

Costa Del Sol Birding Tour Trip Report

29 May – 4 June 2019



The happy crew, from left to right: Colin, Christine, Mark, Rhonda, Jenny, Robin and Álvaro

Report compiled by tour leader Álvaro Peral
Images courtesy of Álvaro Peral



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Introduction

As always, It's difficult to sum up the highlights of such a varied tour. Despite we were already entering June the birds performed admirably for us, while the more noteworthy sightings included Roller, Black Wheatear, Blue and Common Rock Thrushes, Booted Eagle, Western Olivaceous Warbler, White-headed Duck, Peregrine Falcon, Hoopoe, Iberian Grey Shrike, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Long-eared Owl and Subalpine Warbler. The sheer numbers on occasion of the 'commoner' species such as Crested Lark, Corn Buntings, several warblers is difficult to relate here! Although this year we've missed two important species (Bonelli's Eagle and Great Bustard), the views of other unexpected birds –such a group of Long-eared Owls- was a real bonus.

As for mammals we came across a quite impressive group of male Iberian Ibex and enjoyed a family of Iberian Hares playing around. It was just Jenny who saw Egyptian Mongoose. Other Non Avian highlights included some smart butterflies, namely Moroccan Orange Tip, Southern Brown Argus, Cleopatra, Common Swallowtail, Spanish Marbled White plus Pyramid Orchid, though it was a bit late to see orchids, which happened earlier than usual this year.

The reptiles and plants also played their role during the tour, how to miss a 1.8 m Montpellier snake when it crawls next to you?



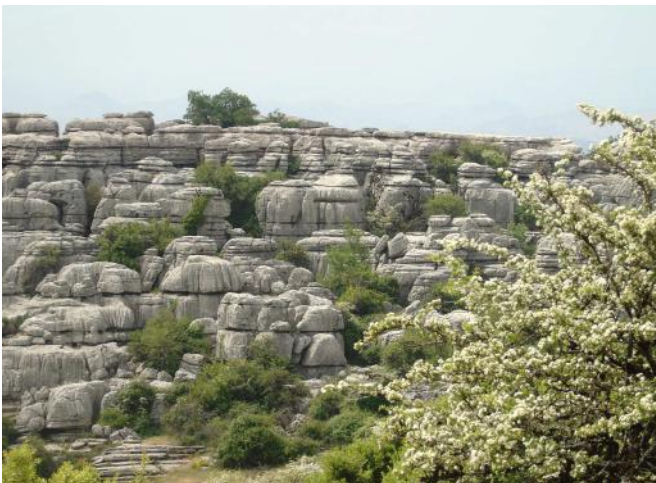
You can also watch this trip report on **video**:
<http://bit.do/solbirding>

Day 1 (29/5/2019) – Málaga to Ronda area

I am glad that the arrival timings were outstanding and we all met almost at once in Málaga, where we enjoyed a quick coffee and headed for a generous welcome meal near Campillos. First “porra” soup for many, which turned out to be the official starter of the tour. After getting to our base in Ronda and having a quick rest we headed to the local river, where we saw Booted Eagle and the very elusive Western Olivaceous Warbler. We also visited the impressive Cueva del Gato to see Alpine Swifts and then headed to Ronda's lower El Tajo to take the picture shown on the cover as the Choughs flew overhead. Time then for some tapas outdoors and soon head to bed!

Day 2 (30/5/2019) – El Torcal de Antequera & Fuentepiedra lagoon

The limestone landscape of el Torcal was our first site to visit today and it really impressed us. The Hawthorn still in blossom served as a skulking roost for Subalpine and Sardinian Warblers. We followed my favourite trail up and soon saw our darker resident Black Redstarts as Rock Sparrows called from the distance. A Thekla Lark showed up just enough to have a quick look at it. Then we came across a group of males of Iberian Ibex catching the first rays of Sun among the fast mist that covered part of the sky and got the first Melodious Warblers. Tales of this rock labyrinth and a few fossils gave way to a beautiful dark-throated male of Black-eared Wheatear that Christine was eager to see. We took close pictures of Wren and Rock Bunting. On the way back we heard Orphean Warblers that did not oblige much and also a juvenile Cirl Bunting. Remarkable was to find a large Ocellated Lizard, probably the same one I see every year there. I won't speak much of our big meal, but what followed after. We visited the Fuente de Piedra lagoon and its entertaining Laguneto, where we soon managed to see several White-headed Ducks despite a moderate wind. As predicted, the flamingos were breeding in big numbers, estimated at 8000 pairs. Black-necked Grebe, Sand Martin and Red-crested Pochard were also seen. Good numbers of Gull-billed Terns came by every now and then and we got close views of them. On the way back to Ronda a Hoopoe showed up to our joy. In the evening we enjoyed several local wines of Ronda and the exquisite cuisine of Entrevinos.



