

Spain - Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

18 – 23 October 2015



Spanish Lynx



Little Owl



Spanish Ibex



The view point of La Lancha

Report compiled by Byron Palacios
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Summary

The Iberian Lynx is one of the rarest cats on the planet, with unpredictable behaviour as they can be diurnal, crepuscular or nocturnal, depending on the season of the year. Any sighting of an Iberian Lynx in the wild, no matter how brief, is a great result. We spent a lot of time looking for lynx during this trip and we were rewarded with great views of a beautiful individual two days in a row; a truly incredible encounter with this mystical creature.

Day 1

Sunday 18th October

Gatwick – Seville – El Rocio – Doñana National Park

After a very early start to catch our direct flight to Seville, we left London Gatwick looking forward to a great adventure in western Andalusia. The overcast weather and rain did not spoil our plans as we arrived at El Rocio before lunch-time and settled into our rooms in the lovely Hotel El Toruño. We then had lunch in a nearby bar and a break before our first excursion into the core and restricted area of Doñana National Park. We drove slowly along the wet sandy tracks of the Raya Real for the first two hours, checking carefully every little corner where an elusive feline could be either hidden amongst the scrub or simply meandering around; you never know with cats! We then stretched our legs and looked around the edge of the pristine Mediterranean forest and the marisma area (seasonally flooded heathland) where birds such as Sardinian Warbler, Common Kestrel and Griffon Vulture were seen. Dozens of Red Deer were seen along the marisma too, alongside a distance group of Wild Boar feeding on the freshly fallen acorns. Suddenly a different creature emerged from the tall grass - a beautiful and rather large male Iberian Lynx, walking along the marisma and right in front of us: amazing, simply amazing! We all were astonished with the event, getting terrific views of one of the rarest cats in the world. We saw him vanish through a hedge of *Lentiscus* bushes after giving us great views, and the timing was perfect as a shower made us retreat back into our 4x4 vehicles. We looked around in case this individual was still around, but he had vanished as a good, skilled feline should. We continued on towards some rabbit burrows where we found a pair of Little Owls and we enjoyed watching and photographing them.

Happy with the results of our first excursion, we drove back to El Rocio to get ready for dinner and a well deserved restful night.

Day 2

Monday 19th October

Doñana National Park

After a relaxing breakfast and still in the dark, we met our park guides around 8.45am and headed to the heart of the National Park. We were all very positive and in high spirits after the success of the previous day with great views of a male Iberian Lynx. Well, today we still sought them but we also looked for other wildlife too. We drove through concealed tracks, once again ending up taking a stroll in the area known as Hierba Buena; a beautiful dehesa (meadows and cork oaks). The walk was very enjoyable and we saw some great birds such as Red Kite, Griffon Vulture, Hobby, Sardinian Warbler, Meadow Pipit, Goldfinch, Linnet, White Stork, Stonechat, Southern Grey Shrike and Black Redstart, amongst others. We also found a nice group of Fallow Deer and Red

Deer walking together along the marisma. We all enjoyed walking amongst this unique Mediterranean habitat, and we finished it off by going back to El Rocio to take a break over a delicious local lunch and drinks.

After lunch we checked the marshes behind our hotel which produced a few interesting bird species such as Common and Whiskered Terns, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt and Common Snipe, amongst others. We then boarded our park vehicles and embraced the core area once again, searching the usual territories and getting as far as the marisma where we made our first stop. This produced some interesting birds such as Yellow and White Wagtails, Crested Lark, Stonechat, Griffon Vulture and an immature Spanish Imperial Eagle perched in the distance. Back in the vehicles, we decided to check the area where we had seen the male Iberian Lynx the previous day at this time, just in case he was around again; and gosh, he was! Once again he emerged from the taller grass, heading in the same direction as yesterday, but a bit quicker as he appeared to be aware of our presence this time. We again had great views of the cat, a bit quicker than the previous day, but nevertheless superb!

Very happy with our sightings, we drove back to El Rocio to enjoy the sunset by the marshes behind the hotel and to thank our park guides for their hard work and enthusiasm during our excursions into the core area of Doñana. At the hotel we again enjoyed a dinner of delicious local food in the restaurant with great wine, beer and others drinks to celebrate!

Day 3

Tuesday 20th October

Doñana National Park (Isla Mayor - Dehesa de Abajo) – Andujar Natural Park

After an early breakfast we packed our bags and left El Rocio behind, heading east to start our three and a half hour drive to Andujar Natural Park. Before leaving Doñana National Park behind, we explored the north-eastern area not far from Seville. We drove for around 45 minutes till we arrived at the area of Isla Mayor from where we entered the park along the irrigation canal that heads to Lucio del Lobo. We made a few stops along the way which produced sightings including Great Egret, Zitting Cisticola, Marsh Harrier, Black Stork, Hen Harrier, Spanish Yellow Wagtail, Greater Short-toed Lark, Cetti's Warbler, glimpses of a very elusive White-spotted Bluethroat, Grey Heron, Common Buzzard and Common Kestrel. We had a few light showers at times but it was still good to do some birding along the tracks of Doñana, finding nearly 100 Eurasian Stone-curlews in one field. We also saw a pair of Lesser Kestrel, perhaps going through quite late, though this species has wintered in Doñana in previous years.

