

Spain - Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

16 - 21 January 2017



Iberian Lynx by Debra Troy



Iberian Lynx by Ralph Tiller



Iberian Lynx by David and Sue Wylie



Eurasian Spoonbills by David and Sue Wylie

Report compiled by Byron Palacios
Images courtesy of Debra Troy, Ralph Tiller & David and Sue Wylie



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Byron Palacios (leader) together with 11 Naturetrek clients.

Day 1

Monday 16th January

Gatwick - Doñana National Park– El Rocío

It was a long day for many of us with an early start at London Gatwick to catch our flight to Seville, where the group assembled on arrival. After having a snack whilst our transport was sorted out, we were ready to set off. We left the Seville airport area and headed west towards Huelva before diverting to the north-eastern entrance of Doñana National Park at Dehesa de Abajo. 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 Glossy Ibis, Grey Heron, White and Black Storks, Common Pochard, Northern Shoveler, Black-necked Grebe, Western Marsh Harrier, Greater Flamingo, Great Egret and Northern Lapwing, amongst others.

We continued our drive, passing the outskirts of the village of Isla Mayor and then following the dirt track into the canal of Doñana, making a second stop at the old water pump house. We had stunning views of over thirty Black-crowned Night Herons basking in the sun along the shore of the canal. We also saw plenty of Marsh Harriers and the always hard-to-find Black-shouldered Kite. We found a beautiful Barn Owl on the way out of the park.

As the sun was setting, we continued our drive to El Rocío where we checked in at our comfortable hotel and, after a short break, gathered together to do our log of the day followed by dinner.

Day 2

Tuesday 17th January

Doñana National Park

We gathered for breakfast at the hotel's cafeteria before setting off on a very chilly morning to our first expedition within the core area of the national park, focussing on different hot spots of approximately ten Iberian Lynx territories, and looking carefully in every gap and clearing amongst the Mediterranean Forest vegetation. Finding one of the rarest cats in the world came to us unbelievably quickly. As soon as we entered the park onto the Royal Track, a group of park workers directed us straight to an Iberian Lynx! A lovely male was having his early stroll of the day and we tracked him down, getting amazing views of this lovely individual for a good 20 minutes. What a treat!

After this amazing encounter, we continued our search and excursion in the park. The morning was rather cold but sunny as we drove along the Raya Real (Royal Track), the widest sandy track which crosses the park from west to east, checking the adjacent areas of dehesa and Mediterranean forest comprising a blend of Cork Oaks, Wild Olives and meadows. 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 and birds such as Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpie, Red-legged Partridge and Meadow Pipit, amongst others.

The narrower tracks took us to a nice typical dehesa habitat known as Hierba Buena, where we scanned the surround lush landscape and saw Hoopoe, Iberian (Southern) Grey Shrike, Iberian Chiffchaff, Stonechat, Thekla Lark and Sardinian Warbler. After an enjoyable walk, we boarded our vehicle and continued a second search for

Lynx, trying really hard by scanning every corner, gap and track where our binoculars could get! Fresh tracks found along the sandy strips where our consolation. We drove back to El Rocio for lunch in a nice corner of the village, which was delicious. After lunch we had a break. Some of us went to the marshes to check the wintering waterfowl and saw Shoveler, Pintail, Snipe, Greater Flamingo, hundreds of wintering Greylag Geese, Black-winged Stilt and many others.

We set out on our afternoon drive into the core area of the park to search for the mighty cat. We drove to the end of the long tracks through the Mediterranean forest and marisma (flooded heath land), where we spotted Griffon Vulture, Spanish Sparrow, Little Owl, Western (Purple) Swamphen, Common Crane, Hen and Marsh Harriers, Short-eared Owl, Great Egret and Green Sandpiper, amongst others. We had a comfort stop at Valverde Visitor Centre before returning to the core area. Similar wildlife to that found during our mourning excursion was seen again: no feline signs but Red Deer and Wild Boar pottering around instead. Dusk was about to obscure our sunny day and there was a gorgeous sunset. As the light faded away, we headed back to El Rocio, checking the tracks before leaving the national park; just in case!

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

Day 3

Wednesday 18th January

Doñana National Park – El Rocio – Sierra de Andujar 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 the first bits of light to continue our Iberian Lynx quest. It was another cold morning due to northerly winds affecting the Iberian Peninsula, which was very unusual for January. We coped well with the cold and enjoyed the sounds of the wilderness of this lovely place as we drifted along the sandy tracks. Our search gave us enjoyable views of Wild Boar, Red Deer, Fallow Deer, and lots of Rabbits and Red-legged Partridges. After four hours searching for any sign of Iberian Lynx, a young individual crossed the track right in front of our vehicle, producing fairly good but very quick views. Unfortunately, she went behind a Lentiscus bush and vanished from sight.

We were back in the hotel at El Rocio by noon to pack our belongings before setting off to Andujar. We made a stop in the outskirts of the village of Aznalcázar where we had picnic lunch along the river Guadiana. We then continued, using the motorway and making a stop for coffee and facilities half way on our journey. We arrived at the town of Andujar and turned northeast towards the mountains and to the village of Viñas de Peñallana, where Los Pinos hotel is located. After checking in, we took a well deserved break and had a delicious dinner, followed by a good night sleep!

Day 4

Thursday 19th January

Andujar Natural Park

After an early breakfast, we drove for about forty minutes towards the valley of La Lancha, to explore and scan this area which has been a successful Iberian Lynx spot over the years. It was rather misty, but dry which was perfect for the feline's taste. After choosing our spot, we started to scan throughout the valley, finding other

important wildlife such as European Mouflon, Spanish Imperial Eagle, plenty of Red and Fallow Deer, Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, Iberian Magpies, Red-legged Partridge and Rabbit, amongst others.

