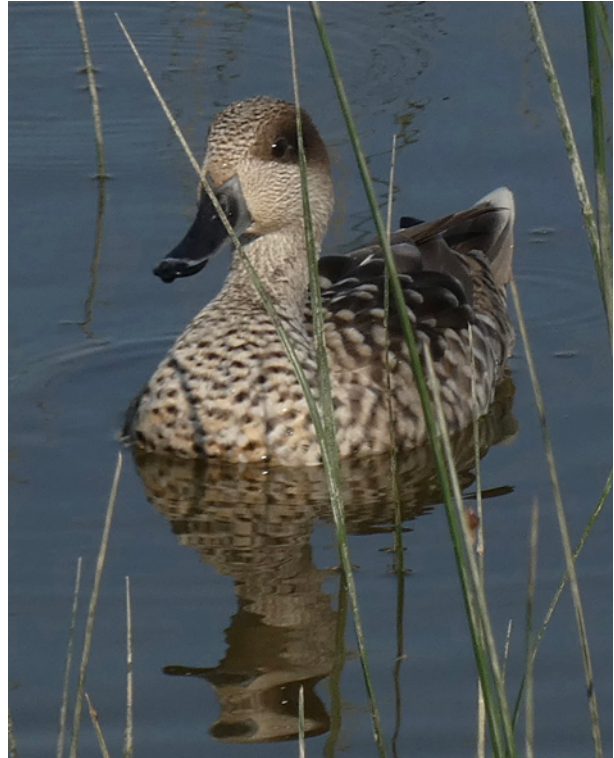
We decided to have another go in the marshes that had produced so many birds the previous day, but from a different angle (the north). After breakfast, we made our way to the east, towards Villamanrique de la Condesa,

and then on to the Guadiamar River, where we walked in a gallery forest, where there were lots of Blackcaps, Sardinian Warblers and a large group of Iberian Magpies, among other birds. We heard an Iberian Green Woodpecker and a Wryneck, but they were hidden in the forest. On the way back to the vehicles, we saw raptors too: Marsh Harriers, Black Kites and an Osprey.

We drove towards Villamanrique, where we had coffee in a local bar. After that, we drove south and stopped as some Eucalyptus trees where there was a colony of Spoonbills, White Storks, Jackdaws, and both Lesser and Common Kestrels. They performed really well for us, and we got some great pictures.



Black-winged Stilt



Marbled Duck

After that amazing stop, we drove towards our lunch spot, which was back at Dehesa de Abajo Natural Reserve. As we had already visited on the first day, we focused on the lunch, surrounded by dozens of Black Kites and White Storks.

After lunch, we drove south along a dirt road, making stops on the way and finding Montagu's Harrier, a lonely Black Stork and several Zitting Cisticolas, plus Spanish Sparrows everywhere. From a gateway along the road we viewed some flood fields, and had an encounter with a group of Western Yellow Wagtails of three different subspecies (*flava*, *flavissima* and *iberiae*). Pure migration magic! Squacco Herons, Short-toed Snake Eagle and Calandra Lark were spotted too.

Eventually, we arrived at the flooded marshes, and enjoyed the location on our own. Hundreds of Glossy Ibises, plus Night Herons and many other herons made a beautiful noise in the colony. We checked the bushes, and a new bird appeared right in front of us: a male Penduline Tit building its nest.

It was time to begin our journey back, and we drove towards El Rocío, finding several different birds on the way. The most impressive moment was when two male Montagu's Harriers glided in front of us over a wheat field, in search of prey.

Once at the hotel, we had a little rest, followed by the checklist and a superb dinner served by Javi and the El Toruño team.

Day 4

Thursday 26th March

Odiel Marshes – Cuesta Maneli – Las Rocinas

Our last full day took us away from El Rocío area, as we wanted to check some other habitats and try to see some migration. After breakfast, we drove west, and once we passed the city of Huelva, we stopped at the salt pans, where we saw plenty of Greater Flamingoes, Common Redshanks and Dunlins, among other birds. We had a stop at the Calatilla interpretation centre and had a walk to see the birds in the area: we found a group of Whimbrels, Pallid Swifts, Red-rumped Swallows and others. Around the back of the interpretation centre, we heard Nightingales and Cetti's Warblers, and we saw another Penduline Tit building its nest in a Poplar. Very entertaining!

After that productive walk, we drove along the dike, seeing Marsh and Montagu's Harriers, plus an Osprey on the nest and lots of Woodchat Shrikes. We spotted lots of waders from the road, like Sanderling, Greenshank and Grey Plover. Spoonbills and Audouin's Gulls were spotted too.

