

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

October, November
(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 and Cantabrian Brown Bear



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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 80 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 Iberian 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 Aguilar de Campoo

We depart from the UK today, usually departing from London Stansted to Santander. On arrival we head south 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.

Aguilar de Campoo is a town located in the north of the province of Palencia, in Castilla and León. The River Pisuerga flows through its historic centre.

It is one of the locations of the St. James' Northern Way (Camino de Santiago - Ruta del Besaya) and, since 2017, the municipality has been included in the Geopark of Las Loras, the first UNESCO Geopark in Castilla and León.

In medieval times, Aguilar de Campoo was home to a Jewish community. The earliest documentation of Jews in Aguilar de Campoo dates to 1187. The Jewish community was decimated after the 1492 expulsion of the Jews. Over the Reinosa Gate, one of the gates of the city, is an inscription of Judeo-Castilian (Castilian language written in Hebrew letters) detailing who built the gate. Gullón and Fontaneda opened biscuit factories in 1904 and 1913, respectively, and the town acquired a reputation as a renowned biscuit-making centre in Spain in the 20th century. The smell of freshly-baked biscuits sometimes hangs over the town.

Our base for four nights is a family run 18th-century water mill converted into an elegant and modern country hotel which preserves the essence of times gone by and the original elements that characterise it. During its restoration, it was decided to maintain the warmth of the materials; a mixture of stone, oak

wood, brick and adobe. This hotel is located in Salinas de Pisuergra, a picturesque village in the outskirts of Aguilar de Campoo.

Days 2 – 4 Park

Montaña Palentina Natural

For the next three full days, from dawn until the late afternoon, we will be mounting our search for the region's Iberian 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.



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 unique and breathtaking landscape with pristine forests and impressive rock formations; a rolling tapestry of conifer plantations, sprawling oak and beech woodlands, 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 Kites, Hen Harriers, Northern Goshawks, Sparrowhawks, Common Buzzards, Eurasian Kestrels, Merlins, Griffon Vulture and even Golden Eagle. Conifer forests are home to Firecrests, Coal and Crested Tits, Eurasian Jays and occasional noisy flocks of Red Crossbills. The heaths hold Woodlarks, Stonechats and Dartford Warblers, whilst Red-billed Choughs and Northern Ravens honk evocatively as they pass overhead. Good numbers of Wild Boar, Red and Roe Deer (the prey of the Iberian Wolf!), together with European Otters on a nearby river, complete the picture. However, look around the traditional granite-built villages of the

region and the Crag Martins, 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 away from the skyline 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 the late afternoon.

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. Although binoculars are useful for scanning the hillsides for signs of movement, telescopes are essential to obtaining good views of wolf behaviour; therefore, we encourage clients to bring their own 'scopes if possible. 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. 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.