

Wolf-watching in Spain

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Spain; transfer to the mountains
- Day 2/4** Daily programme of wolf-tracking and birdwatching excursions
- Day 5** Fly UK

Departs

September, October, December
(See website)

Focus

Wolves, birds and other mammals

Grading

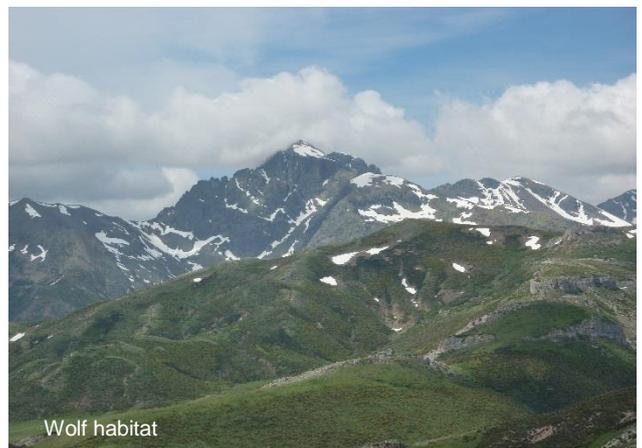
A. Some easy walks but most of our Wolf watching is done stationary from viewpoints

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code ESP19) or brochure

Highlights

- Very good chances (90%+) of Iberian Wolf - one of Europe's most exciting mammals
- Wild Boar, Red Deer & Roe Deer regularly seen
- Great birdwatching, especially birds of prey (up to 10 species seen on most tours)
- Tasty traditional cuisine and local wines (vegetarians well catered for too!)
- Possibility of Wildcat, Cantabrian Brown Bear and Otter



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N.B. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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

This is a 5-day (4-night) holiday to a little-known and very rural corner of northern Spain in search of Iberian Wolves in the mountains where we believe that we offer you the best chance of an Iberian Wolf encounter anywhere in Spain, and one of the best chances of a wild Wolf anywhere in the world.

All but a handful of our groups (well over 50 now) since March 2006 have enjoyed good telescope views of Wolf; on several occasions of as many as 6 Wolves. Wolf-watching can, indeed, seem very difficult during the long hours that need to be put in to track down such a notoriously elusive animal, and Wolves cannot be guaranteed, but an encounter is well worth the wait if it comes!

This tour will provide ample time in which to enjoy this rich birdlife, but it is our quest for the Iberian Wolf that will be our primary goal.

Day 1 Fly Santander, transfer to Cordovilla de Aguilar, Fuentes Carrionas Natural Park

We depart from the UK today, usually departing from London Stansted to Santander. On arrival we head into rural Spain through a changing landscape of farmland before entering into the gently rolling hills, heathland and conifer/oak plantations of the Cantabrian foothills. Here we will be based in a quiet village of humble granite houses that stand in varying stages of dilapidated antiquity. Elderly ladies dressed in black, and hunched, walnut-faced menfolk beneath weathered caps, amble occasionally and sedately about the streets of nearby villages. This is a backwater of rural Spain that seems, for now at least, to have escaped the EU and local government funding that has recently so transformed so much of Spain's countryside.



Wolf print

By the time we arrive in the outlying hills of northern Palencia and reach our rural base for the holiday we will be ready for a rest. Our lodging, three terraced converted farmhouses, is newly renovated but not flash! Its rooms are warm, comfortable and beautifully clean; rustic but functional (see detailed description at end of itinerary). Breakfasts

are varied help yourself affairs; cereals, fruit, bread/toast and jam, eggs, with tea or coffee. Three-course dinners are straightforward but enjoyable and eagerly anticipated each evening. We also include very drinkable local Toro and Duero wines in our package.

This simple, but comfortable, and unique environment will be our base for four nights.

Days 2 – 4

Fuentes Carrionas Natural Park

For the next three full days, from dawn until dusk, we will be mounting our search for the region's Wolves. You will, of course, be free to either join or opt out of any of our excursions that you choose; however, your chances of seeing a Wolf obviously increase the more time you are prepared to put in. Indeed, our chances depend on the hours we put in, our patience in our quest and, above all, the stealth and silence that we maintain during our long hours in the field. 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 will, we hope, be rewarded. It should also allow us to see some of the other mammals as well as the birds that inhabit the region.