We parked close to the dunes, and had a look to the ocean where we saw lots of things being active in the sea. There were many Sandwich, Gull-billed and Little Terns, and Gannets trying to fish. While we were watching those birds, we spotted some other birds which didn't look seabirds, and there we had little guys all the way from Africa right in front of our eyes: Pied Flycatchers, Woodchat Shrikes, Western Bonelli's Warblers and others. We all enjoyed the moment! It was time to go for lunch, so we drove towards the interpretation centre once more and made our picnic, enjoying the wildlife of the marshes and having a coffee afterwards.

We decided to travel back towards the coastal dunes of the National Park, where we walked a board walk and saw several warblers: Dartford, Western Subalpine and Sardinian. Woodchat and Iberian Grey Shrikes were spotted too. It was quite warm by the time we got back to the vehicles, so we refreshed ourselves and drove to Las Rocinas, one of the 'honeypots' in the National Park, with hides and facilities. There we had plenty of Serins, Stonechat, Griffon Vultures, Black Kites and Glossy Ibises. We also heard Savi's Warbler and Short-toed Treecreeper, but they were elusive this time.

To finish our day, we parked just in front of the "mother of the marshes" near El Rocío to enjoy the view of the village, the marsh, and even some new species for the trip. Teal, Black-tailed Godwit, Spoonbill, Flamingoes and Glossy Ibises were there.

We finished the day, and after a well-deserved rest we did our last checklist and celebrated a wonderful week with our last delicious dinner.

Day 5

Friday 26th March

El Rocío – Sevilla Airport

Due to an early flight, we had to make a very early start; we drove to the airport and arrived safely and on time. We spotted Pallid Swifts, Black Kites and Spotless Starlings on the way, among other birds. Once at the airport, we gave one another big hugs, and said goodbye until the next adventure!

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

N=near-endemic, I=introduced, [] =escape		March 2026				
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27
White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	✓				
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
[Ringed Teal]	[<i>Callonetta leucophrys</i>]	✓				
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	✓	✓			
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓		✓	
Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	✓	✓	✓		
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	✓				
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓	✓		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				✓	
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>		H	H		
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓			
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		✓	✓		
Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>		✓			
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		H		H	
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>					
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Feral Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓				
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>		✓	✓		
Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓	✓		
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>				✓	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Thinornis dubius</i>		✓			
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓	
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		✓		✓	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				✓	
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>				✓	
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>				✓	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				✓	
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>				✓	
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>				✓	
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				✓	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓	✓	

N=near-endemic, I=introduced, [] =escape		March 2026				
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27
Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>				✓	
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓	
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			✓		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>				✓	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Little Bittern	<i>Botaurus minutus</i>		✓			
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓		✓		
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>		✓	✓		
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		✓	✓		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓			
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			✓	✓	
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓		✓	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			✓		
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓			
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>			H		
Iberian Green Woodpecker - N	<i>Picus sharpei</i>			H		
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		✓	✓		
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iberian Grey Shrike - N	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓		✓	
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloesus monedula</i>	✓		✓		
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>			✓	✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>				✓	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>		✓	✓		
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			✓		
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	H	H	✓	✓	
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>				H	

N=near-endemic, I=introduced, [] =escape		March 2026				
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓	✓	
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H	H	H	
Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>			✓	✓	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓			✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓		✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H	✓	✓	
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>				✓	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	H	✓	✓	✓	
Western Subalpine Warbler	<i>Curruca iberiae</i>				✓	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				H	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				H	
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓		
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		H	H	H	
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>				✓	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	
Western Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>		✓	✓		
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓		✓	✓	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓	✓		
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>		✓	✓	✓	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓	✓	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</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>		✓	✓	✓	

Mammals

		March 2026				
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>			✓		
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓			
Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>		✓	✓		

Amphibians & reptiles

		March 2026				
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27
Iberian Green Frog	<i>Pelophylax perezi</i>		✓			
Large Psammmodromus	<i>Psammmodromus algirus</i>		✓		✓	

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026				
		23	24	25	26	27
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	✓		✓		
Spanish Festoon	<i>Zerynthia rumina</i>		✓			
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>		✓			
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>			✓		
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>		✓			
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	✓	✓	

Other invertebrates

Common name	Scientific name	March 2026				
		23	24	25	26	27
Dragonflies						
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓	✓	✓		
Grasshoppers						
Egyptian Locust	<i>Anacridium aegyptium</i>	✓				
True bugs						
Brown Cicada	<i>Cicada orni</i>		✓			
Beetles						
Dung Beetle	<i>Scarabeus cicatricus</i>		✓			
Crustaceans						
West African Fiddler Crab	<i>Afruca tangeri</i>				✓	