We then drove to a nearby area called Dehesa de Abajo. This seasonal marsh has been the only place with fresh water in the area as the harsh summer had left lots of the water sources within the park completely dry. We found a vast population of water birds and waders here including dozens of Greater Flamingoes, Grey Herons, Avocets and Black-winged Stilts. We also saw Mallard, Little and Cattle Egrets, Zitting Cisticola, Red-crested and Common Pochards and White Stork, amongst others. We also found the exotic Yellow-crowned Bishop flitting round a patch of tall reeds by the road. After a coffee break in a nearby bar we drove towards the village of Aznalcázar where we found a very nice spot to have our picnic lunch. We then made the three-hour drive to Andujar with a coffee break along the way at a motorway services.

Once in Andujar we drove up to the mountains where our lodge was located. We checked into our rooms and after a short break, gathered together to enjoy some local drinks and nibbles, followed by a delicious and generous supper.

Day 4

Wednesday 21st October

Andujar Natural Park (Rio Jándula – La Lancha)

It was still dark as we ate our breakfast, and then we went out at first light to start exploring the Andujar Natural Park along the river Jándula, a very nice spot fifteen minutes away from our lodge. It was a beautiful sunny morning but a bit chilly till it warmed up towards mid morning. We parked our vehicles on top of the ridge and began our walk, checking both sides of the track and along the river. We stopped by the old bridge near the dam wall from where we had great views of European Kingfisher, Grey and White Wagtails and Sardinian Warbler. Several raptors were soaring in the blue sky and drifted our way including Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, with the odd Eurasian Kestrel in the distance. Other passerines such as Chaffinch, Crested Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Long-tailed Tit, Eurasian Nuthatch, Woodlark and Cirl Bunting kept us busy on our walk. Towards midday we arrived at our lunch spot where we saw a very nice male Goshawk flying against the crags.

After lunch the sun had warmed up the day to the high twenties celsius, so we returned to the hotel for a break before our next outing. We found a young male Spanish Ibex along the main road on the way to our lodge. We were worried that he couldn't get himself back to the forest through the roadside fence, but he finally made it.

Mid-afternoon we drove to La Lancha, a pristine Mediterranean forest located 40 minutes away from our lodge. On the way we found Red and Fallow Deer, very obliging Wild Boar, and a solitary Mouflon. We also saw the impressive bullfighting bulls, Toro de Lidia, kept at the farm at El Encinarejo. Once at La Lancha we choose a nice place from which to scan the valley and watch the wonderful scenery, which was dominated by the presence of Red Deer, some rutting and calling constantly. Dozens of Iberian and Eurasian Magpies were also seen and several groups of Red-legged Partridges. The sunset was beautiful, and as the light started to fade we started the drive back to our lodge, finding a nice Eurasian Eagle Owl along the way perched on top of a telegraph post; certainly a great finale to the day! We arrived back at our hotel in time to enjoy a superb dinner and drinks.

Day 5

Thursday 22nd October

Andujar Natural Park (La Lancha - Rio Jandula)

We had another early breakfast before setting off on a very chilly but sunny morning - perfect weather conditions for wildlife. We found lots of Red and Fallow Deer along the way, the same female Wild Boar feeding on acorns, and the bulls at the bullfighting farm. Lots of Iberian Magpies were seen along the track together with Mistle Thrush, Woodlark, Chaffinch, Black Redstart, Hoopoe, European Jay, and Iberian Green Woodpecker. We arrived at La Lancha and chose a place from where we scanned the valleys finding more Red and Fallow Deer and dozens of Iberian Magpies flying around. Other birds seen here included Southern Grey Shrike, Cinereous and Griffon Vultures, and Sardinian Warbler. The day warmed up and reached the pleasant mid twenties Celsius; perfect for exploring the crags and mountains around the village of La Lancha. We found a nice group of Spanish Ibex basking in the warming sunlight and took plenty of photographs of them posing on top of the boulders, some against the blue sky - great!

We drove to the end of the track and parked the vehicles by the main reservoir and dam, from where we took a stroll across the dam bridge. We enjoyed the soaring Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, and with them a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles which gave excellent views. We also had great views of Crag Martins, both perched and in flight. For a finale we found a beautiful Blue Rock Thrush mimicking a female Chaffinch or Spotless Starling - something very unusual. We checked the tunnel for bats and found roosting Common Pipistrelle. We found a perfect place for our last picnic lunch in the field, which we enjoyed whilst watching a few Cinereous and Griffon Vultures, Eurasian Nuthatch, Firecrest, Gull Bunting, and Great and Blue Tits. After lunch we returned to our lodge for a short break before going out again to the river Jandula area.

