

# Birding South-West Spain: Coto Doñana and Sierra de Grazalema 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> May 2004

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## Introduction

Coto Doñana is a huge area of low lying wetland in southern Andalucía some 50 miles south of Seville. It is essentially the delta of The River Guadalquivir which floods during the winter. Although much of the delta area has been drained in recent years for agriculture, there are still plenty of wetlands much of which is protected as a national park. The delta area, particularly in the north and west is fringed with stone pine forests and along the coast in the south are some huge dune systems.

We spent three days here in May 2004. On the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> we toured around the Coto Doñana visiting a number of key birding areas; the weather was hot and sunny with light easterly winds. On the 16<sup>th</sup> we travelled due east to the Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema, about 35 km west of Ronda. Here the weather was also sunny, but a strong easterly wind was blowing all day making birding for passerines difficult.



photo:  
Richard Taylor

*The team in the Valverde area.*

## Itinerary

**Friday 14<sup>th</sup>** Jerez de la Frontera International Airport, route N IV to El Cuervo, minor road north to Lebrija, then farm roads (dirt and tarmac) across the agricultural area towards the Guadalquivir River and the Preparque Este, the latter on the opposite bank. Slow drive along tarmac roads north through extensive farmland to the Brazo del Este. Birded continually from the road skirting the marshes and then headed east to Los Palacios y Villafranca where we picked up the N IV again. Onto the A 49, around the southern side of Sevilla and at Bollullos south on the H-612 to El Rocio. Here we found the campsite and our bungalow for the next two nights. Late afternoon/early evening drive and walk along the dirt track from El Rocio to Palacio del Rey. Dusk at La Rocina.

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>** Minor road east towards Villamanrique de la Condesa, then dirt road towards Palacio del Rey for dawn. Early morning drive through the northern marshes alongside the Brazo de la Torre to the Lucio del Lobo lagoon and the José Antonio Valverde visitor centre. Lunch at the boundary of the National Park nearby. Back round to El Rocio then south to Matalascañas. Short walk into the dunes (2 km) and viewed the National Park to the north. Back to El Rocio via El Acebuche visitor centre.

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup>** Left Coto Doñana and headed east along the N 342 via Arcos de la Frontera, Villamartin and Algodonales, to the Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema about 35 km to the west of Ronda. From the viewpoint into the village of Grazalema itself then onto the C 3331 alongside the Sierra del Caïllo to Ubrique. Continued along this road to Puerto de Galiz, then CA 511 to Alcalá de los Gazules. A new motorway is under construction from the south to Jerez and we picked this up to Laguna de Medina. From here onto the A 4 motorway (toll) and off at Las Cabezas de San Juan. Minor road towards Espera then 5 km of dirt track to the Laguna Hondeilla (sign posted from the road about 2 km from Espera). Stayed in a hotel called Vende de Pan just outside Las Cabezas.

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup>** Quick drive down the A 4 motorway to Jerez de la Frontera International Airport and return to UK on 11.30 flight.

### Daily Diary

#### **Friday 14<sup>th</sup>**

We arrived at Jerez de la Frontera International Airport at 10.00 am, 40 minutes ahead of schedule. While taxiing on the runway, the plane flushed a **Collared Pratincole** and **White Storks** were seen nesting on a communications tower. As we walked from the plane to the terminal, **Spotless Starlings** were flying overhead and **Nightingale** could be heard singing in nearby bushes.

We left the airport heading for the Brazo del Este, part of the eastern marshes of the Coto Doñana. Not far from the airport, small floods in fields around El Cuervo, held at least 12 **Collared Pratincoles** and a similar number of **Gull-billed Terns**. Also there were two **Red-rumped Swallows** and a **Crested Lark**. A little further down the road, we saw our first **Woodchat Shrike**, whilst **Black Kites** and **White Storks** were soaring in the thermals.

As we continued our journey along minor roads in the eastern marshes, we were seeing **Black-winged Stilts**, **Spanish Yellow Wagtails**, and **Crested, Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed Larks**.

A large shallow lagoon near the Guadalquivir river held a **Purple Heron**, **Grey Heron**, **White Stork** and **Little Egret** all in the same camera lens. Also here were three **Marsh Harriers**, two **Avocet**, **Collared Pratincoles**, **Yellow-Legged Gull**, **Little Tern**, four **Turtle Doves**, two **Bee Eaters**, **Great Reed**, **Reed and Savi's Warblers**.



photo:  
Andy Warren

*Purple heron in a roadside pool near the Guadalquivir River.*



photo:  
Andy Warren

*White Stork in a roadside pool near the Guadalquivir River.*

A little further on adjacent to one of the main drains entering the river, we spent some time trying to see a **Western Olivaceous Warbler** singing vigorously from dense cover. We did manage some brief good views just as a pair of **Marbled Ducks** flew in and landed nearby. Also here were **Marsh Harrier**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Savi's Warbler** and **Spotted Flycatcher**.