Day 3 (31/5/2019) – The limestone massif of central Andalusia

Today it's been the time to check a bunch of birding locations for a few minutes. In this way we added new birds on every stop, specially when we went into our "lake district" near El Chorro Nature Reserve. A first stop gave us nice views of the local female Peregrine Falcon (hopefully the already grown up chicks were doing well). It was nice to see big numbers of Griffon Vultures passing by the same flyways every few seconds. A venturesome Crag Martin flew close in between some of us, which was quite thrilling. We also got Chough, Alpine Swift and a quick blue Rock Thrush. Back near the lake we saw a family of Yellow-legged Gulls and a lonely Great Crested

Grebe. We were looking for woodland passerines and soon watched the bird on our logo, the Crested Tit. It was a juvenile being fed by its parents, so it was easy to track for a few minutes. Spotted Flycatchers were seen throughout our walk in the woods, but it was a pair of acrobatic Crossbills that drew our attention mostly. The calcarenite rock formations –such as taffoni- were quite interesting to see and were home to many Andalusian Wall Lizards. After lunch we headed to the higher peaks, where we enjoyed a magnificent scenery with clear blue sky. There were lots of Swallowtails hilltopping and we all had very good views of Blue Rock Thrush in front of the mighty Huma peak. A large flock of Griffon Vulture made us stop on the way back to Ronda, for excellent pictures. As we headed for dinner we saw a gorgeous male of Lesser Kestrel flying at eye level!



Day 4 (1/6/2019) – The Guadalhorce Natural Reserve

A new habitat to explore today, adding lots of species to our tour list. The Guadalhorce estuary is one of the must sites a naturalist has to visit if near Málaga city. Although the magnificence of the early spring was stronger a few weeks earlier, there were still lots of wetlands species to see. To start with, Zitting Cisticola and Monk Parakeet were coming and going all morning long. We saw a nice colony of House Martins and the local pair of Red-rumped Swallows. Common and Pallid Swifts were also seen very actively. I soon found old faces at the Reserve, which warned us about a Grey Plover. We soon saw this migratory bird, which is to some extent a great bird for us to see in breeding plumage. We made good use of the hides, from which we soon saw lots of Kentish Plovers patrolling the shores, besides Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, Kestrel, Grey Heron and Gull-billed Tern, to name a few. We particularly enjoyed the Laguna Grande lookout, getting a group of roosting Sandwich Tern in one of the islands and also a few juvenile stilts. It was also the first time we had nice and long views of Sardinian Warbler. A flock of ca. 30 Slender-billed Gulls flew overhead right after our short encounter with the –again local- big Montpellier Snake. On the way back we were surprised by a roosting Bee-eater, that posed nicely still for us.



Day 5 (2/6/2019) – The steppes of Seville

A day to scour nice birding spots within the province of Seville, more precisely near Osuna. On route we had to make a quick stop in the mountains to observe a flock of Griffon Vultures wandering around the surroundings of a dump where some carcasses had just been cleared out. Once at the farmlands our first stop was dedicated to the Little Bustard, that just some of us got the chance to identify on flight. Soon after a family of Iberian Hares delighted us looking through the scope while the juveniles were actively playing. A few Montagu's Harriers were seen roosting and hunting around 10am, so we had a lucky start. We used some railway bridges as lookouts, and we soon noticed a few Collared Pratincoles flying low over the remaining wheat crops. This was one of the warmest days and we enjoyed a good time birding from the minibus. Both of our shrikes (Iberian Grey and Woodchat) showed up several times, but the best was just to come. On the way to the concentration areas of Eurasian Roller we chanced a couple of pairs from the road (picture below, right). It was a real excitement since none of us were expecting to have such a close view of them. As usual, scores of Crested Larks, Ravens and Corn Buntings were there too. Then we headed for lunch to a local "venta" right besides a White Stork nest. It was lovely to see how the parents were intentionally giving shade to their baby Storks. We were just missing the



