



# Doñana Delights

9th -13th January 2020

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What a superb trip to beautiful Doñana in all its wintery wonder! Perhaps the perfect antidote to a Northern European January!

Thousands of wintering waders, wildfowl and wetland birds filled the lagoons, ponds and saltpans, including Red-knobbed Coot, Marbled Duck, White-headed Duck, Black-winged Stilt, Little Stint, Caspian Terns, Slender-billed Gulls, Common Ringed, Little Ringed, Grey and Kentish Plover, Black-crowned Night Herons, White and Black Storks, Common Cranes, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingoes and Purple Swamphens.

As well as treats like showy Bluethroats, Little Swifts, Eurasian Hoopoes, Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Black-winged Kites, Booted Eagles, Iberian Grey Shrikes and a sneaky Lesser Flamingo, the group were lucky enough to encounter both of Doñana's most famed Iberian endemics. In two wholly different experiences we shared the briefest of moments with an evaporating Iberian Lynx – soon followed by outstanding views no less than SIX Spanish Imperial Eagles!

It's hard to know how we packed so much into just five days!

But we did, and we still had plenty of time to enjoy every species at a relaxed pace, sample sustainably-produced local food during picnics in the sun, and get to know the sandy streets and bar-side hitching posts of El Rocío.

## Day 1

## Thursday 9 January

Simon and Niki met the team – Jill, Richard, Lynne and Peter - from their flight into Sevilla airport, where Lynne and Peter reported a Booted Eagle they had spotted from the runway! We were soon loaded into the Bustard Bus and away! The outskirts of Sevilla gave way to open fields, olive groves and Cork Oak *dehesas*, and we enjoyed views of Red Kites, Common Buzzards and our first flocks of Iberian Magpies as we drove.



Soon we were winding through the pretty streets of El Rocío, a horseperson's town complete with sand streets and hitching posts. We paid a quick visit to the “Madre de las Marismas” – “mother of the wetlands” – the lagoon on whose shores the town sits. We enjoyed an afternoon snack while picking up our first wetland birds, which included Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingoes and a lively Bluethroat in the vegetation nearby.

After a little time to check in, unpack and unwind, we headed to the western end of the lagoon. A wealth of wintering wildfowl, waders and waterbirds awaited, including Black-winged Stilts, Northern Lapwings, Common Snipe, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Teal, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Spoonbills and

many hundreds of Northern Shoveler and Greylag Geese. A haze of pink decorated the back half of the lake as hundreds of Greater Flamingoes waded in the shallows. A couple of early Barn Swallows were recorded feeding over the waters. The view back across the white-washed town and its iconic church was beautiful in the setting sun.

We headed back to the lavish yet welcoming surroundings of our accommodation at Palacio Doñana for a quick refresh before meeting at Restaurante Toruño for a welcome complimentary glass of local *manzanilla* dry sherry before dinner. A lovely first day!

**Day 2**

**Friday 10 January**



A misty dawn saw us heading to the woods and heaths of Doñana National Park with our friend Irene from Doñana Nature. She picked us up in a custom 4x4 minibus, which would allow us to reach areas of the park where others are not permitted to go!

Many Red Deer surveyed us cautiously from amongst the trees as flocks of Iberian Magpies moved around us. Two Red Foxes paused to look at us a while before disappearing into the undergrowth. We noted their grey, almost wolf-like colour.

At the base of a Mastic bush we noted a shape which grabbed our attention – it was an Iberian Lynx! We barely had chance to lay eyes on this slender female before she evaporated away. There are ninety or so of these beautiful, elusive endangered felines living in Doñana and to see one, however fleetingly, is such a privilege!

As the morning began to warm up, Irene took us to Coto del Rey, a permit-only area which was previously the royal hunting estate. Our timing was perfect – as we arrived, we came across two juvenile Spanish Imperial

Eagles perched on poles! We were busy getting views of this fantastic endemic raptor when one was displaced by a regal adult bird! Birding royalty indeed!

We took a stroll around the heath and picked up many Eurasian Hoopoes and flocks of Woodlarks. A Tawny Pipit gave us an unseasonal treat! Was this an early arrival or an overwintering bird? Northern Lapwing were numerous on the grasslands, and amongst them a flock of around twenty Eurasian Stone Curlews. Iberian Grey Shrikes called from tree tops and fence posts.