Continuing our journey through the marshes birds were plentiful, and we added **Kentish Plover**, **Stone Curlew** and **Hoopoe** to our trip list. We also noted good numbers of **White Storks**, **Purple Herons**, **Black Kites**, a group of 41 **Gull-billed Terns** and two more **Red-rumped Swallows**.

On the large reedy pools at Brazo del Este, there were at least 68 **Purple Swamphens** allowing some excellent views. Also here were two **Spoonbills** (one an immature), a **Squacco Heron**, three **Little Bitterns**, a **Night Heron** and good numbers of **Purple Herons**, including birds on nests in the reeds. We picked up our first **Booted Eagle** here together with two groups of **Common Waxbills** (3 and 7).

Leaving the eastern marshes we quickly drove round to the Coto Doñana proper, seeing a distant **Montagu's Harrier** en route. Arriving at our campsite at El Rocio, we saw our first **Serin** of the day. There were also **Bee Eaters** and **Black Kites** flying around the town and huge clusters of **House Martin** nests on suitable buildings.

An early evening walk in the stone pine forest along the dirt track towards Palacio del Rey produced two **Azure-winged Magpies**, a **Cetti's Warbler**, **Sardinian Warbler**, a few **Crested Tits** and a **Short-toed Treecreeper**. Also here were **Booted Eagles**, **Black Kite** and **Bee Eaters**.

A scan of La Rocina lagoons from the main road just south of El Rocio at dusk produced around 60 **Greater Flamingos**, at least 30 **Spoonbills**, about 15 **Night Herons**, two **Whiskered Terns**, a **Kingfisher** and excellent close prolonged views of a **Savi's Warbler**.

### **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>**

We set off at 4.30am, hearing **Common Nightjar** and **Nightingale** as we left the campsite. Initially we headed north, but after only a few kilometres we turned east towards Villamanrique de la Condesa, stopping several times to listen out for one of our main target species, **Red-necked Nightjar**. We heard several birds in the distance, none of which were approachable. As it grew light we headed a short distance down the rough track to Palacio del Rey (from the northern side). Over the next 45 minutes or so, we were treated to some excellent close views of at least four or five birds, both in flight, settled on the ground and perched in trees. At the same time **Quail** could be heard calling in the distance.

With the arrival of daylight, we set off in the direction of the José Antonio Valverde Visitor Centre, stopping frequently along the way at any interesting sites. At Compuertas, on the Brazo de la Torre, we found a good area for larks with excellent views being obtained of **Calandra**, **Crested**, **Short-toed** and **Lesser Short-toed Larks**. We picked up further **Quail** here as well as our **first Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** with good views of around 10-15 birds in flight and settled. Also here were a **Spectacled Warbler** and two **Melodious Warblers** in the few bushes in the area, as well as several **Great Reed Warblers**. A small pool in the distance held two summer-plumaged **Red Knots**, several **Dunlins** and a **Grey Plover**. Excellent views were obtained of a **Short-toed Eagle** perched on power pylons as we continued along the rough track.



photo:  
Andy Warren

*Short-toed Eagle perched on a pylon at the trackside near Valverde.*

Shortly before the visitor centre, we came to two large lagoons on the left hand side. This was Lucio del Lobo – a superb reed-fringed freshwater lagoon with a considerable covering of flowering water crowfoot. Here there were good numbers of **Common Coots** and at least two **Red-knobbed Coots**, including one with a white collar, a bird from a recent reintroduction scheme. Many **Glossy Ibis** were flying around at the back of the lagoon and there were also about 20 **Greater Flamingos** and 8 **Spoonbills**. We also picked up a ring-tailed **Montagu's Harrier** and found an adult and an immature **Slender-billed Gull** mixing in with the **Black-headed Gulls**. There were also good numbers of **Whiskered Terns** and on the water there were **Gadwall**, **Common Pochard** and **Red-crested Pochard**.