Great Bustard, but by the time we got to the place where I had lately been watching them this year, the crops were too high and it was a very warm day, so the chances were low. Well, we had to trade them for some feathers and –what was very surprising- a group of four Long-eared Owls roosting in a Holm Oak. We had a careful look at the many owl pellets and found out they were basing their diet mainly on sparrow-size passerines. Happy about this encounter we continued on route and saw a Little Owl perched on a sign by the road. Hard to believe for some of the crew that we were going to see Owls at daytime on such a hot weather, that's the magic of birding! Checking some dirt tracks we had excellent views of a Short-toed Lark sandbathing and also flying over us. We then visited a breeding colony of Spanish Sparrow, most of which had already left home but saw a few ones plus, Moorish Gecko and another pair of Roller. A Black Kite, Lesser Kestrels, a few Hoopoes and a Booted Eagle were also spotted near Osuna.

Day 6 (3/6/2019) – Sierra de Grazalema and Serranía de Ronda

We stated on our Roadbook that this day would be the jewel of the crown. The well preserved mixture of habitats found in the Ronda-Grazalema area made us tick 50 species of birds on this day, which is the record of birds per day after day 2. It is on the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park where we guide trips more often and therefore everything was set to reveal our companions the many secrets it offers. And so we started walking along some trails along the cork oak wooden valleys. Woodlarks were singing at all times, and at some point we were able to see both of our shrikes at the same time, which was quite rewarding. A small Bee-eater colony added joy to our morning sightings, and the same for Western Bonelli's Warbler, which was displaying quite well.



Another track gave us nice views of our first pair of Black Wheatears, quite active. We headed to the impressive Cerro Coros (picture above), from where we got eye level views of Griffon Vulture besides Black Redstart, Firecrest and Woodlark. After a traditional 2 course meal we walked

around wooded and shady tracks, where we heard Golden Oriole, Short-toed Treecreeper, Wren, Cirl Bunting and Greater Spotted Woodpecker. Some of us were lucky enough to see Hawfinch on the highest branches of the poplars. Jenny saw an Egyptian Mongoose while some of us enjoyed watching a Viperine Snake hunting small fish. Then we headed to the magnificent Llanos de Líbar trail, where we got another pair of Black Wheatear and enjoyed the nest activity of several pairs of Choughs and Griffon Vultures. How noisy can they be! The track also provided Serin, Linnet, Greenfinch, Sardinian Warbler, Blackcap, Black Redstart, Blue Tit and Stonechat. Back in Ronda we met again for dinner, this time we enjoyed a delicious good-bye paella right at the Ronda gorge (picture above, right) and a Blue Rock Thrush came to check everything was in order.

Day 7 (4/6/2019) – Sierra de las Nieves to Málaga

With not so much time left for birding we decided to check the local mediterranean woods to see Nuthatch and Colin was lucky enough to get nice pictures of our Greater Spotted Woodpecker -its red-tinged breast resembles the numidus subspecies-. Happy with these sightings we headed to the Natural Park Sierra de las Nieves, where we photographed Firecrest, Western Bonelli's Warbler and Woodlark. On the way back to Málaga we saw a pair of Black Wheatear and a stunning male of Common Rock Thrush just by the road, which made us all very happy, what a great last species for the tour this is!



We can't but thank our friendly group for such an enjoyable birding tour, which also served as an important benchmark on our central Andalusia expeditions.

→ Link to the [Costa del Sol Birding Tour](#) ←

CHECKLIST

A total of **119 bird species** were recorded, with 6 of them heard only and 1 of which was heard only by the tour leader. (X: recorded, H: heard only).

Note: this bird checklist is designed to minimize the time spent to find a species. The aim of the checklist is not to include every single species recorded in southern Spain, but to provide a useful tool for taking field notes when on this tour. Therefore common names are **alphabetically ordered** and **simplified**. For the same reason not all of them match the IOC world list.

