

# Spain - Realm of the Iberian Lynx

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly Seville and transfer to Coto Doñana
<b>Day 2</b>	Coto Doñana
<b>Day 3/5</b>	Sierra Morena
<b>Day 6</b>	Return Seville; fly London

### Departs

Generally January, September, November and December

### Focus

Birds and mammals, including the Iberian Lynx.

### Grading

Grade A.

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP08) or brochure

### Highlights:

- Explore last refuges of the Iberian Lynx – the world's rarest cat
- Take a 4x4 excursion into the Coto Doñana with expert local guides
- Iberian Lynx seen on 80+% of tours to date
- Red & Fallow Deer, Wild Boar, European Otter & Mouflon amongst other mammals seen
- Purple Gallinule, Marbled Teal & Crested Coot amongst Doñana highlights
- Cinereous & Griffon Vultures & Spanish Imperial Eagle amongst many raptors



Iberian Lynx



El Rocio



Cinereous Vulture



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)



**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

## Introduction



Sierra Morena

This is a 6-day (5-night) holiday to the lesser known corners of the Coto Doñana and the rugged regions of the Sierra Morena, together the last refuge of the critically endangered Iberian Lynx, and home to a wealth of other mammals and birds.

The Iberian Lynx (*Lynx pardinus*), the most endangered of the world's 36 cat species, stands on the brink of extinction. Just a century ago, it ranged throughout over half of the Iberian peninsula. As recently as

1996 it still occurred in nearly a quarter of the region. Today, its range has shrunk dramatically to just two viable (but isolated) populations within Andalucia, and its population is estimated to be fewer than 150 adult individuals. A number of factors have combined to decimate the population of this delightful cat. First came myxomatosis, which devastated Iberia's Rabbit numbers and deprived the Iberian Lynx of its chief prey species – 90% of its diet! As if that was not enough, a second disease – viral hemorrhagic pneumonia – hit the region's surviving Rabbits. Habitat destruction and fragmentation has been a contributing factor, but worse, Spain's entry into the EU and its astonishingly rapid transformation from simple rural economy to a highly developed and urbanised one has seen a surge in road construction and consequential traffic (and road-kills) that have wreaked havoc on Lynx communities.

In the rugged, dry and rocky hills and mountains of the Sierra Morena some of the best preserved Mediterranean forest in the Iberian peninsula is to be found. Primarily this is open and spacious oak forest, comprised of Holm, Gall and Cork Oak, though alder, ash and poplars are to be found at the margins of rivers, glades and meadows. In this quiet and relatively unpopulated region, Spain's wild animals thrive. As well as Iberian Lynx, Wolves, European Otters, Wild Boar, Mouflon and Red Deer are all to be found. These mountains also hold a large population of Griffon Vultures, as well as good numbers of the rare Black Vulture and Spanish Imperial Eagle. Amongst the oak forest that clads these hills are grassy glades and secluded valleys where the Iberian Lynx hunt



Wild Boar



European Rabbits, rest amongst the rocks, and raise their young in ancient, hollowed oaks. Here live the majority (perhaps 70% or more) of the world's remaining Iberian Lynx. Perhaps here, in a refuge from the modern world, the Iberian Lynx has a chance of survival.

The remaining 20-30% of the Iberian Lynx population lives in and around the Coto Doñana, a quite different environment of flat grasslands and pine forests where just a few individual oak trees or remnant patches of Mediterranean oak forest are to be found. This is an area besieged by the marching tide of Spain's EU-funded agricultural revolution... and a noose of roads that grows ever tighter as Seville and its suburbs expand.



On this tour we will enjoy the mammals and birds within these two, quite different, Iberian Lynx habitats. Past experience suggests that, on average, Naturetrek groups have been rewarded with a Lynx sighting for every thirty to forty hours spent within Lynx habitat. We have chosen to travel during the autumn and winter months, when the area is quieter and when Lynx are active. We therefore have a realistic chance of seeing this rare animal on this holiday, but we must look upon a sighting as a bonus to our enjoyment of the birds (especially) and other wildlife of these areas, rather than

a sole aim in itself.

This is not a tour for the loud and talkative! You must be prepared, at all times, to follow your tour leader's instructions, and to be quiet at any time, and for long periods. Such patience may, we hope, be rewarded. It should also allow us to see some of the other mammals as well as the many birds that inhabit the region.

## Day 1

## Fly Seville, transfer to Coto Doñana (El Rocío)

We depart today from London on a flight to Seville. From Seville we drive south-west for a couple of hours to El Rocío, passing through the fertile farmland and orange groves that lie to the west of the great Guadalquivir river.

The remarkable village of El Rocío lies at the western edge of the Parque Nacional de Doñana. It has been described as a living relic, a step back to the days when the whole of this area was accessible only by horse. Even today its unmetalled sandy streets, lined with wooden hitching rails for horses and elegant white-washed buildings (that include a magnificent church) give more the impression of the American Wild West than southern Spain. Indeed, one instantly has the feeling of having stumbled across the set of a Spaghetti Western! Further, the village is also the



site of a famous and spectacular pilgrimage fair, the Romeria del Rocío, which draws up to a million people each year!

In the spring El Rocío overlooks the adjacent 'Madre de las Marismas', a magnificent lagoon laden with Greater Flamingoes, waders and numerous other waterbirds, and a river and marshlands that lie within the Coto Doñana National Park, one of the finest wetlands in Europe. In September, these bird-filled wetlands are more than likely to have dried up, but the village nonetheless makes the perfect base for three nights as we spend time in the realm of the Iberian Lynx, hoping for a sighting as we enjoy the wealth of birds and other wildlife that this unique national park has to offer.