photo:  
Andy Warren

*Red-knobbed Coot at Lucio del Lobo.*

A little further along the track we arrived at the José Antonio Valverde centre. The reed beds, which could be closely viewed from the centre, were alive with breeding herons. Seven species were nesting side-by-side: **Grey, Purple, Squacco and Night Herons, Little Bittern, Little Egret and Cattle Egret**. A **Great Egret** was also seen, whilst we were also lucky enough to spot the regular dark-morph **Western Reef Heron** fly in. Meanwhile considerable numbers of nesting **Glossy Ibis** were constantly flying around, and further back **Whiskered** and **Black Terns** were hawking the lagoons. Also here were two **Marbled Ducks**, **Red-crested Pochards** and a **Western Olivaceous Warbler** carrying food.



photo:  
Andy Warren

*A male Little Bittern at Brazo del Este.*

After about an hour at the centre we drove on to the boundary of the National Park. Here the track was blocked by a gate, passage through which required a permit. Our intention was to scan the distant stone pine forest for raptors but the heat haze of the early afternoon made this difficult. We did however see a group of about 30 **Griffon Vultures** with **Black Kites**, a **Red Kite** and a **Raven** mixed in, all of which passed overhead - some birds surprisingly low down. We also picked up a further two **Montagu's Harriers** here.

We then turned round to return to El Rocio. On the way we saw a small group of **Spanish Sparrows** presumably nesting in a nearby White Stork's nest.

We continued south through El Rocio until we reached the large coastal resort of Matalascañas. At the eastern end of the town we parked up and walked through the sand dunes to the south, heading for a particularly high spot to give us a raptor watch point facing inland to the small woods and vast heathlands of the Park. The dunes contained **Common Buzzard**, **Booted Eagle**, **Hobby**, **Raven**, **Azure-winged Magpies**, **Dartford Warbler** and **Sardinian Warbler**. A surprise came in the form of a **Mongoose** trotting through the slacks, whilst several **Red Deer** were also noted here. After 20 minutes or so, we picked up our first large eagle species soaring a considerable distance away and at great height. Over the next 40-50 minutes of constantly watching at least two large eagles, we were able to confirm their identification as **Spanish Imperial Eagles**.

On our way back to El Rocio, we called in briefly at the main National Park visitor centre at El Acebuche, finding an **Azure-winged Magpie** nesting in a tiny tree in the car park. A **Southern Grey Shrike** on the roadside home, then after dark, **Little Owls** were calling and a hissing **Barn Owl** flew through the campsite.

### **Sunday 16<sup>th</sup>**

We set off at 5am, heading almost due east to the mountains of the Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema and Sierra Ubrique. Our first stop was the viewpoint car park at Grazalema itself (around 1600m).

Driving up, we flushed a **Black Wheatear** by the roadside, and scanning from the viewpoint produced 8 **Griffon Vultures**, a **Lesser Kestrel**, 16 **Red-billed Choughs** and

2 **Pallid Swifts**. We set off on foot, climbing up the mountainside and very quickly having good views of **Rock Bunting**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Dartford Warbler**. An unfamiliar thrush-type song being delivered from perch and flight was quickly confirmed as our main target species for this area – **Rock Thrush** – and at least three superb males were seen. A few **Black Redstarts** were also noted here as well as a **Common Cuckoo** and several **Stonechats**. Further down the mountainside, when we reached the tree line, we found and obtained excellent views of a singing **Bonelli's Warbler**.



photo:  
Andy Warren

*One of three male Rock Thrushes at Grazalema.*

For the next few miles our target was Rock Sparrow. We stopped frequently at roadside crags and cliffs as we passed through Sierra del Caillo, but no Rock Sparrow. We did however add **Egyptian Vulture**, **Crag Martin** and **Grey Wagtail** to our trip list and found another **Southern Grey Shrike**. In this area we also saw a **Black Wheatear**, two **Blue Rock Thrushes** and five **Red-rumped Swallows**.

As we descended from the mountains the habitat became more scrubby, with cork oak and olives being the predominant vegetation. Our target here was Orphean Warbler but it was not to be, perhaps because of the strong cold winds that were blowing through the valleys by midday. Nevertheless we did see another 2-3 **Griffon Vultures**, 2 **Short-toed Eagles**, 2 **Red-billed Choughs**, 4 **Woodlarks**, 2 **Blue Rock Thrushes**, our 3<sup>rd</sup> **Black Wheatear**, another **Bonelli's Warbler**, a male **Subalpine Warbler**, 2 **Melodious Warblers**, an **Iberian Chiffchaff**, a **Firecrest**, 2 **Hawfinches**, a male **Cirl Bunting** and astonishingly a stunning male **Rock Thrush** singing from a roadside fence well down the mountain.

