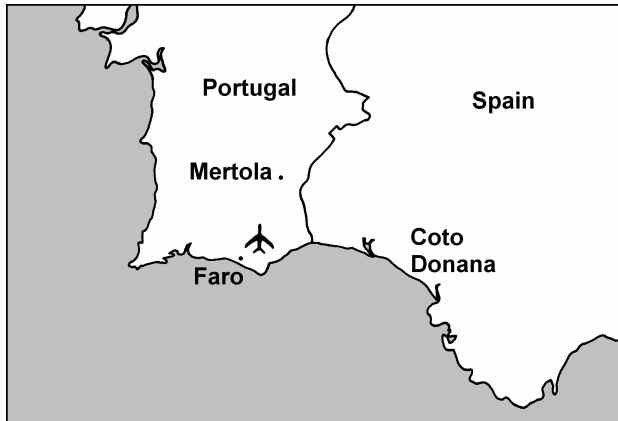


# COTO DONANA AND ALENTEJO

*the best of southern Spain and Portugal*



Spain and Portugal are popular holiday destinations for birdwatchers from the UK, and with very good reason. They are great places for birds, with a pleasant climate in the spring. It is a short three hour direct flight to Faro and by mid-afternoon we can be birding in the Coto Donana. We will spend four nights at the picturesque town of El Rocio on the edge of the marismas and then three nights near Mertola in the Alentejo, the beautiful Portuguese plains.

We know of reliable sites for Black-shouldered Kite, Marbled Duck and Red-necked Nightjar. In one of their last strongholds Great Bustards will be seen displaying. The thrill of the quest will take us on in pursuit of Crested Coots and White-headed Ducks, two of Europe's rarest breeding birds. Purple Gallinules can be watched at very close range attending to their tiny young. Glossy Ibis, Purple Heron and Night Heron will all be seen nesting.

By arranging a two-centre, seven night holiday we will have the benefit of a full range of habitats, where we can find many of the region's special birds.

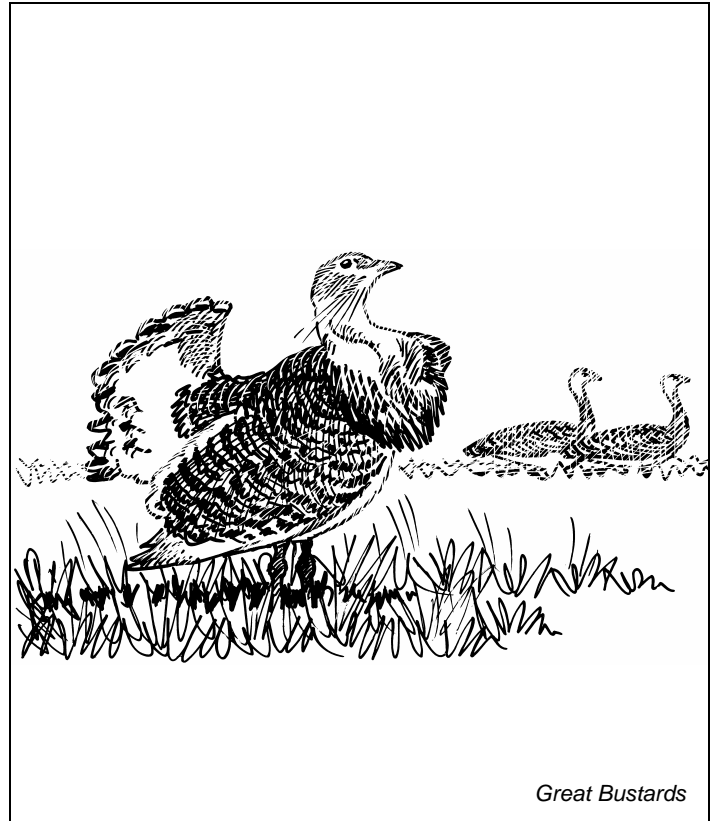
## ITINERARY

### THE COTO DONANA

Europe's second largest delta, where the River Guadalquivir enters the Atlantic, is home to some of the rarest birds in Europe. Justifiably one of the world's most famous reserves, Donana plays host to large numbers of birds of prey. Black Kite, Red Kite, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Griffon Vulture and Marsh Harrier are the commoner raptors, along with the rarer Black-shouldered Kite and Spanish Imperial Eagle.

Marshes at El Rocio provide feeding grounds for thousands of birds at the time of our visit. Passage waders are numerous, particularly Little Stint, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Black-winged Stilt, Avocet and Ringed Plover. Collared Pratincoles breed here in good numbers, and are regularly seen flashing their chestnut underwings as they chase flying insects. Spoonbills, Greater Flamingos and White Storks are common. Terns feeding over the marshes include Whiskered and Black, with the occasional Gull-billed, Caspian and White-winged Black.

Pools and a reedbed at Acebuche give us the opportunity to watch, at close range, the Purple Gallinule. Other birds seen



*Great Bustards*

include Little Bittern and Red-crested Pochard. Azure-winged Magpies are very common in the stone pines.