Out on the plains we found ourselves surrounded by flocks of European Goldfinches, Common Linnets and Corn Buntings. We hopped out of the van to catch up with a Black-winged Kite and in doing so also encountered a gorgeous male Hen Harrier.

Post-lambing, there were many bits of carrion strewn around. What a treat to find five young Spanish Imperial Eagles tucking in alongside three Griffon Vultures! Northern Ravens and Red Kites drifted around waiting for their turn at the feast.

Returning to the lake at El Rocío we took our picnic, which today featured a feisty local sheep's cheese to celebrate our meat-free day. Common Chiffchaffs were everywhere, as were Spotless Starlings doing all sorts of mimicry including Golden Oriole and European Bee-eater!

There was then time to walk around town and enjoy its unique-ness! El Rocío is a horseperson's town, and its sandy streets, whitewashed buildings and ubiquitous hitching posts make it reminiscent of a Wild West film! It is also uniquely Andalusian, and has much cultural interest due to the pilgrimage route connected with its most venerated statue of the Virgin of El Rocío.

We headed back out for the afternoon with Doñana Nature, towards the visitor centre of Jose Valverde. *En route* we had fantastic views of Black-winged Kite as well as Green Sandpipers, four Common Cranes, and a charming Little Owl on a farm building.

At the visitor centre we were dismayed to note how dry the pools and marshes were. The effect of intensive agriculture and drought is really taking its toll this year – Irene remarked she had never seen it this dry in January. However, the main pool at the visitor centre was being maintained by pumping water from the Guadalquivir river, with the result that a massive wealth of life was concentrated into this one area, with spectacular results.

The fields and the air were filled with thousands of Greylag Geese – the symbol of Doñana National park itself. Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon mixed with hundreds of Black-winged Stilt, 30+ Common Snipe, 30+ Purple Swamphens – all occasionally taking panicky flight in response to a marauding Marsh Harrier!

We headed back through the woods as dusk fell on a fabulous day full of winter sun and glorious birding.

### **Day 3                      Saturday 11 January**

After a leisurely breakfast at the hotel with plenty of good coffee, we set out to explore another aspect of Doñana – the salt pans and pools of the eastern side of the Guadalquivir. Our drive soon passed by with sightings of Black-winged Kite, Red Kite and Common Buzzard *en route*.

The team were a little baffled as we stood in the biting wind in an industrial harbour complex near Sanlúcar, but their surprise was soon to be revealed! After waiting a few minutes, suddenly 71 Little Swifts exploded giggling from their feathery roosts! We delighted in their comings and goings for a while and then had a lovely coffee in the harbour café to warm up.

We moved on to the salt pans at Bonanza, where two Booted Eagles greeted us as we arrived. The amount of life was truly incredible. Swirling flocks of waders passed around us, thousands at a time – Dunlin, Sanderling,

Common Ringed, Kentish and Grey Plover. Black-necked Grebes were on the deeper water, while Common Redshanks fed in the shallows and we picked out a Little Stint. Several Caspian Terns were seen both roosting and on the wing, as well as two Slender-billed Gulls.

As we tucked in to picnic by a sluice-gate, our expansive view over the pans allowed us again to appreciate the sheer numbers of birds. Pied Avocets, Black-tailed Godwits, Eurasian Curlews Common and Green Sandpipers fed in the pools nearby. We picked up four Black Storks, hunting Western Ospreys and Bluethroat in the ditch right next to us. A Common Kingfisher jetted past, flocks of Lesser Short-toed Larks fed in the salt marsh and a Peregrine Falcon shot through.

So much was going on that we almost overlooked a bright pink Lesser Flamingo lurking amongst its lankier Greater cousins – a fine record for the area.

After digesting both the picnic and the incredible run of thick-and-fast bird sightings, we moved on to explore the numerous freshwater irrigation pools in the area. Straight away we came across three White-headed ducks really close. We also enjoyed a Battle of the Swamphens with five het-up individuals squawking and flapping at each other.



Across the road, the pool levels were low but we still picked out several more Purple Swamphens and a huge gathering of Iberian Pond Tortoises.



