

Spain - Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

12 - 17 December 2016

Report compiled by Byron Palacios



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Tour participants: Byron Palacios (leader) together with 10 Naturetrek clients.

Day 1

Monday 12th December

Gatwick – Seville – El Rocio

We left London Gatwick airport early in the morning and landed on time at Seville where, on arrival, the whole group successfully assembled. We loaded our vehicle and left Seville airport, heading west towards Huelva and then towards Dehesa de Abajo, the north-eastern entrance to Doñana National Park. The afternoon weather was glorious with a very pleasant temperature and sunshine, perfect for a birding stop at this picturesque place surrounded by water and rice fields. We had great views of Black and White Storks, Glossy Ibis, Grey Heron, Red-crested and Common Pochards, Northern Shoveler, Black-necked Grebe, Squacco Heron, Western Marsh Harrier, Greater Flamingo and the always hard-to-find Black-shouldered Kite. As the sun began to set we continued our drive to El Rocio where we checked in at our comfortable hotel and, after a short break, gathered together to do our sightings log, followed by dinner.

Day 2

Tuesday 13th December

Doñana National Park (Raya Real – Hierba Buena – Caracoles)

After an early start, we set off from our hotel for our first expedition into the core area of the national park. Here we focussed on the hot spots of approximately ten Iberian Lynx territories, looking carefully into every gap and clearing amongst the Mediterranean forest vegetation. The morning was rather cold and foggy, with a nice mantle of sunshine by mid-morning. We joined our park guide Jose, who took us onto the Raya Real track (Royal track), the widest sandy track which crosses the park from west to east. We checked the adjacent areas of dehesa and Mediterranean forest; a blend of Cork Oaks, wild Olives and meadows. Both of these habitats are very suitable for the elusive Iberian Lynx which normally hangs around in search of its most wanted food; rabbits. We saw many Red Deer, Wild Boar and birds such as Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpie, Red-legged Partridge and Meadow Pipit, but the Iberian Lynx seemed to be even more elusive this morning.

The narrower tracks took us to a nice typical dehesa habitat known as Hierba Buena, where we scanned the surrounding lush landscape spotting Eurasian Hoopoe, Iberian (Southern) Grey Shrike, Iberian Chiffchaff, European Stonechat, Thekla Lark, Sardinian Warbler and a nice Egyptian Mongoose seen moving rapidly amongst some cattle. After an enjoyable walk, we boarded our vehicle again and continued on a second search for the Iberian Lynx, trying really hard by scanning every corner, gap and track where our binoculars could get! More fresh tracks found along the sandy strips were a consolation.

We drove back to El Rocio for lunch in one of the nice corners of the village. After lunch we had a break before another excursion to the park. Some of us went to the marshes to check the wintering waterfowl, spotting Shoveler, Pintail, Snipe, Greater Flamingo, hundreds of wintering Greylag Geese, Black-winged Stilt and many others.

Later we returned to the core area of the park to search for the mighty cat. We drove to the end of long tracks along the Mediterranean forest and the Marisma (flooded heathland) where we spotted Griffon Vulture, Spanish Sparrow, Little Owl, Purple Swamphen, Common Crane, Hen Harrier, Western Marsh Harrier, a very fast

Iberian Hare, Short-eared Owl, Great Egret and Green Sandpiper, amongst others. Returning to the core area, we found similar wildlife to that seen on our mourning excursion. As dusk arrived there was a gorgeous sunset. As the light faded we returned to El Rocio, checking the tracks on the way, just in case!

We returned to our hotel for a well-deserved break, a delicious supper and drinks.

Day 3

Wednesday 14th December

Doñana National Park (Raya Real) – El Rocio – Sierra de Andújar Natural Park

We had another early morning start and headed into Doñana National Park before dawn. Once again, we drove along the Raya Real track waiting for first light to continue our Iberian Lynx quest. It was cold, but not as cold as the previous morning due to the overcast weather. We enjoyed the sounds of the wilderness of this lovely place as we drifted along the sandy tracks searching for lynx. During the search we had nice and enjoyable views of Wild Boar, Red Deer, Fallow Deer, lots of European Rabbits and Red-legged Partridge, the main source of food for the lynx.

We returned to our hotel at El Rocio by noon in order to pack our belongings before setting off to Andújar. We had a stop for coffee and to use the facilities half way on the journey. We drove on the motorway through Seville and Córdoba, driving through Andújar and turning north-east towards the mountains to arrive in the village of Viñas de Peñallana and Los Pinos hotel. It was a wet journey after leaving El Rocío, and after arriving we had a break before a delicious dinner.

