

Birding: Donana / Dos Hermanas

Date: 20 – 27 Sept 2014

Participants: Ed.O'Hara/Liusmi Garrido [Andalusian Birding Holidays]



Luis



Saturday: 20 Sept 2014: Sunny 27C

Arrived about 14:00, with my family, in our Hotel in **Dos Hermanas**, just outside the city of Seville, after a short flight from Dublin with Ryanair. After a quick check-in, I went for a walk at the rear of the hotel, along a country road near the **Canal de Bajo Guadalquivir**. Almost immediately I picked up a few birds, **Melodious Warbler**, **Zitting Cisticola**, **Cattle Egret**, **Little Egret**, **Pied Flycatcher**, **Spotted Flycatcher** and **Waxbill** an unexpected find in this area. The light was beginning to fade, so I headed back to the hotel for a welcome dinner.



CATTLE EGRET



ZITTING CISTICOLA

Sunday: 21 SEPT 2014: Sunny with some rain 26C

After breakfast, I went for a walk in the same area as I was in yesterday, but had a whole day almost to walk in the area of the **Canal de Bajo Guadalquivir, La Motilla**. This is an area of dry open farmland with a few bushy areas near the canal. In the open fields and near the farmhouse **Crested Lark** were plentiful, several **Yellow Wagtail** of the races *flava* and *flavissima* and **Northern Wheatears** were also present. The scrub areas had **Willow Warblers**, **Cetti's Warbler**, **Long-tailed Tits**, **Western Bonelli's Warbler**, **Common Redstart**, **Spotted Flycatcher** and **Great Tit** could be found in good numbers. Birds of prey were hunting in the large open fields notably, **Marsh Harrier**, **Common Buzzard**, **Common Kestrel**, **Red Kite**, **Black Kite**, **Booted Eagle** and a single **Peregrine**.

In the afternoon on my return walk back to the hotel, as the sky was beginning to darken, you could see heavy rain falling in the distance, a few more species were picked up, **Raven**,

Grey Heron, Blackbird, Red-rumped Swallow, Common Swift, Barn Swallow, Sand Martin and 100+ *White Stork* on migration.



YELLOW WAGTAIL



RED KITE

Monday: 22 SEPT 2014: Mist / Sun / Rain 29C

Today was a day, I had long cherished, my first visit to the famous **Donana National Park**. Before I left Ireland I had arranged to meet Luismi Garrido of **Andalusian Birding Holidays**, someone whom had been highly recommended by another birder on the web, as a knowledgeable birder and good company to boot. This was indeed the case. I had booked Luismi for two days but in the end we spent three days birding in the Donana and surrounding areas.

The day began slowly as we approached **Donana** in the mist, but already several species had been picked up, *Green Sandpiper, White Stork, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Ruff, Hoopoe* and *Azure-winged Magpie*. Driving along the road towards our first stop, the **Visitor Center Dehesa de Abajo**, hundreds of *Glossy Ibis* and *White Storks* were flying overhead along with several species of wader, *Dunlin, Avocet, Green Sandpiper, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Northern Lapwing, Spotted Redshank, Greenshank* and *Greater Flamingo*.

After a quick cup of welcome coffee, we went for a short walk around the reserve car park, picking up *Yellow Wagtail, Crested Lark, Jackdaw, Common Magpie, Red-Rumped Swallow, Woodchat Shrike, Common Buzzard*, whilst down on the reservoir were hundreds of *Glossy Ibis* and *White Storks*, in association with *Mallard, Teal, Gadwall* and *Shoveler*.



Dehesa de Abajo



Glossy Ibis

Leaving the Centre we headed along the edge of the numerous rice fields in the **Veta La Palma** area, when we came across a channel with numerous herons, egrets and waders, productive since we added another two birds to our list, ***Great White Egret*** and ***Black Stork***.