Continuing down the mountain, we arrived at the village of Alcalá de los Gazules. Just before we reached the village, a **Black-eared Wheatear** flew across the road in front of the car. In the village centre, at least 12 **Lesser Kestrels** were flying around the church tower, often at great height.

About 45 minutes later we arrived at Laguna de Medina. Here we saw 12 **Black-necked Grebes**, 2 **Red-knobbed Coots** feeding young, 2 **Honey Buzzards** and a **Hobby**, whilst the reeds and waterside bushes held **Great Reed**, **Cetti's**, **Fan-tailed** and **Sardinian Warblers**. Also, a **Little Bittern** was glimpsed briefly here and the water held **Gadwall** and **Red-crested Pochard**.

With dusk approaching, we moved on to the Laguna Hondeilla near Espera and finally caught up with **White-headed Duck** – there were 8 males and 3 females on the first pool and two pairs on the second pool. Also here were 4 **Red-knobbed Coot** (including one with a white neck collar), 3 **Black-necked Grebes**, several **Red-crested Pochards** and a **Purple Swamphen**. The track to the laguna from the main road also had a **Black-eared Wheatear** and plenty of larks (probably all 4 species). The area looked to be excellent for Little Bustard but none were seen.



photo:  
Andy Warren

A male White-headed Duck at Laguna Hondeilla.

### Systematic List

<b>Black-necked Grebe</b> <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	16/5 – 12, Laguna de Medina. 16/5 – 3, Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>Little Grebe</b> <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Small numbers seen throughout Coto Doñana and at both Laguna de Medina and Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>Great Crested Grebe</b> <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	15/5 – 1 or 2, Lucio del Lobo.
<b>Little Bittern</b> <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	14/5 – 3, Brazo del Este. 15/5 – small numbers amongst the heronry at Valverde. 16/5 – 12, Laguna de Medina.
<b>Black-crowned Night Heron</b> <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	14/5 – 1, Brazo del Este. 14/5 – c15, La Rocina lagoons. 15/5 – small numbers amongst the heronry at Valverde.
<b>Cattle Egret</b> <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana, often in groups of up to 30 birds around cattle. Also, seen in the cattle grazed meadows in the foothills of Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema.
<b>Squacco Heron</b> <i>Ardeola ralliodes</i>	14/5 – 1, Brazo del Este. 15/5 – 1, Lucio del Lobo. 15/5 – small numbers amongst the heronry at Valverde.

<b>Little Egret</b> <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana.
<b>Western Reef Egret</b> <i>Egretta gularis</i>	15/5 – the regular dark-morph bird was seen in the heronry at Valverde.
<b>Great Egret</b> <i>Egretta alba</i>	15/5 – an adult in the heronry at Valverde.
<b>Grey Heron</b> <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Common throughout Coto Doñana, normally as singles.
<b>Purple Heron</b> <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Probably as common as Grey Heron throughout Coto Doñana. Many birds nesting in reedbeds at Brazo del Este and Valverde.
<b>White Stork</b> <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Fairly common all areas. Seen nesting in a variety of places including a church tower, communications/power pylons and purpose-built platforms. Largest group was 16, Brazo de la Torre.
<b>Glossy Ibis</b> <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	15/5 – very numerous at Lucio del Lobo and Valverde – 400+ birds.
<b>Eurasian Spoonbill</b> <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	14/5 – 2 immatures, Brazo del Este. 14/5 – 30+, La Rocina lagoons. 15/5 – 8, Lucio del Lobo.
<b>Greater Flamingo</b> <i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	14/5 – c60, La Rocina lagoons. 15/5 – 20+, Brazo de la Torre. 15/5 – 100+, Lucio del Lobo. 15/5 – c10, Valverde.
<b>Mallard</b> <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Present in small numbers in all wet areas.
<b>Gadwall</b> <i>Anas strepera</i>	15/5 – a male, Lucio del Lobo. 16/5 – a pair, Laguna de Medina.
<b>Pintail</b> <i>Anas acuta</i>	14/5 – a male, Brazo del Este.
<b>Marbled Duck</b> <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	14/5 – 2, near R. Guadalquivir. 14/5 – 2, Brazo del Este. 15/5 – 2, Valverde.
<b>Common Pochard</b> <i>Aythya ferina</i>	14/5 – a pair, Brazo del Este. 16/5 – 2 males, Laguna de Medina. 16/5 – 2-3 males, Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>Red-crested Pochard</b> <i>Neta rufina</i>	14/5 – c10, Brazo del Este. 16/5 – a male, Laguna de Medina. 16/5 – c10, Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>White-headed Duck</b> <i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	16/5 – 7 males and 3 females on the first pool at Laguna Hondeilla with a further 2 pairs on the second pool.
<b>Eurasian Griffon Vulture</b> <i>Gyps fulvus</i>	15/5 – c30, Valverde. 16/5 – 8, Grazalema. 16/5 – 2-3, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Egyptian Vulture</b> <i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	16/5 – 1, Sierra del Caillo.
<b>Spanish Imperial Eagle</b> <i>Aquila adalberti</i>	15/5 – 2, distantly from the dunes south east of Matalascañas.

