

Spain - Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

22 - 27 September 2011



Juvenile Black-crowned Night-heron



Iberian Lynx country



Sunset at Doñana National Park



Iberian Lynx

Report and images compiled by Byron Palacios



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Day 1

Friday 22nd September

Heathrow – Madrid – Seville – El Rocio – Doñana National Park

It was a long day, especially for those who were let down by late airport connections. Most of the group reassembled at their arrival in Seville with others arriving later in the day. The weather was good, maybe too hot and sunny for birds and mammals, but great for a change coming from Britain. We left the airport behind driving thorough the city in our comfortable van, driving eastwards to El Rocio, located just in the outskirts of Doñana National Park.

After settling down in our lovely hotel, we prepared ourselves to go out on our very first expedition in the park at 17:30 in 4x4s, from where the bumpy tracks were to be the start of a great adventure. The afternoon was sunny with a fresh breeze blowing from the south. As we entered the park, many Cattle Egret and beautiful birds such as European (Common) Redstart, Whinchat, Common Buzzard, Glossy Ibis, Black-capped Night-Heron, Red Deer, amongst more wildlife were seen in the forest area. Once we crossed in to the Mediterranean area of the park, the dried and cragged ‘marismas’ gave us an idea of how dry has the summer been. We saw some flitting Whinchat, Eurasian Stonechat, Crested Lark, Northern Wheatear, and Spanish Yellow Wagtail, and jumped off the vans in order to take a stroll along the main marisma towards the visitors centre, focusing mainly on a big patch of water left behind by the dry summer, where many interesting birds, such as a hovering Short-toed Eagle, were seen, alongside with Purple Gallinule, Avocet, Dunlin, White Storks, Little, Cattle and Grey and Purple Herons, Fan-tailed Warbler, Spoonbills, Black-winged Stilt, Ringed Plover, Montagu’s Harrier, Common and Green Sandpipers, Marsh Harrier, Squacco Heron, and more.

We arrived at the visitors centre in time to use the facilities and check the empty marshes – where a group of Greater Flamingos were seen – before we continued our expedition driving back to the woods in order to keep searching for the elusive Iberian Lynx. Many Red Deer were already gathering together to spend the night, while a very conspicuous Little Owl was yet enjoying the last sun beams from its perching stamp.

As the sun was about to hide on the horizon, we decided that was time to go after our ‘main quarry’ - Iberian Lynx. Driving carefully and with eyes wide open, nothing seemed to be moving along, when suddenly the enigmatic figure of a male Iberian Lynx emerged from the low vegetation, making us jump from our seats - amazing!! He even was confident enough to show off, crossing in front of the vans, giving us such a show, what a view!! We certainly all enjoyed watching this beautiful animal as he walked amongst us and eventually was lost in the scrub secretively and looking for some food. A lucky way to start the tour with great views of Iberian Lynx under our belt already!! Very happy and satisfied, we drove back to our hotel in order to get ready for our very well deserved delicious local supper!

Day 2

Friday 23rd September

El Rocio – Doñana National Park – La Rocina

We started today having an early breakfast. The mist was partially covering the surroundings of the hotel plaza. Our local park guides picked us up to make another visit to Doñana National Park, this time to a different location but still checking the productive spots which produced Iberian Lynx on the previous the evening; in spite of this, no lynx were seen this morning. We checked all the territories where a female with three cubs had been seen in recent days, but no signs of them. After exploring the majority of this female lynx territory pretty well, we moved to the area known as La Raya, where we planned to walk a couple of hours making the loop around the dehesa (habitat with fields and cork oaks).

Our first stop produced interesting birds such as Short-toed Eagle, Black Kite, Marsh Harrier, Booted Eagle, Common Buzzard, Grey Heron, Little and Cattle Egrets, Northern Wheatear, Stonechat, Sardinian Warbler, Crested Lark, Tree Pipit, Spotless Starling, and others. The sandy tracks and the mixed vegetation are a great habitat for the elusive Egyptian Mongoose, which we looked for very hard until we eventually saw three of them running along the track, superb!! We also saw Eurasian Hoopoe, Pied Flycatcher, alongside some Fallow and Red Deer, and including a heard but impossible-to-spot Stone Curlew.