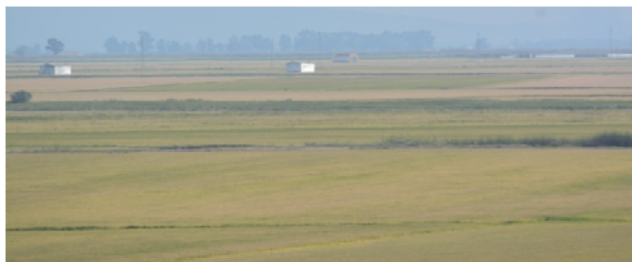
Great White Egret



Black Stork

After stopping at several points to observe several large flocks of birds in the area, we eventually arrived at the **José Antonio Valverde Visitor Center**, just after one o'clock so we decided to stop for lunch.

The pools at the centre were dry even after the heavy rain that fell on the area over the past week; apparently it would take a few weeks of rain to fill them. As we were leaving a flock of ***Griffon Vultures*** and several ***Black Storks*** soared overhead, also seen was a small flock of ***Bee-eaters***. Near a pumping station we came across another mixed flock of birds resting on the canal bank and in the adjacent reed beds, in the flock were ***Night Herons***, ***Squacco Herons***, ***Grey Herons***, ***Little Egrets***, ***Cattle Egrets***, ***Great White Egrets***, and several species of duck.



Rice fields surrounding Donana



Night Herons: Adult and Juvenile.

Sitting on pylons nearby were an ***Osprey***, ***Short-toed Eagle*** and two ***Lesser Kestrel***, and in and around the pump house were numerous ***Yellow Wagtails***, ***Cetti's Warblers***,

Chiffchaffs and Whinchats. In the surrounding fields were **Northern Lapwing, Crested Larks, Common Buzzard,** and **Stonechats.** The rain that had been forecast finally arrived and as we drove further along the edge of the reserve, it was difficult at times to keep up with the number and variety of birds flying overhead. On the roadside fences were the ubiquitous Whinchat, several Common Kestrels and an adult and juvenile **Montagu's Harrier.** You could get quite close to the birds as long as you stayed in the car. The rain was getting heavier so we stopped the car at the side of a pond and waited until it passed over.



Montagu's Harrier

After a half an hour the weather cleared once more and we drove along a main drainage channel at the northern end of the park, it was an area of open fields and scrub, with adjacent rice fields. This proved a very fruitful drive, notable birds being, **Black-winged Kite, Red Kite, Black Kite, Little Owl, Honey Buzzard, Greater Flamingo, Booted Eagle, Honey Buzzard** and **Melodious Warbler.**



Black-winged Kite



Greater Flamingo

The evening was getting on and more dark clouds were an ominous warning of more heavy rain to come, so at this point we decided to call it a day and what a wonderful day it had been in Donana. It had more than lived up to my expectations, so many species and in such numbers. If this was 'off-season' what a fantastic place this must be in mid-winter with a quarter of a million birds in the park! One of the best birding days of my life. By the time we got back to my hotel in Dos Hermanas, it was dark and a hot bath and a lovely evening meal ended a perfect day.

Tuesday: 23 SEPT 2014: Sun / Torrential Rain / Sun 25C

The biggest factor today was the weather, we started out in the morning in bright sunshine but by mid-morning it had clouded over and by noon it was torrential rain on and off for two hours followed by an evening of pleasant sunshine!

Luismi and I headed off at 08:00 and within an hour we were in the **Montes de Alcala de los Gazules** area in Cadiz province. Taking off the main highway, we quickly were on a good 'birding road' [gravel farm road with no traffic]. *Red-rumped Swallow, Barn Swallow, Crested Larks, Linnets, Goldfinches, Chaffinches, Corn Buntings, Yellow Wagtails, Red Kite, Black Kite, Red-legged Partridge, Little Owl, Little Egrets, Cattle Egrets* were a selection of the birds seen on this drive around the cortijo.



Crested Lark



Pied Flycatcher

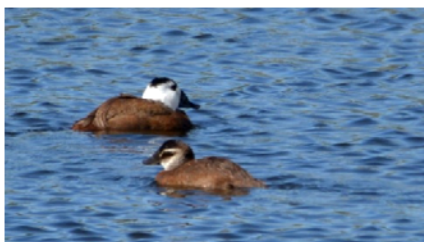
Almost at the end of the farm road, we noticed a bird flying along the tree tops; it was one of my target birds, an adult female *Spanish Imperial Eagle*. What a superb bird and thankfully back from the brink, there are now 400 pairs in Iberia, up from a low of 50 odd pairs a few decades ago. The rain had begun to fall so we left the area and headed for some lakes near Jerez, on the way there a *Turtle Dove* was spotted sitting on the telephone wire. A bird that is becoming increasingly hard to find, only two birds were seen all week. The lakes proved disappointing as there were no terns or gulls present. As the torrential rain came down we stopped at a village bar for a very long lunch! Eventually the rain stopped and we set out for the **Sanluca de Barrameda** area, on the eastern side of the Rio Guadalquivir, which is also part of Donana.