<b>Short-toed Eagle</b> <i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	15/5 – 2, Lucio del Lobo. 16/5 – 2, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Booted Eagle</b> <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	14/5 – 2, Brazo del Este. 14/5 – 1, from the autoroute north of El Rocio. 14/5 – 4, forests near La Rocina. 15/5 – 2, from the dunes south east of Matalascañas.
<b>Red Kite</b> <i>Milvus milvus</i>	15/5 – 1, Valverde.
<b>Black Kite</b> <i>Milvus migrans</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana. Birds seen at the nest in the stone pine forest near El Rocio.
<b>Marsh Harrier</b> <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	14/5 – 3, near R. Guadalquivir. 14/5 – 2, Brazo del Este.
<b>Montagu's Harrier</b> <i>Circus pygarrus</i>	14/5 – 1 male in fields north of Coto Doñana. 15/5 – 1, Lucio del Lobo. 15/5 – 1, Valverde.
<b>Common Buzzard</b> <i>Buteo buteo</i>	15/5 – 1, from the dunes south east of Matalascañas.
<b>European Honey Buzzard</b> <i>Pernis apivorus</i>	16/5 – 2, north over Laguna de Medina.
<b>Common Kestrel</b> <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Singles seen all areas – fairly common.
<b>Lesser Kestrel</b> <i>Falco naumanni</i>	16/5 – 1, Grazalema. 16/5 – 12+, Alcalá de los Gazules – around the church tower.
<b>Eurasian Hobby</b> <i>Falco subbuteo</i>	15/5 – 1, in the dunes south east of Matalascañas. 16/5 – 1, near Laguna de Medina.
<b>Red-legged Partridge</b> <i>Alectoris rufa</i>	16/5 – fairly numerous in the Laguna Hondeilla area.
<b>Moorhen</b> <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Present in small numbers in all wet areas.
<b>Eurasian Coot</b> <i>Fulica atra</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana, especially at Lucio del Lobo and Laguna de Medina.
<b>Red-knobbed Coot</b> <i>Fulica cristata</i>	15/5 – 2, Valverde (1 with a white collar). 16/5 – 2, Laguna de Medina feeding young. 16/5 – 4, Laguna Hondeilla (1 with a white collar).
<b>Purple Swamphen</b> <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	14/5 – c68, Brazo del Este. 16/5 – 1, Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>Avocet</b> <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	14/5 – 2, on a lagoon by the Guadalquivir river.
<b>Black-winged Stilt</b> <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Small groups throughout Coto Doñana. Also, 2 at Laguna Hondeilla on 16/5.
<b>Stone Curlew</b> <i>Burhinus oedicanus</i>	14/5 – 1, along the Guadalquivir river. 15/5 – 1, Brazo de la Torre. 15/5 – 2, El Acebuche visitor centre.