Mid-afternoon we drove fifteen minutes down the main road to the lower basin of the river Jandula. We chose a nice spot by the river from which to scan. With patience and keeping quiet we found some interesting birds such as Blue Rock Thrush, Grey and White Wagtails, Sardinian Warbler, and fantastic views of European Kingfisher. Several groups of Great Cormorants and half a dozen Grey Herons crossed the sky, perhaps heading to their roosting places, and dozens of Spotless Starlings were congregating on an old bare eucalyptus tree. We also found a very nice Iberian Green Woodpecker in the same tree with them. The light was fading as we made our way back to the hotel for our last supper together before an early start the following morning to travel to Seville airport.

Day 6

Friday 23rd October

Andujar – Seville – London Gatwick

We had a very early start today to drive to the airport for our mid-morning flight. We ate a packed breakfast on the way, and arrived in time to catch our flight to London Gatwick.

Once at Gatwick airport, we gathered to collect our luggage and to wish everyone a safe journey home after our great experience together in the domains of the Iberian Lynx. We were very lucky to have found our most-wanted prize; the critically endangered Iberian Lynx. Perhaps there had been more lynx in the mountains of Andujar during the time we spent there but they didn't want to show, so we had to be satisfied with the lovely individual in Doñana which gave us a great treat, watching this wonderful cat!

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Species Lists

Mammals (✓=recorded not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			18	19	20	21	22
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>	1	1			
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
4	European Mouflon	<i>Ovis orientalis musimon</i>				✓	
5	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				✓	✓
6	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
7	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>		✓			
8	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
9	Geoffroy's Bat	<i>Myotis emarginatus</i>			✓		
10	Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>					✓

Birds

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓		
2	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓		
3	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas Penelope</i>		✓	✓		
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		✓	✓		
6	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>			✓		
7	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya farina</i>			✓		
8	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
9	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			✓		
10	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			✓		
11	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓		
12	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			✓		
13	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			✓		
14	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓		
15	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓		
17	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓		
18	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓	✓
19	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
20	Cinereous (Black) Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				✓	✓
21	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	✓	✓			✓
22	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				✓	✓
23	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				✓	✓
24	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	✓		
25	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			✓		
26	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
27	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Purple Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>			✓		
29	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
30	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓		
31	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>			✓		
32	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		✓	✓		
33	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓	✓		
34	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
35	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			18	19	20	21	22
36	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		✓			
37	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>		✓			
38	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			✓		
39	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓		
40	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		✓	✓		
41	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓		
42	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓			
43	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>		✓			
44	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>		✓	✓		
45	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
47	Eurasian Eagle-owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>				✓	
48	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				H	
49	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	✓	✓		✓	H
50	European Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>					✓
53	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpie</i>					✓
54	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			✓		
55	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		✓	✓		
57	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓		✓	✓
58	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>					✓
59	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>					✓
62	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓		
63	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	H	
64	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>				H	
65	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				✓	
66	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>				✓	✓
67	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			✓	✓	✓
68	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓		✓	✓
69	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
70	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			✓		
71	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓		
72	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓				✓
73	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H	✓	H	H
74	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓	✓	✓
75	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		H	✓		
76	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓		✓	
77	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		✓	✓		
78	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓		✓
79	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>					✓
81	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				✓	✓
82	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓	✓
83	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				✓	H
84	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			18	19	20	21	22
87	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	H	✓	✓
88	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>				✓	✓
89	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	✓			✓	
90	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>					✓
91	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓		
93	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓		
95	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			✓		✓
96	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓	✓
97	Iberian Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>			✓		
97a	Yellow Wagtail sp.	<i>Motacilla flava sp.</i>		✓			
98	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	✓
99	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓		
101	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓		✓	✓
103	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓	✓
104	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓		
105	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓		
106	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>				✓	✓
107	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
108	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				H	
109	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				✓	✓
110	Yellow-crowned (Golden) Bishop	<i>Euplectes afer</i>			✓		

Other Taxa

1	European Tree Frog	<i>Hyla arborea</i>	✓				
2	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓				
3	Lesser Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax parthenope</i>	✓				
4	Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	✓				
5	Natterjack	<i>Bufo calamita</i>		✓			
6	Crimson Speckled Moth	<i>Utethesia pulchella</i>		✓			
7	Iberian Blue tail Damselfly	<i>Ischnura graellsii</i>		✓			
8	Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna affinis</i>		✓			
9	Plain-tailed Darter	<i>Sympetrum spp.</i>		✓			
10	Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>		✓			
11	Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>		✓			
12	Iberian Water Frog	<i>Rana perezi</i>					✓