The drive along the Guadalquivir produced several new birds, *Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-necked Grebe* and *Spotted Redshank*. Three more Marsh Harriers were seen along with *Lesser Black-backed Gulls* and *Black-headed Gulls*. All the egrets and herons were present with the exception of Purple Heron, which surprised me but Luismi said that by the end of September the majority of this species had already migrated to Africa.

Time was getting on so we went to a wooded area, **Alqaida de Sanlucar** near a large pond inside Donana, a hot-spot for several species, but it was lifeless, apart from a Moorhen. However the wooded area had several *Western Bonelli's Warblers, Melodious Warblers* and a single *Reed Warbler* in the scrub area around the car-park.

Our next stop was a series of small pools formed from reclaimed sand pits in the **Tollos de Bonanza** area, and at last I saw another of my target species, *White-headed Duck*. There was one male and two females in the pond and I got excellent views of this iconic species. Also present were *Purple Swamphen, Black-necked Grebe, Red-rumped Swallow, Spotless Starling and Spanish Sparrow*.

On the way back to my hotel, we had our final stop of the day at a disused quarry, target bird was the resident Eagle Owl, but it had gone! However we did find *European Bee-Eater* and a *Short-toed Eagle* sitting on an electricity pylon.



White-headed Duck



Short-toed Eagle



Turtle-Dove

Wednesday: 24 SEPT 2014: Cloudy / Sunny 27C

Family day.

Thursday: 25 SEPT 2014: Cloudy / Sunny 29C

Family day

Friday: 26 SEPT 2014: Sunny 28C

Once again an early start, Luismi picked me up at 08:00 and after negotiating the early morning traffic in Seville, we were in Donana by 09:30. Déjà vu, it was bit misty but this cleared within 30 minutes, to reveal a bright morning. The first stop was a small pool area near the road, present were, *Green Sandpiper*, *Common Sandpiper*, *Great White Egret*, *Cattle Egret*, *Little Egret*, *Greenshank*. We then proceeded to the Church of El Rocio, what a unique place; ornithology took a back seat for a while as I walked around the church and its surroundings. A wonderful place.

In winter the area opposite the church is flooded, but not on our visit. The birdlife must be magnificent here when the marshes are filled with water. We walked along the boardwalk at the edge of the marsh, in the reeds and surrounding trees we found *Cetti's Warbler*, *Reed Warbler*, *Willow Warbler*, *Chiffchaff*, *Spotted Flycatcher* and *Northern Wheatear*.

Next stop was only a short distance away, Centro de visitantes de La Rocina y Palacio del Acebron, an area of woodland and low scrub. Firstly we went for a walk through the pine trees, difficult to bird at best I find with pine forests but we managed to locate a few birds notably, *Pied Flycatcher*, *Hoopoe*, *Serin*, *Short-toed Treecreeper*, and *Azure-winged Magpie*.

Walking a further 500m brought us to a broadleaf forest area, as expected a much more productive area with the highlights being *Lesser Spotted Woodpecker*, *Green Woodpecker*, *Common Redstart*, *Western Bonelli's Warbler*, also seen were *Great Tit*, *Blue Tit*, *Chaffinch*, *Wren*, *Blackbird*, *Mistle Thrush*.

It was fast approaching 13:00 so we had lunch in the centre car park; the sun was now high in the sky and the temperature 32C. Several birds of prey were circling in the sky including 20 *Griffon Vultures*, a *Black Vulture* and several *Common Buzzards* and a single *Honey Buzzard* plus two large flocks of White Storks heading south presumably towards Gibraltar.