Today, depending on the flight schedules available to us, we will hope to arrive in El Rocío by mid-afternoon, in time for a first foray by four wheel drive out into the National Park.

Our hotel is a most comfortable one, situated on the edge of the village; all rooms with private facilities.

## Day 2

## Coto Doñana (El Rocío)



Crested Coot

We will head out around first light this morning to enjoy all morning in the best Iberian Lynx habitat. Exploring the mosaic of marshes, Stone Pine woodland, Mediterranean Forest and open grassland and heathland, we are likely to encounter Red and Fallow Deer, Hares and Rabbits, potentially all to be found on the menu of the lynx.

The Coto Doñana also holds a remarkable variety of wetland and Mediterranean woodland birds, and to see 100 species a day is not unusual. We will

particularly enjoy the large numbers of birds of prey. The areas on which we focus hold the densest populations of raptors in the Coto Doñana. Both species of kite are common (with particularly big roosts of migrating Black Kites in September) as are Booted Eagles and Common Buzzard. The flocks of Griffon Vultures circling up on the rising thermals are often joined by Short-toed Eagles, Marsh Harriers and Goshawks and, if we are fortunate, we may even find one of the seven pairs of Spanish Imperial Eagles which breed in the Coto Doñana. The Stone Pine woodlands are home to roving flocks of Azure-winged Magpies, plus Hoopoes, Bonelli's Warblers and, depending on the time of year, Great Spotted Cuckoos, whilst lingering Spectacled and Subalpine Warblers may still be found in the low trackside scrub in September and Lesser Short-toed Larks in the more open areas.

Migrants should be numerous, amongst them storks, herons, waders, ducks, gulls and terns. Many of the marshes and ponds may be dry in September, but we hope to visit the fish ponds where an amazing number and variety of these wetland species should be present. We will also look for some of the region's specialities, amongst them Purple Gallinule, Marbled Teal and Crested Coot.

After lunch in the Park we will probably enjoy a period of rest back at the hotel in the mid-afternoon, before a late afternoon/evening visit to La Rocina and El Palacio de Acebron. These are not areas permanently inhabited by Lynx but nevertheless some good birding is possible with previous visits yielding Tawny Owl, Iberian Chiffchaff, Great Reed and Savi's Warblers, Penduline Tit, and many others.

## Days 3 - 5

## Sierra Morena

We now transfer to the hills, completing our holiday with a 3-night stay in the Sierra Morena.



In these rugged, dry and rocky hills and mountains some of the best preserved Mediterranean forest in the Iberian peninsula is to be found. Primarily this is open and spacious oak forest, comprised of Holm, Gall and Cork Oak, though alder, ash and poplars are to be found at the margins of rivers, glades and meadows. In this quiet and relatively unpopulated region, Spain's wild animals thrive. As well as Iberian Lynx, Wolves, Otters, Wild Boar, Mouflon and Red Deer all occur. These mountains also hold a rich birdlife.

Azure-winged Magpies are particularly abundant and Hawfinches common and a large population of Griffon Vultures is present, as well as good numbers of the rare Black Vulture and Spanish Imperial Eagle.

Amongst the oak forests that clad these hills are grassy glades and secluded valleys where the Iberian Lynx hunt European Rabbits, rest amongst the rocks, and raise their young in ancient, hollowed oaks. Here live the majority (perhaps 70% or more) of the world's remaining Iberian Lynx. Perhaps here, in a refuge from the modern world, the Iberian Lynx has a chance of survival.

If we are to have a chance of a sighting of one of these magnificent cats, we must spend much of our time scanning from various scenic viewpoints. From each one we will be able to overlook vast tracts of Lynx habitat. Here, unlike in the flat Coto Doñana, sightings of Iberian Lynx and other animals are often at long range, but the scenery is tremendous, and the birdlife and other natural history to be enjoyed whilst soaking in this environment is very rich.

## Day 6

## Fly London

Today we drive back to Seville for our return flight to London.

## Optional extensions

For those of you wishing to enjoy the historic city of Seville we should be happy to arrange a couple of night's accommodation in the city at the end of your tour. Accommodation can be hard to find in Seville, so the earlier you book the better chance we have of finding space and booking return flights.

## Grading & Focus

Grade A. On this tour we will spend part of our time in our vehicles, either touring or using our vehicles as hides, safari-style. We will spend part of our time (particularly in the Sierra Morena) watching and scanning from strategic viewpoints, and we may also undertake some short walks, though none of them will be long or strenuous. The tour is therefore suitable for all ages and for all degrees of fitness, though it will involve early starts each day, and late finishes. It is not suitable for those not prepared to watch patiently, often for long periods of time!

One of the main objectives will be to provide participants with observations of Iberian Lynx and Spanish Imperial Eagle as well as a plethora of other interesting birds in the wild but it must be stated that Lynx are exceedingly hard to find and success cannot be guaranteed. With the aid of local expertise every effort will be made to locate interesting mammals but even on the most favourable of days it is unlikely that the animals will be viewable for more than a fraction of the time spent in the field. At all times, including during the searches for these species, due attention will be paid to the wider natural history of the area and as the most conspicuous and widespread members of the fauna, it is probable that a significant amount of time will be spent looking at birds. People who do not enjoy birdwatching might not enjoy the tour, and need to think carefully before committing.



Some of the accommodation (left) and the living room area (right) of our hotel in El Rocio



## Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this two-centre holiday, based in two clean and comfortable village hotels, with private facilities throughout. Please note, however, that some of the rooms at Los Pinos are not en-suite, but have an adjacent bathroom.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.