At our next stop, we were pleased to see a group of newly-arrived Barn Swallows perched chattering on the wires alongside Crag Martins. But on the water, the very closest bird was a stunning Red-knobbed Coot which was busily showing all the other coots who was boss! As we watched, a Ferruginous Duck also drifted into view. We admired a large roost of fifty or more Black-crowned Night Herons, decorating the bushes like lingering Christmas decorations!

With that it was time to head back, accompanied by 150+ White Storks and 30+ Common Cranes overhead as well as more Booted Eagles.

There were smiles all round as we met to run through the day's list around the open fire at Palacio Doñana!

#### **Day 4                      Sunday 12 January**

Today we headed out to the nearby rice fields of Isla Mayor to enjoy the teeming birdlife that chooses to spend its winter here. We weren't disappointed!

On the way to Dehesa de Abajo nature reserve, we made several impromptu stops, giving us great views of Black Storks, White Storks, gorgeous Black-winged Kites and a Merlin jetting through. Glossy Ibis grazed the recently-harvested rice paddies in huge flocks, alongside Green Sandpipers, Northern Lapwings, Spotted and Common Redshanks, Little Ringed Plovers and Greenshanks.

Wintering Common Chiffchaffs were seemingly everywhere, a blizzard of gold flecks in the winter light. We were well-entertained by numerous Bluethroats along the muddy ditches, some more obliging than others!

Arriving at the southern shore of the lake at Dehesa de Abajo, we spent a few more minutes enjoying another Bluethroat before crossing the road to check out the abundance of wildfowl on the waters. Hundreds of wintering Northern Shovelers stretched as far as the eye could see, interspersed with Red-crested Pochard and a medley of other wintering ducks. Penduline Tits could be heard in the reeds, and with a little patience we got some great views.

We were thrilled to pick up a group of Marbled Duck in flight, then another eight on the water! Another much-sought-after Doñana resident, it's always a joy to see this pretty duck with its smoky eye-make up.

We had our picnic lunch on the benches outside the visitor centre, enjoying views over the lake and its many wintering Greater Flamingoes.

We headed back via the area's mixed farmland, at a leisurely pace, making stops as we went. We found flocks of Spanish Sparrows, sparkling Calandra larks, two Black-winged Kites and a flock of Stock Doves, a good record for this part of Spain.

Arriving back at El Rocío we were still buzzing, so with the last of the day's light, we made the most of the Madre de las Marismas once more. As well as the fantastic duck and wader assemblage, we were treated to a plucky little Bluethroat, which hopped perkily right up to the hide, sporting the most dazzling white-spotted blue bib we had seen on the trip! This little fella became a highlight of the trip for many!

We celebrated our last night in style at Restaurante Toruño, where Javi and the team served us another fantastic array of local specialities, finished off with a dazzling trifle in the form of a flamingo!

## **Day 5                      Monday 13 January**

Thanks to late afternoon flight departures (or not departing at all in some cases!) we were able to enjoy a full morning's birding before we headed to the airport.

A first stop on the heath gave us great views of Dartford Warbler and Thekla Larks as well as a singing Iberian Grey Shrike.

Wandering round the peaceful woodlands at Palacio Acebron, the group enjoyed fantastic views of two Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, as well as encountering Short-toed Treecreepers, Crested Tits, Long-tailed Tits, Common Firecrests and Great Spotted Woodpecker amongst others.

For our last lunch of the trip, we headed to Acebuche heath, where the group enjoyed their final sample of the legendary Inglorious Bustards picnic! Sustainability is close to our hearts, so - as every day - it featured a selection of local, sustainably-produced cheeses from extensively-grazed sheep and goats, locally-produced vegetables and wine, artisanal salt from the pans we had visited and fresh local bread.

Today was all the more special as flocks of Iberian Magpies were waiting for us! We enjoyed their azure-and-peach antics as they tried to swoop in for picnic scraps! This proved a special pressie for Lynne and Peter who were celebrating their 47<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We of course helped the proceedings along with a little local *cava*!

Then finally the time had come to say goodbye to the delights of Doñana, leaving Jill and Richard to enjoy the rest of their holiday in Sevilla, and saying our farewells to Lynne and Peter at the airport.

Thanks guys, for your company on a superb and memorable trip full of laughs, birds and *manzanilla*!