After Lunch we drove along an area of short scrub, expectations were not high in the hot afternoon sun but after, a few birds were showing near the track, *Whinchat*, *Dartford Warbler*, *Azure-winged Magpie* and *Serin*.



Whinchat



Dartford Warbler

We then returned along the road towards the **Dehesa de Abajo Visitor Center**. Along the way we saw several good areas for birds and eventually stopped at one of them, a pool near the edge of the road. As usual there was a variety of species resting quietly in the evening sunshine, among them were *Spoonbill*, *Spotted Redshank*, *Greenshank*, *Greater Flamingo*, *Green Sandpiper*, *Wood Sandpiper*, *Common Sandpiper*, *Cormorant*, *Moorhen*, *Coot*, *Little Ringed Plover*, *Kentish Plover*, *Common Snipe*, *Great White Egret*, *White Stork*, *Black Stork*, *Reed Bunting*, *Yellow-crowned Bishop*



Little Ringed Plover



Green Sandpiper

And as the evening light was beginning to fade, I left Donana for the last time and took so many memories of this wonderful birding location. Certainly a place I will return to in the near future.

I would like to thank Luismi for his guiding skills and enjoyable company throughout the three days we birded Donana and its surroundings and I can say without hesitation that I would recommend him to anyone visiting the area.

TRIP LIST

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Good numbers of birds at all suitable locations

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* 2 birds seen in Donana

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* 2 birds seen at Bonanza

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Birds seen flying over mostly

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* 50 plus birds seen in Donana

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* Several seen in Donana

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Very common, seen almost anywhere

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Very common

Great White Egret *Egretta alba* Daily in Donana

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Very common

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* 500 plus in Donana

Gadwall *Anas strepera* 12 in Donana

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Common in Donana

Shoveler *Anas clypeata* 100 plus in Donana

Pochard *Aythya farina* Small numbers at most suitable sites

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Several seen during week

Red Kite *Milvus milvus* Three in Donana

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* Five birds seen, all in Donana

Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* 1 juvenile seen overhead

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* Seen each day

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* Common in and around Donana

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* Three in Donana

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* Common

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* Common

Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalbertii* One seen in Monte de Alcala

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* Three seen during the week

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* 2 birds seen in Donana

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Birds seen every day

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanii* Several seen in Donana

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* One bird seen

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* 10 seen in Monte de Alcala

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Very common at all suitable locations

Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni* Common in Donana

Coot *Fulica atra* Common in suitable areas

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Common in suitable areas

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* Four seen in Donana

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Common in suitable areas

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Common in Donana

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Small numbers seen near the Rio Guadalquivir

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* Small numbers seen in Donana

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* One bird in Donana

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* One bird in Donana

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* Several seen

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Several in Donana

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* Up to 8 birds in Donana

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* One bird in Donana.

Common Sandpiper *Atcitis hypoleucos* Up to 10 in Donana
Black-headed Gull *Larus ribibundus* Common
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* Common
Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* Common
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Common
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* 2 birds seen in Donana
Hoopoe *Upupa epops* several seen
Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Common in Donana
Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* Common in suitable habitat
House Martin *Delichon urbica* Large flock seen in Donana
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* Several seen of two ssp.
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* Several seen at various locations
Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* Several at La Rocina
Robin *Erithacus rubecula* Several at La Rocina
Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* Very common in suitable habitat
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* Seen daily in many locations
Blackbird *Turdus merula* Several around the hotel and any suitable habitat
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* One at La Rocina
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* Common in suitable habitat
Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* Two seen at La Rocina
Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis* Very common
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta* Several seen during the week
Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* Several birds seen during the week
Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* Three birds at different locations
Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* Common
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* Seen at La Rocina
Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* Several at El Rocio
Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* Common
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* Seen daily
Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* Noted at La Rocina
Great Tit *Parus major* Common
Southern Grey Shrike *Lanus excubitor* Two birds seen during the week
Raven *Corvus corax* Up to 12 birds seen at different locations
Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* Seen at several locations
Magpie *Pica pica* Common
Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus* Common in suitable areas
Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor* Abundant
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Extremely common throughout
Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Common
Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* Several observed in Donana
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* Seen at La Rocina
Serin *Serinus serinus* Common
Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* Several at El Rocio
Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* Very common
Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* A few seen in Donana
Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra* Common in suitable habitat