BIRDS			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarpis melba</i>	X		x			X	
2	Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>				x	x	x	x
3	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>					x		
4	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	X	X				X	X
5	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>						X	X
6	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	X	X	x			X	
7	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	H	X	H			X	
8	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>		X					
9	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		X		x			
10	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		X					
11	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		X		x			
12	Blue Rock-thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		X	x			X	
13	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		X				X	X
14	Bonelli's Warbler, western	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>		X				X	X
15	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	X				X	X	
16	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>					X		
17	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>					X		
18	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	X			x			
19	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H		H			
20	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		X	x			X	X
21	Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	X	X	x		X	X	
22	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		X				H	
23	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	X	X	x	x	X		X
24	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>					X		
25	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	X	X	x	x	X	X	X
26	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		X		x			
27	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	X	X			X	X	X
28	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			x				X
29	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	X			x	X	X	
30	Crested Tit	<i>Lopophanes cristatus</i>			x				
31	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			x			H	
32	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>						H	
33	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>							H
34	Feral Dove	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	X	X			X		

	BIRDS		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>						X	X
36	Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>		X		X			
37	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	H				H	H	
38	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
39	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			X				
40	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>						X	X
41	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	X	X	X	X		X	X
42	Green Woodpecker, iberian	<i>Picus sharpei</i>					X		
43	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	
44	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				X			
45	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				X			
46	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>						X	
47	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	X	X	X		X	X	
48	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>		X		X	X		
49	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothra.</i>						X	
50	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		X			X		
51	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	X	X	X	X	X		
52	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	
53	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		X					
54	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			X	X		X	
55	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>				X			
56	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	X	X		X	X		X
57	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				X			
58	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		X	X		X	X	
59	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		X	X		X	X	X
60	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			X	X			
61	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		X					
62	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>					X		
63	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>				X			
64	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>					X		
65	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		X		X		X	
66	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>		X		X	X		
67	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			X				
68	Monk Parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>				X			X
69	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>					X		
70	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		X		X			
71	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	H	H		H	H	X	
72	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>							X
73	Olivaceous Warbler, western	<i>Iduna opaca</i>	X						
74	Orphean Warbler, western	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>		H				H	
75	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		X		X		X	

BIRDS			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
76	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			X				
77	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		X		X			
78	Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>						H	
79	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	X	X			X	X	
80	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>		X					
81	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>					X		
82	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	X			X	X	X	
83	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				X			
84	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		X		H			
85	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			X			X	H
86	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		X					
87	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>			X				
88	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		X				H	
89	Rock-thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>							X
90	Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>					X		
91	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		X					
92	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				X			
93	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	X	H	H	X	H	X	
94	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
95	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				X			
96	Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>					X		
97	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	H	H	X			X	H
98	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		X					
99	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>				X			
100	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>					X	X	
101	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>							
102	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>					X		
103	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	X	X		X	X	X	X
104	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			X				
105	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	X				X	X	
106	Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>							
107	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>		X			X	H	
108	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
109	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		X				X	
110	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>					X		
111	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	X	X			X		
112	White/Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	X					X	
113	White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>		X					
114	Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>						X	X
115	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	X		X		X	H	X
116	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>					X	X	
117	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H	X	H			H	H
118	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>			X	X			
119	Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed w.)	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		X	H	X	X	H	

Thanks to our tour participant Mark H., we paid a special attention to the **reptiles** found while birding, which turned out to be enjoyable and even got this list of species:

REPTILES			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Andalusian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis vaucheri</i>			x				
2	Large Psammodromus	<i>Psammodromus algirus</i>		x		x		x	
3	Ocellated Green Lizard	<i>Timon lepidus</i>		x				x	
4	Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>				x	x	x	
5	Montpellier Snake	<i>Malpolon monspessulanus</i>				x			
6	Viperine Water Snake	<i>Natrix maura</i>						x	
8	Spanish Pond Turtle	<i>Mauremys leprosa leprosa</i>		x		x		x	
9	Yellow-bellied Slider	<i>Trachemys scripta scripta</i>				x			