	Common Name	Scientific name	Date:				
			9	10	11	12	13
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	400	2,000	√	√	
2	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	3		20	5	
3	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	5	10	5	10	
4	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>		20			
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	√	√	√	√	
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	√	√	√	√	
7	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	10	10		8	
8	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>					
9	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	√	√		√	
10	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>				18	
11	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>				20	
12	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			15	√	
13	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>			1		
14	White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>			8		
15	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	3	10			√
16	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		6	8	4	
17	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			50		
18	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	50	150	500	150	
19	<b>Lesser Flamingo</b>	<b>Phoeniconaias minor</b>			1		
20	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			5	6	
21	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	10	6	150	100	√
22	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	20	20		200	
23	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	7	2	15	300	
24	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			50		2

25	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	√	√		√	√
26	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	2	3	15	√	√
27	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			1	5	
28	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			4	20	2
29	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			√	√	
30	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			5	1	
31	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		1	1	7	
32	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		3			
33	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	1		8		
34	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		6			
35	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1		1	1	
36	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>					
37	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		1		2	
38	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	2	6	6	30	
39	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	2	8	6	5	3
40	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>					
41	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	3	8	15	√	2
42	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		1			
43	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		30	10	4	
44	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	2	6	6	6	1
45	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>			1		
46	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	√	√	√	√	√
47	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>		20	1		
48	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	30	c.1,000	200	500	√
49	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			50		
50	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	√	√	√	√	√
51	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			40		
52	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			√		
53	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>				20	
54	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>			50	8	
55	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	5	30	10	18	
56	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			8	1	

57	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			10		
58	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>				2	
59	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			√	√	
60	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			5	√	
61	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		1	4	10	1
62	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>					
63	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			2	2	
64	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			√		
65	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			√	√	√
66	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>			2		
67	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	√		√	√	√
68	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>			√	√	√
69	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			√	√	√
70	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>			4		
71	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	√	√	√	√	√
72	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				34	
73	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	√	√	√	√	√
74	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	√	√	√	√	√
75	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>					1
76	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>			71		
77	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		1			
78	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			2	2	1
79	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		8			1
80	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>					2
81	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>					2
82	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>					1
83	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	√	10	√	√	√
84	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>				1	
85	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			1		
86	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		4			
87	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>					2
88	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	√	√	√	√	√

89	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	√	√	√	√	√
90	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>				√	√
91	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	10	√	√	3
92	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>					4
93	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		1	2	√	√
94	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	1	2		√	√
95	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>			1	6	
96	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				√	
97	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		20			4
98	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		2			11
99	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	√	√	√	√	√
100	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		10		400	
101	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala rufescens</i>			20		
102	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	5	2	20	8	3
103	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			70	√	√
104	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	1	4	3	√	3
105	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>					√
106	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	√	√	√	√	√
107	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			2	4	
108	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	4	10		√	√
109	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>					3
110	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	√	√	√	√	√
111	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>					4
112	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					3
113	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>					2
114	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		2			6
115	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>					
116	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	√	√	√	√	√
117	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	√	√	√	√	√
118	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>					2
119	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		6		3	5
120	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	√	√	√	√	√

121	White-spotted Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	1	7	5	20	
122	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	√	√	2	4	√
123	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	√	√	√	√	√
124	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	√	√	√	√	√
125	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>				√	
126	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	5			8	
127	Spanish Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>				1	
128	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>				1	
129	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	√	√	√	√	√
<b>130</b>	<b>Tawny Pipit</b>	<b><i>Anthus campestris</i></b>		<b>1</b>			
131	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	√	√	√	√	
132	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	√	√		√	√
133	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>					3
134	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	2	4	2		2
135	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				√	√
136	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		3	30	√	√
137	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	√	√	√	√	√
138	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	2	8	√	√	√
139	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		√		√	√

## Other Taxa

Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	√	√			
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>					
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>					
Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>					
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		√		√	
Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>		1			
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		4			
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		2		1	
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>		√			
Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>					
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		√			
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>					
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	√	√	√		
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		√			
Wasp Spider	<i>Argiope bruennichi</i>					
Iberian Pond Frog	<i>Rana iberica</i>	√	√			
Mediterranean Tree Frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>					
Iberian Pond Tortoise	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>				√	