By this point, our vehicles picked us up and took us towards our lunch spot known as La Garvija, but we went in search for a Spanish Imperial Eagle, which was perched in one of the pylons nearby; we carefully approached its perch, getting great scope views of this most-wanted species. We continued our drive, spotting a pair of migrating Hobbys en route, until we arrived at La Garvija in time to enjoy a delicious picnic lunch! Black Stork and a soaring Spanish Imperial Eagle were spotted while we were having lunch, making this beautiful spot very productive! After lunch, we started our drive back towards El Rocio, making a few stops on the way to see Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrike, Fallow and Red Deer, and two more Booted Eagles.

Once in El Rocio and after a short break, we drove a short distance to make a visit to La Rocina. The place was unusually quiet and apart from some Chaffinches, Great, Blue and Long-tailed Tits, House Martins, Pied Flycatcher and Barn Swallow, there was nothing else to see. We then returned to enjoy a delicious supper!

Day 3

Saturday 24th September

El Rocio – El Acebuche - Andujar Natural Park

We had another early morning today in El Rocio, which was less misty than the other days and was a bright sunny morning. We hit the sandy tracks once again, very persistently after Iberian Lynx one more time; but in spite of the massive efforts we had no luck this time. We checked every corner of the main territories where they have been seen previously. We even walked the main track known as La Raya very carefully, but it was just not our day. A few Red Deer were seen, and a single Wild Boar crossed the track, but no signs of cats. Some birds such as Little Owl, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Treecreeper, Azure-winged Magpie, and Pied Flycatcher, were seen.

As the mid morning passed quickly, we drove back to El Rocio in order to check out of our lovely hotel and start our long journey towards Andujar, planning to make a birding stop in the visitors centre at El Acebuche beforehand. The centre shows live images of Iberian Lynx taken from several webcams at the reintroduction centre, which we all enjoyed very much indeed! We had a good meander around the place before lunch time, having stunning views of Azure-winged Magpie, Hoopoe and Red-rumped Swallow, plus Short-toed Treecreeper, Dartford and Sardinian Warblers and Chiffchaff, Purple Gallinule and close views of an Egyptian Mongoose by one of the participants, very lucky! We had lunch at the picnic area, and eventually we drove up out of El Acebuche and hit the road towards Andujar.

It took nearly four hours to get there, and after checking in, we decided to take advantage of the last couple of hours of light to check some of the surrounding areas (El Peregrino view point). Not long after we arrived and set up our scopes, an Iberian Lynx was spotted moving from the top of the big rocks down to the bushy ground, but just one of the participants and myself (a few others had glimpses of it) got him on the binoculars for seconds, and as frustrating as it was, the rest of the group could not see it and we lost its track eventually. As dusk arrived we decided to drive back to the hotel in order to get ourselves ready for supper.

Day 4

Sunday 25th September

Andujar Natural Park (Rio Jandula & La Lancha)

After an early breakfast, we drove for about forty minutes towards the basin of the River Jandula. It was another beautiful morning, great conditions to see some good wildlife including Follow Deer, lots of rooting Red Deer, the always running Wild Boar, Mouflon and Iberian Hare, which kept us busy for nearly half of the morning. While we were amused by Griffon Vulture, Black Vulture and lovely Spanish Imperial Eagle, the shout of “lynx, lynx...!!” It took us by surprise, but certainly we got accurate views of a beautiful male walking down the closest gully to us. We all had great views of him and it was very pleasant to see him walking very relaxed through the Mediterranean forest! An Egyptian Mongoose was spotted by one of the group participants at this site too, making this place a superb mammal spot!

As lunch time was around the corner, we drove down the road towards the dam to a nice picnic place where we enjoyed our lunch while overlooking the surrounding landscape. It was quite hot at the time, so after we finished our meal, we went further down to the reservoir, where we parked our vans and continued walking. A few Crag Martins were spotted here, as well as more Spanish Imperial Eagles, Black and Griffon Vultures, and a soaring Sparrowhawk.