By mid-morning it was a clear blue sky, and then clouds covered the sun. A movement was spotted up the valley. We moved to the area to scan and found a fantastic male Iberian Lynx, incredibly well hidden between two bushes. It wasn't long till he started to move around, exploring the area and spraying to let his potential competitors and females know he's around. We had spectacular close views of this wonderful animal. It was amazing! 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 the encounter. We had our lunch here while watching a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles surfing the sky alongside Griffon and Cinereous Vultures.

After lunch we moved to another potential lynx area. We stopped whilst passing our lodge for a coffee break before continuing to the lower basin of the river Jandula, where we spent the rest of the afternoon walking along the track and by the river. This produced views of European Otter that quietly appeared in the river. As the light was fading we drove back to our hotel to get ready for drinks and nibbles, followed by delicious local gastronomy.

Day 5

Friday 20th January

Andujar Natural Park

We started the day with all the energy to go back into the field despite the very cold weather. After an early breakfast, we set off and drove to the lower basin of the river Jandula where we patiently scanned the river. We spotted Great Cormorants and Grey Herons perched like statues. Our searching in the cold paid off as we had great views of another Otter on the opposite shore. We then continued walking along the track, watching Hawfinch, Spotless Starling, and Iberian Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers amongst others. Once at the old dam bridge we had good views of other birds including Sardinian Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Robin, Black Redstart, Grey and White Wagtails, and Great Grey Shrike. After a successful morning, we found a nice spot along the river for our picnic lunch. We then returned to our lodge for a drink before setting off to the hotspot of La Lancha.

We drove straight to the dam at the end of the track, from where we spotted great wildlife such as Cinereous Vulture, Black Redstart, Crag Martin, and a very nice group of Spanish Ibex with lovely views of handsome males. We then drove to La Lancha where we started scanning the area, finding European Mouflon, Red and Fallow Deer, and lovely views of Spanish Imperial Eagle and Cinereous and Griffon Vultures. An Iberian Lynx was spotted moving in the adjacent valley. We rapidly walked to the spot and got brief views of a male Iberian Lynx which walked into a dip next to the track. It was frustrating but we waited patiently till the cat turned up again, walking up hill and giving fantastic views to all the wildlife lovers who were there. For us, it was our third Iberian Lynx in a row and we could not have hoped for more!

As the natural light faded with a gorgeous sunset, we made our way back to our hotel, very happy and pleased with the wildlife seen and appreciating the good luck in finding one of the rarest felines of the world on three consecutive days! Plenty of wine, beer and cava to celebrate this wonderful tour awaited us in the dining area, alongside large amounts of tasty local food. We enjoyed our last supper together as a truly good farewell from this lovely and wild area!

Day 6

Saturday 21st January

Andujar Natural Park – Seville airport

Today we had an early start for our two-and-a-half-hour journey back to Seville airport. We dropped four fellow travellers in Cordoba before the rest of us arrived at the airport, checked in and boarded our flight back to Gatwick.

Once at Gatwick, we collected our luggage and said our goodbyes and best wishes after an amazing experience in the lovely Andalucía. An experience which allowed us to be lucky enough to see lots of great wildlife, the landscape, fine gastronomy and locations in this fantastic part of Spain; and most importantly, fantastic views of the mysterious and very rare Iberian Lynx!

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Glossy Ibis by David and Sue Wylie

Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	January				
			16	17	18	19	20
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	European Mouflon	<i>Ovis orientalis musimon</i>				✓	✓
6	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>					✓
7	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓		✓	✓
9	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				✓	✓
10	Common Pipistrel	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	✓	✓			
11	Goefroy's Bat	<i>Myotis emarginatus</i>	✓	✓			

Birds

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓		
2	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>		✓	✓		
3	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			✓		
4	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>		✓			
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓		
7	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓	✓		
8	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓		
9	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓	✓		
10	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓			
11	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓	✓		
13	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓			
14	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	✓				
15	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
16	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		✓			
17	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	✓				
18	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓		
19	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
20	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓		
21	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓				
22	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓		
23	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓			
25	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓		
26	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓			✓	✓
27	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓			
28	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	✓		✓		
29	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓		✓	✓
30	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓		✓	✓
31	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
32	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	✓		
34	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	January				
			16	17	18	19	20
35	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	✓				
36	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓		
37	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓	✓			
39	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
40	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓		
41	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
42	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
43	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓	✓			
44	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	✓		
45	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		✓	✓		
46	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓			
47	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓	✓			
48	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
49	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>			✓		
50	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓			
51	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Barn Owl	<i>Tito alba</i>	✓				
54	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓			✓
55	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>		✓			
56	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓	
57	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>					h
59	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓	✓
60	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>				✓	✓
61	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
62	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓		✓	✓
63	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>					✓
64	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓	✓	
65	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>					✓
68	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓		
69	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
70	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>					h
71	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓	✓	✓
72	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		h		✓	✓
73	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>		h			
74	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			
75	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓			
76	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓		
77	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓		
78	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	✓
79	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓		
80	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓	h		h
81	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	✓
82	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		✓			
84	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓			
85	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	January				
			16	17	18	19	20
86	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	h	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>					✓
88	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					✓
89	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓	✓
90	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓			
91	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	✓
94	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓	✓	✓
95	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
98	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
99	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓	✓			
100	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>				✓	✓
101	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	✓
102	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
104	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>				✓	✓
106	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓	✓	✓
107	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓			
108	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
109	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
110	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
111	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					h
112	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>					h



Barn Owl by Debra Troy