<b>Collared Pratincole</b> <i>Glareola pratincola</i>	Common and numerous in many areas of the Coto Doñana. Biggest groups:- 14/5 – 12+, in a flooded field near El Cuervo, not far from Jerez airport. 14/5 – 100+, Brazo del Este. 15/5 – several hundred in the Los Palacios y Villafranca area.
<b>Little Ringed Plover</b> <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	14/5 – 1, on a lagoon at Balsa de Mendano near Lebrija.
<b>Ringed Plover</b> <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	14/5 – 33, on a lagoon by the Guadalquivir river.
<b>Kentish Plover</b> <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	14/5 – 5, on a lagoon by the Guadalquivir river.
<b>Grey Plover</b> <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	15/5 – 1, Brazo de la Torre.
<b>Lapwing</b> <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	15/5 – 2 Lucio del Lobo/Valverde area.
<b>Knot</b> <i>Calidris canutus</i>	15/5 – 2, Brazo de la Torre.
<b>Common Sandpiper</b> <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	14/5 – 1, Brazo del Este.
<b>Redshank</b> <i>Tringa totanus</i>	14/5 – 1, Brazo del Este. 15/5 – several, Lucio del Lobo.
<b>Whimbrel</b> <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	14/5 – 1, calling over the campsite in El Rocio.
<b>Black-headed Gull</b> <i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana.
<b>Slender-billed Gull</b> <i>Larus genei</i>	15/5 – an adult and an immature, Lucio del Lobo.
<b>Yellow-legged Gull</b> <i>Larus cachinnans</i>	Small numbers throughout Coto Doñana.
<b>Lesser Black-backed Gull</b> <i>Larus fuscus</i>	14/5 – 1, Brazo del Este.
<b>Little Tern</b> <i>Sterna albifrons</i>	14/5 – 2, Brazo del Este.
<b>Gull-billed Tern</b> <i>Sterna nilotica</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana. Largest group was 41 hawking over a flooded field a little before Brazo del Este.
<b>Black Tern</b> <i>Chlidonias niger</i>	15/5 – 3-4, Valverde.
<b>Whiskered Tern</b> <i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	14/5 – 2, La Rocina lagoons. 15/5 – 20-30, Lucio del Lobo/Valverde area.
<b>Pin-tailed Sandgrouse</b> <i>Pterocles alchata</i>	15/5 – 10-15, Brazo de la Torre.
<b>Wood Pigeon</b> <i>Columba oenas</i>	Occasional birds recorded in all areas.
<b>Collared Dove</b> <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Common throughout the urban areas.
<b>Turtle Dove</b> <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	14/5 – 4, along the Guadalquivir river. 16/5 – 1, near Laguna de Medina.

<b>Cuckoo</b> <i>Cuculus canorus</i>	16/5 – 2, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Barn Owl</b> <i>Tyto alba</i>	16/5 – 1, calling in the campsite at El Rocio around 5am.
<b>Little Owl</b> <i>Athene noctua</i>	15/5 – 1, near Villamanrique de la Condesa. 15/5 – birds calling in El Rocio overnight. 16/5 – 2, near Las Cabezas.
<b>European Nightjar</b> <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	15/5 – 1, heard from the campsite at El Rocio.
<b>Red-necked Nightjar</b> <i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>	15/5 – 10+, near Villamanrique de la Condesa.
<b>Common Swift</b> <i>Apus apus</i>	Fairly common throughout.
<b>Pallid Swift</b> <i>Apus pallidus</i>	Occasional records Coto Doñana. Good numbers seen in the mountainous areas on 16/5.
<b>Hoopoe</b> <i>Upupa epops</i>	14/5 – 1, along the Guadalquivir river. 14/5 – 2, from the autoroute north of El Rocio.
<b>Common Kingfisher</b> <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	14/5 – 1, La Rocina lagoons.
<b>European Bee-eater</b> <i>Merops apiaster</i>	Occasional groups of 2-4 birds throughout Coto Doñana. Also birds flying around El Rocio.
<b>Crested Lark</b> <i>Galerida cristata</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana.
<b>Woodlark</b> <i>Lullula arborea</i>	16/5 – 4, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Short-toed Lark</b> <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana. Best along track from Brazo de la Torre to Valverde.
<b>Lesser Short-toed Lark</b> <i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	Slightly less common than Short-toed Lark and usually seen together.
<b>Calandra Lark</b> <i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	15/5 – c10, Brazo de la Torre.
<b>Crag Martin</b> <i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	16/5 – several birds noted nesting on cliffs in Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Sand Martin</b> <i>Riparia riparia</i>	14/5 – 1, Brazo del Este.
<b>Swallow</b> <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Fairly common all areas.
<b>Red-rumped Swallow</b> <i>Hirundo daurica</i>	14/5 – 1, El Cuervo, not far from Jerez airport. 14/5 – 2, Brazo del Este. 16/5 – 5, Sierra del Caillo.
<b>House Martin</b> <i>Delichon urbica</i>	Large numbers nesting in El Rocio. Also nesting in the mountain villages in Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema.
<b>White Wagtail</b> <i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	A few singles noted around Coto Doñana.
<b>(“Spanish”) Yellow Wagtail</b> <i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana.
<b>Grey Wagtail</b> <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	16/5 – 1, by a mountain stream, Sierra del Caillo.