We continued to the tunnel, truly ideal to see some roosting bat species, and we were not disappointed as we found *Pipistrelle* spp., Lesser Mouse-eared Bat and Geoffrey's Bat. A female Blue Rock Thrush was seen in the other end of the tunnel, right on top of the rocky hill. As the day was getting hotter and hotter, we decided to drive back to our hotel, take a break and get ready for a late afternoon/early evening excursion.

The temperature was still hot when we set off by six o'clock; this time we chose a closer spot to go – El Encinarejo, (lower basin of the River Jandula), located about a quarter of an hour from our hotel. We checked the old bridge area just in front of the reservoir's old wall and checked the shores and banks of the river. Loads of fish such as trout, carp and barbel were spotted in the waters, with the latter making bubbles in the water surface regularly as they took oxygen. We then walked along the river bank and placed ourselves on a nice boulder of rocks just by the river, scanning the shore across in case a lynx popped by. The usual Red Deer were pottering around very quietly, while young Black-crowned Night-Herons struggled to keep their balance on the hanging twigs, comparing with the accurate and precise perching of the colourful European Kingfisher next to them. We also saw a single White-rumped Swallow crossing by. The time went by and soon the sunset minimized the natural light with no signs of the feline. We then decided to drive back to our hotel in order to enjoy the delicious local gastronomy.

Day 5

Monday 26th September

El Encinarejo – lower basin Rio Jandula

The sounds of the very early morning brought to our ears 'hoots' of some Tawny Owls around and we got to see some European (Grey) Nightjar erratically fling over the hotel's gardens. After another early breakfast, we drove through the usual dirt road again, hoping to have better luck this morning. We stopped and parked our vans on the highest point of the track scanning the whole valley; many Azure-winged Magpies, Sardinian Warblers, Pied Flycatcher, Eurasian Magpies, and singing Woodlarks, amongst others, were constantly seen around the site. As the sun rose facing straight towards us, we decided to walk down the road towards the old bridge. As soon as we crossed to the adjacent hide area which overlooks the river bank, a young male Iberian Lynx was spotted walking near the shore, very slowly, making a rapid stop as soon as he was aware of our presence - but luckily he seemed to be okay about us. Instead, he kept going amongst the low vegetation, giving us great views of his movements, and also even marking his territory by spraying on some broom as he walked. He was spotted at scarcely fifty metres away, and although the sighting was just for twenty seconds, most of us really appreciated the moment.

We made a lot of effort running around soon as he vanished into the thick bushes, trying to follow its steps but it was impossible to get more views of him, he just vanished! We stayed in the area hoping for him to come back, but nothing happened, making us quit as heat was getting to its peak and lunch time arrived. After lunch, the temperature reached 33 degrees; hence we decided to retire to our hotel in order to have a break after a long morning – and a very exciting one – spent in the field.

We followed the same plan as the previous early evening, scanning the same spot which produced those great views of the Iberian Lynx earlier on in the morning, hoping this young male could wander around again, but he never did it, or at least he didn't while we were there waiting for any signs of him. We retired to our hotel when dusk came. Back at our hotel, plenty of wine, beer and large amounts of food gave us the feast we all deserved!

Day 6

Tuesday 27th September

Andujar Natural Park – Seville

We were expecting another sunny and hot day, and it was indeed! After our very last early breakfast, we drove down to El Encinarejo once again – to a lower bit of the River Jandula – in order to search every single patch hoping to see Iberian Lynx again, having the same luck we had the previous morning. It was a beautiful morning in a lovely landscape with plenty of wild sounds dominating the peaceful atmosphere. We saw some interesting birds such as Hawfinch, Serin, Sardinian Warbler and Rock Bunting. One of us managed to spot a European Otter walking by the bank and eventually at the rivers edge, showing itself very well. She kept towards the upper bank of the river vanishing within the thick vegetation by the river bank. We saw Red Deer, while in the background were the persistent and active vocalizations of Sardinian Warbler, Wood Lark, Azure-winged Magpie, Green Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper, Hoopoe, and Serin, amongst others.