Iberian Wolf

It is in these hills and mountains of northern Spain that the vast majority of Spain's 1,000 to 1,500 Iberian Wolves are found – the stronghold of the species in Europe. This is a population that has increased markedly since an estimated all-time low in Spain of just 500 individuals in 1970. The depopulation of Spain's rural regions, as Spaniards have increasingly migrated into the cities, has benefited the Iberian Wolf, as has a changing attitude towards an animal that was once viciously persecuted.

The few hot spots and wolf territories known very well by us and our local guides are located amongst rolling hills and broad valleys surrounded by mountains which afford excellent opportunities to scan wide areas of open land and which may easily be accessed via an extensive network of graveled mountain tracks. It is a landscape that is part Scotland, part New Forest; a rolling tapestry of conifer plantations, sprawling oak and beech woodlands, extensive heaths, ancient grazing meadows enclosed by tumbledown dry stone walls, and damp grassy hollows marked by elegant poplar stands. Much of the birdlife here is shared with similar habitats in Britain but easier to find. Birds of prey are much in evidence, and include Red & Black Kites, Hen and Montagu's Harriers, Northern Goshawks, Sparrowhawks, Common Buzzards, Kestrels, Merlins and even the occasional Black Vulture and Golden Eagle. Conifer forests are home to Firecrests, Coal and Crested Tits, Eurasian Jays and occasional noisy flocks of Crossbills. The heaths hold Woodlarks, Stonechats and Dartford Warblers, whilst Ravens honk evocatively as they pass overhead. Good numbers of Wildboar, Red and Roe Deer (the prey of the Wolf!), together with European Otters on a nearby river, complete the picture. But, take a look around the traditional granite-built villages of the region and the Crested Larks, Black Redstarts, Southern Grey Shrikes, Spotless Starlings, Rock Sparrows, Serins, Yellowhammers, Cirl Buntings and Rock Buntings soon confirm that you really are in Southern Europe!

Looking for wolves requires a great deal of persistence, patience and stealth. It also requires a lot of luck... not least with the weather! We will spend much of each day (certainly the first and last three or four hours) ensconced deep in the heather at suitable viewpoints in order to scan for Wolves... and any other mammals and also birds that we may happen to see. Each day will be tackled with flexibility, but a typical day is likely to involve a pre-dawn start to ensure on-site positioning by dawn or sunrise,



armed with drinks and some 'nibbles' to keep us going! Later, armed with a packed lunch (or having taken lunch back at base) we will head out into the field again, probably remaining out until dark.

Day 5

Santander & Fly London

If flight times allow this morning, we will either take to the road for a final look for Iberian Wolves in the surrounding hills or, if we have been successful previously in this regard, we may prefer to spend more time in the forests and steppe lands en route back to Santander for our flight back to the UK.

Tour Grading & Focus

Grade A. On this tour we will probably spend at least 50% of our time scanning, stationary, from suitable viewpoints. We may also undertake the odd short walk, though none of them will be long or strenuous. The tour is suitable for all ages and for all degrees of fitness.

Wolves have been persecuted in Spain for decades and therefore have a healthy fear of man. This is not a tour on which to expect close views of this elusive carnivore – any photographs are likely to be 'for the record' only and any views of wolves, if we're lucky enough to find them, are likely to be distant ones through binoculars and telescopes. Please travel with realistic expectations. In return you'll be rewarded with some expert guiding, warm hospitality and, hopefully, you'll become one of the tiny proportion of humans to have seen an Iberian Wolf.

Food and accommodation

All food, wine and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

Our accommodation comprises up to 3 old farm cottages.

Casa Montes, the largest, has a double room, bathroom, kitchen and living space (where group meals will be had) upstairs, with 2 twin rooms and 2 full bathrooms downstairs (one for each bedroom, but not en suite). Rooms in this house will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

Casa del Arco has 2 bedrooms upstairs (1 twin, 1 double) with 1 shared bathroom, together with a shared toilet, kitchen and living space downstairs.

Casa Gutierrez has a twin and a double upstairs with a shared bathroom, kitchen and living room downstairs.

You will be assigned a double or twin share room, unless you would prefer a single room, in which case please let us know and make your payment before departure or, preferably, on booking.

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, 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.