<b>Wren</b> <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	14/5 – several heard in the forests near La Rocina.
<b>Robin</b> <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	14/5 – A few heard in the forest near El Rocio.
<b>Nightingale</b> <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Occasional birds in suitable wooded areas throughout. 16/5 – several, Laguna de Medina and Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>Black Redstart</b> <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	16/5 – several, Grazalema.
<b>Black-eared Wheatear</b> <i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	16/5 – 1, Alcalá de los Gazules. 16/5 – 1, Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>Black Wheatear</b> <i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>	16/5 – 1, Grazalema. 16/5 – 1, Sierra del Caillo. 16/5 – 1, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Stonechat</b> <i>Saxicola torquata</i>	16/5 – occasional birds throughout the mountainous regions.
<b>Blue Rock Thrush</b> <i>Monticola solitarius</i>	16/5 – 2 males, Grazalema. 16/5 – 2 males, Sierra del Caillo. 16/5 – a pair, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Rock Thrush</b> <i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	16/5 – 3 males song-flighting, Grazalema. 16/5 – 1 male, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Mistle Thrush</b> <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	16/5 – 1, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Blackbird</b> <i>Turdus merula</i>	Occasional records all areas.
<b>Blackcap</b> <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	16/5 – 1, below Grazalema. 16/5 – 1, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Sardinian Warbler</b> <i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	14/5 – 1, forests near La Rocina. 15/5 – 3, dunes south of Matalascañas. 16/5 – 1, Grazalema. 16/5 – 1, Laguna de Medina.
<b>Spectacled Warbler</b> <i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	15/5 – a male, Brazo de la Torre.
<b>Subalpine Warbler</b> <i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	16/5 – a male, Sierra del Caillo with others heard.
<b>Dartford Warbler</b> <i>Sylvia undata</i>	15/5 – 2, dunes south east of Matalascañas. 16/5 – 1, Grazalema.
<b>Zitting Cisticola</b> <i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Birds seen/heard occasionally throughout Coto Doñana and at Laguna de Medina and Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>Savi's Warbler</b> <i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	14/5 – 1, near Guadalquivir. 14/5 – 1, Brazo del Este. 14/5 – 1, La Rocina lagoons.
<b>Cetti's Warbler</b> <i>Cettia cetti</i>	14/5 – 1, La Rocina. 16/5 – several, Laguna de Medina and Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>Reed Warbler</b> <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	Occasional records throughout Coto Doñana.

<b>Great Reed Warbler</b> <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana.
<b>Melodious Warbler</b> <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	15/5 – 2, Brazo de la Torre. 16/5 – 2, Sierra del Caillo. 16/5 – 1, Laguna Hondeilla.
<b>Olivaceous Warbler</b> <i>Hippolais pallida</i>	14/5 – 1, near Guadalquivir. 15/5 – 1 carrying food, Valverde.
<b>Bonelli's Warbler</b> <i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	16/5 – 1, below Grazalema. 16/5 – 1, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Chiffchaff</b> <i>Phylloscopus collybita ibericus</i>	16/5 – 1, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Firecrest</b> <i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	16/5 – 1, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Spotted Flycatcher</b> <i>Muscicapidae striata</i>	14/5 – 1, near Guadalquivir. 15/5 – 1, Valverde.
<b>Great Tit</b> <i>Parus major</i>	Occasional birds all areas.
<b>Coal Tit</b> <i>Parus ater</i>	16/5 – 1, below Grazalema.
<b>Crested Tit</b> <i>Parus cristatus</i>	14/5 – several heard, forests near La Rocina.
<b>Short-toed Treecreeper</b> <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	14/5 – 1, forests near La Rocina.
<b>Woodchat Shrike</b> <i>Lanius senator</i>	14/5 – 1, near El Cuervo. 14/5 – 3, near Guadalquivir. 16/5 – 1, Sierra del Caillo.
<b>Southern Grey Shrike</b> <i>Lanius excubitor meridionalis</i>	15/5 – 1 on wires near La Rocina. 16/5 – 2, Sierra del Caillo.
<b>Azure-winged Magpie</b> <i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	14/5 – 2, forests near La Rocina. 15/5 – 2, dunes south of Matalascañas. 15/5 – birds at the nest, El Acebuche visitor centre. Small parties heard in the forests around Coto Doñana.
<b>Common Magpie</b> <i>Pica pica</i>	15/5 – several, near Valverde.
<b>Jay</b> <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	16/5 – 2, Sierra del Caillo. 16/5 – 1, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Jackdaw</b> <i>Corvus monedula</i>	15/5 – several, near Valverde, over the distant tree line. 16/5 – 1, near Laguna de Medina.
<b>Red-billed Chough</b> <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	16/5 – 16, Grazalema. 16/5 – 2, Sierra del Caillo.
<b>Raven</b> <i>Corvus corax</i>	15/5 – 1, Valverde. 15/5 – 1, from the dunes south of Matalascañas. 16/5 – 1, Laguna de Medina.
<b>Spotless Starling</b> <i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Fairly common throughout Coto Doñana.
<b>House Sparrow</b> <i>Passer domesticus</i>	Fairly common throughout.