We decided to change the spot and walk further down the road following the river until we got to a certain spot where it was much easier to scan the boulders across the river but nothing was seen. As the late morning arrived, we served a brunch in the picnic area – still keeping an eye on the hills, just in case, until we were ready to drive back to the hotel and check out, collect our luggage and make our way down to Seville airport, to where we arrived in time to catch up the group's flight back to the UK.

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Species Lists

Mammals (✓ = recorded but not counted; h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	September					
			22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>	✓			✓	✓	
2	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓				
3	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
4	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓
5	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
6	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>					✓	
7	Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>		✓				
8	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>						✓

Birds

1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓					
2	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>					✓	✓
3	Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
4	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓			✓	
5	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	✓	✓				
6	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓				
7	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
8	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	✓	✓				
9	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>		✓				
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓				✓
11	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓				
12	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓				
13	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	✓	✓				
14	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓				
15	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
16	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓					
17	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓					
18	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓				✓
19	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓					
20	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				✓	✓	
21	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
22	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	✓	✓				
23	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓				
24	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>					✓	✓
25	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
26	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca (adalberti)</i>		✓		✓	✓	
27	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓		✓		
28	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
29	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓				✓
30	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		✓				
31	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	✓					
32	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓		✓	✓	
33	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓				✓
34	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓				
35	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓					
36	Little Crake	<i>Porzana parva</i>		✓				
37	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓					
38	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>		h				

	Common name	Scientific name	September					
			22	23	24	25	26	27
39	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓				
40	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓				
41	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓				
42	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		✓				
43	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓				
44	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓	✓				
45	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	✓					
46	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓				
47	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓				
48	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	✓	✓				
49	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓	✓				
50	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	✓	✓				
51	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓				
52	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓	✓				
53	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓				
54	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓				
55	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	✓					
56	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>	✓					
57	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
58	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
59	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓				
60	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
61	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>					h	
62	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	✓	✓				
63	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		✓			✓	
64	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>					✓	✓
65	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>				✓	✓	
66	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
67	Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		h				
68	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓				
69	Roller			✓				
70	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>					✓	✓
71	Great-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>		h			✓	✓
72	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		h			h	✓
73	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓				
74	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓				
75	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	✓					
76	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓				
77	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
78	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
79	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
80	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>		✓				
81	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓			✓	✓
82	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	✓	✓
83	Yellow (Iberian) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava (iberiae)</i>	✓	✓				
84	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		h			✓	✓
85	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>					✓	✓
86	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	✓				✓	✓
87	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	✓	✓				
88	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓	✓				✓
89	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓				

	Common name	Scientific name	September					
			22	23	24	25	26	27
90	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				✓	h	
91	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>					✓	✓
92	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓				
93	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		h			✓	
94	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>					✓	
95	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>		✓				
96	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>					✓	
97	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>					✓	✓
98	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
99	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓			✓	
100	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
101	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
102	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>		h				
103	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
104	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
105	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓			✓	✓
106	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		h			✓	✓
107	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>					h	✓
108	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		✓		✓		✓
109	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>					✓	✓
111	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
112	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
113	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		✓				
114	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓					
115	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
116	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓				✓	✓
117	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
118	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>					✓	✓
119	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>					✓	✓
120	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>		✓			✓	✓
121	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
122	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		✓			✓	✓
123	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>				✓		
124	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>					h	
125	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					✓	✓
126	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓				

Other Taxa

1	Toad (?)			✓				
2	Tree Frog			✓				
3	Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	✓	✓				
4	Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanicus</i>		✓				
5	Praying Mantis			✓				
6	Field Cricket			✓				
7	Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>		✓				
8	Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda careulescens</i>		✓				
9	Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	✓	✓			✓	
10	Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>	✓	✓				
11	European Terrapin	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>				✓	✓	