Day 4

Thursday 15th December

Andújar Natural Park (La Lancha – River Jándula)

After an early breakfast, we drove for about forty minutes towards the valley of La Lancha to explore and scan an area which had been very successful for Iberian Lynx over recent years. The morning was rather misty but dry; perfect for the feline's taste. After choosing our spot, we started scanning throughout the valley where plenty of Red and Fallow Deer were spotted, alongside Iberian and Eurasian Magpies. A few Griffon and Cinereous Vultures started to drift along the mountain tops as the sunshine heated the cold air. Red-legged Partridge and Rabbit were around; ideal food for the lynx. What at first looked like a log was spotted by one of us on the opposite hill. Soon we realised it was in fact a beautiful male Iberian Lynx basking in the sunshine. We all enjoyed watching this cat for over an hour till he disappeared amongst the bushes and boulders. We were very happy and extremely content with this encounter with one of the rarest cats in the world! We then had our lunch while watching a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles surfing in the sky alongside Griffon and Cinereous Vultures.

After lunch we moved to another potential lynx territory area, having a coffee break at our lodge en route. We continued to the lower basin of the river Jándula where we spent the rest of the afternoon watching European Otters in the river. The light began to fade so we drove back to our hotel to get ready, and then we enjoyed drinks and nibbles, followed by delicious local gastronomy.

Day 5

Friday 16th December

Andújar Natural Park (Rio Jándula – La Lancha)

After yesterday's successful sightings, we were keen to go out again despite the rain! After an early breakfast we set off and drove down the lower basin of the river Jandula where we patiently scanned the river in the rain, spotting Great Cormorant and Grey Heron. The rain eventually stopped and the bird activity returned to this lovely hotspot. Sightings then included Rock Bunting, Willow Warbler, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Cinereous Vulture and Hawfinch. Plenty of Griffon Vultures were spotted on a large wall of boulders, drying themselves out after the very wet morning. After an unexpectedly successful morning, we returned to our lodge for a break and lunch.

After lunch we set off for La Lancha. First we drove straight to the dam at the end of the track from where we spotted great wildlife such as Golden Eagle, Cinereous Vulture, Black Redstart, Crag Martin and a very nice group of Spanish Ibex with lovely views of handsome males. We then drove to the La Lancha hotspot where we started scanning the area, covering a great range of the whole valley. We scanned quite tirelessly together with other watchers, but no lynx were about. The weather was going from chilly to very cold as the afternoon went by, but we still saw some good wildlife such a Red Deer, Rabbit, Sardinian Warbler, Iberian (Southern) Grey Shrike, Stonechat, Crag Martin and a beautiful Spanish Imperial Eagle soaring amongst a large group of Griffon and Cinereous Vultures in the blue sky. As the natural light faded to a gorgeous sunset, it was time to retire to our hotel. Plenty of wine, beer and large amounts of food awaited us. We enjoyed our supper very much; a truly good farewell from this lovely and wild area!

Day 6

Saturday 17th December

Andujar Natural Park – Seville airport

Today we had an early start for the two-and-a-half-hour journey to Seville airport. Upon arrival we checked in our luggage and later boarded the aircraft for our flight back to Gatwick. We had a delay of over two hours due to air traffic control problems. Once back at Gatwick, we collected our luggage and said our goodbyes. We had enjoyed a good tour in lovely Andalucía, and been lucky enough to see lots of wildlife including Iberian Lynx, experience outstanding landscape and taste fine gastronomy in this fantastic part of Spain.

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Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	December					
			12	13	14	15	16	17
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>				✓		
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	Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>		✓				
10	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				✓		

Birds

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓			
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓			✓	
3	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓			
4	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓	✓			
5	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓			
6	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓					
7	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓	✓			
8	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓				
10	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	✓					
11	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		✓				
12	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
13	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	✓	✓				
14	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓			
15	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
16	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓			
17	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	✓					
18	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓			
19	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓			
21	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓					
22	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
23	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	✓					
24	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
25	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				✓	✓	
26	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>				✓	✓	
27	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>					✓	
28	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
29	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓				
30	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓			
31	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓			
32	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓				
33	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
34	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓			
35	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	December					
			12	13	14	15	16	17
36	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓					
37	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
38	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓					
39	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	✓			
40	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			✓			
41	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓	✓				
42	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
43	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓		✓			
44	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓					
45	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
47	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>						h
48	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓		✓	✓	
49	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>		✓				
50	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓		
51	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
52	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>				✓		
53	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
54	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓				✓
55	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
56	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
57	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>				✓		
58	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓					
59	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>			✓			✓
60	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓			
61	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	h	h		h	h	
62	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>				✓		
63	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>		✓				
64	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>					✓	
65	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓			✓	
66	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓			
67	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	✓	
68	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			✓			
69	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	h	h	h	h	
70	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓		
71	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>					✓	
72	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
73	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		✓	✓			
74	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓				
75	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				h	h	
76	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
77	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>						✓
78	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				✓		
79	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
80	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
81	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
82	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
83	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
84	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				✓	✓	
85	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
86	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	December					
			12	13	14	15	16	17
87	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓				
88	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓		✓	✓	
89	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
90	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓			
91	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
92	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>					✓	
93	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓		
94	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓					
95	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
96	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓			✓	
97	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓				
98	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					✓	