La Rocina holds similar species, plus many small birds including Savi's, Reed, Great Reed, Cetti's, Fan-tailed and Melodious Warblers, Crested Tit, Stonechat, Woodchat Shrike and Short-toed Treecreeper. The Spotless Starling is common. Another Iberian speciality found here is the Red-necked Nightjar. We shall try one or two reliable sites on evening or early morning visits.

A whole day will be required to explore the vast marismas to the east of El Rocio. Hoopoe and Bee-eater, two of Europe's most colourful birds, are both very common here. There is a continuous presence of raptors, and other specialities include Marbled Duck, Calandra, Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed Larks and Spectacled Warbler, with the chance of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse. Birds found throughout the whole of this fantastic area include Squacco and Night Herons, Little and Cattle Egrets, Kentish Plover, Yellow-legged Gull, Turtle Dove, Little Owl, Pallid Swift, Woodlark, Southern Grey Shrike and Nightingale.

White-headed Duck came back from the brink of extinction in Spain in the late twentieth century and is now flourishing. Up to thirty birds can be seen at the breeding site we visit on the

east bank of the Guadalquivir. The Crested Coot, one of the rarest breeding birds in Europe, is also present in small numbers. Red-crested Pochards and breeding-plumaged Black-necked Grebes complete a wonderful picture. At nearby Brazo del Este there are Penduline Tits and Marbled Ducks.

**ALENTEJO**

On day five we will head north-west, crossing the border into Portugal. The Alentejo, a region in south-central Portugal, is typical of the rolling plains which extend eastwards into Spain. Great swathes of wild flowers provide a memorable sight and attract masses of butterflies. So impressive is the carpet of mainly white wild flowers that it has given rise to the local name 'Campo Branco' meaning White Country.

Many excellent birds are within reach of our base. We will visit a reliable site for Great Bustard to watch displaying males. Flocks of over 50 have been seen in this area. Little Bustards are common too, and we also have a chance of Black-bellied Sandgrouse. The overhead wires are regularly dotted with Southern Grey Shrikes. Woodchat Shrike, a true Mediterranean speciality, is also found here in good numbers. Quails can be heard making their distinctive calls and Red-rumped Swallows sweep over the meadows. Montagu's Harriers are common, the superb males being a regular sight as they hunt over the crops and dazzling wildflower meadows. Indeed, they provided one of the highlights of a previous trip when a male was watched at close range being mobbed by an angry Lesser Kestrel. Other raptors likely include Black Kite, Red Kite and perhaps Black-shouldered Kite and Black Vulture. Bonelli's Eagles occasionally hunt over this area too.

The plains and small farms are favourite breeding areas of Roller, Calandra Lark, Crag Martin and Lesser Kestrel, and we will also watch the Spanish Sparrows that breed in the untidy White Storks' nests. This latter species breeds here in as high a density as anywhere in Europe.

Great Spotted Cuckoos are regularly seen in this area, along with their hosts, Azure-winged Magpies. Other localized species likely to be found here are Red-necked Nightjar, Spotless Starling and Collared Pratincole. Larks include Thekla, Short-toed and Calandra. The largest colony of Lesser Kestrels in Portugal breed around the ancient town of Mertola. This is, in part, due to a nestbox scheme. A similar scheme has also been very beneficial to nesting Rollers.

On day eight we will drive to Faro airport in good time for our flight home.

**PACE**

Breakfast will be taken at about 7.30am most mornings. Basic fitness is all that is required. Full days will be spent in the field and short/medium length walks on the flat will be undertaken. There will be little or no uphill walking.

**ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD**

Full-board accommodation is provided, with four nights in the Hotel Toruno, El Rocio on the edge of the Coto Donana and three nights at the Beira Rio, Mertola, in Portugal's Alentejo. All rooms have en suite bathrooms. Packed lunches will be taken every day.

**PRICE INCLUDES .....**

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 30<sup>th</sup>, ending with breakfast on 7<sup>th</sup>), soft drinks at meal times, local transport by mini-bus, international flights and airport taxes.

**WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED**

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

**INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS**

We will fly from Leeds/Bradford to Faro, using the scheduled services of Jet2. The outbound flight departs mid-morning and the return flight arrives back late afternoon. It is also possible to join this trip from other airports including Manchester and London. Please call for details.

<b>7 nights:</b>	<b>30<sup>th</sup> April to 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012</b>
<b>Principal leader:</b>	<b>Andrew Woodall</b>
<b>Maximum group size:</b>	<b>7 clients with one leader or 13 clients with two leaders</b>
<b>Cost with discount (if you book before 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012):</b>	<b>£1390 per person sharing</b>
<b>Full Cost:</b>	<b>£1490 per person sharing</b>
<b>Single supplement:</b>	<b>£145</b>
<b>Deposit:</b>	<b>£300</b>



*Azure-winged Magpies*