<b>Spanish Sparrow</b> <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	15/5 – 3/4, Valverde area.
<b>Chaffinch</b> <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	14/5 – several in the forests near La Rocina.
<b>Linnet</b> <i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Fairly common throughout.
<b>Goldfinch</b> <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Fairly common throughout.
<b>Greenfinch</b> <i>Carduelis chloris</i>	14/5 – 1, near El Cuervo.
<b>Serin</b> <i>Serinus serinus</i>	Several around El Rocio.
<b>Hawfinch</b> <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	16/5 – 2, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Cirl Bunting</b> <i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	16/5 – 1 male, Sierra Ubrique.
<b>Corn Bunting</b> <i>Miliaria calandra</i>	Common in all agricultural areas.
<b>Rock Bunting</b> <i>Emberiza cia</i>	16/5 – 2 or 3 singing males, Grazalema.
<b>Common Waxbill</b> <i>Estrilda astrild</i>	14/5 – two groups – 3 and 7, Brazo del Este.

**Total number of species recorded over the three days 142**

### **Mammals**

Roe Deer, Brown Hare, a few rabbits, 1 Mongoose, 5 Red Deer (1,2,2)

### **Butterflies**

Many Painted Lady

### **Dragonflies**

The Coto Doñana is a magnificent complex of wetlands. The cold wet spring seemed to have put the damper on good numbers of Dragonflies. However the main species on the wing were Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii*. To do the Dragonfly populations justice, more field time would be required to allow positive identifications to be achieved. Most views of the limited insects on the wing were distant over the huge areas of wetland, which proved quite frustrating. An interesting aspect of behaviour was seeing a Variable Damselfly *Coenagrion pulchellum* attracted to a light at 21.00 hrs at a cafe in El Rocio alongside moths and mosquitoes.

### **Background Reading**

Where to watch birds in Southern Spain (1994) by Ernest Garcia and Andrew Paterson. ISBN 0-7136-3859-1.

A bird Watcher's guide to Southern Spain and Gibraltar by Clive Finlayson ISBN 1 87 1104 033.

One book now out of print that had inspired two of our party to visit the Coto 20 years ago and still worth a read, is Guy Mountfort's Portrait of a Wilderness – the story of the Coto Doñana expeditions illustrated by Eric Hosking. Published by Hutchinson.

Also check out John Butler's website [www.donanabirdtours.com](http://www.donanabirdtours.com) which has a wealth of excellent information and almost daily bird sightings.

### **Trip Logistics**

**Flights** – Ryanair out of Stansted. Departed 06:55 on 14/5 arriving about 40 minutes ahead of schedule at 10.00 (Spanish time) at Jerez de la Frontera International Airport. Returned on 17/5, departing at 11.20 arriving Stansted at 13.10 (UK time). These excellent early flights gave us almost 3 full days in the field and a reasonable return time home ready for work on the Tuesday. Cost £53.25 each. <http://www.ryanair.com/>

**Airport Parking** - £38 for the four days. <http://www.bookings@airport-parking-centre.co.uk/>

**Accommodation** – We rented a five bed bungalow at La Aldea, the new campsite on the main road just north of El Rocio. John Butler of Doñana Bird Tours booked it for us and paid the 50% deposit on our behalf. Total cost was £107.20 for two nights. On the third night we stayed in a hotel just off the A 4 motorway at Las Cabezas de San Juan. Total cost for two rooms was £75.00.

**Car Hire** – We hired a Ford Galaxy for £165.43 for the duration including insurance, etc. <http://www.amigoautos.com>

So if you want, this trip can be undertaken on a reasonably low budget. For five people over four days we paid about £182.00 each including food and petrol.

### **Final Comments**

This was a truly spectacular few days birding, seeing virtually all our target species. We were fortunate to visit following a very wet spring so there was plenty of surface water in Doñana although this did make the tracks in the stone pines undriveable in our Galaxy. The vastness of the delta area is daunting and it would take many weeks to fully cover the area. Nevertheless, we are satisfied that our two days birding here did the area justice.

PBa/PBe/RTT/AT/ADW