

# Spain - Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

19 - 24 November 2018

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Report compiled by Niki Williamson



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Tour participants: Simon Tonkin & Niki Williamson (leaders) and a group of twelve Naturetrek clients.

## Summary

This two-base tour took in the atmospheric misty woodlands and wetlands of Doñana Natural Park, as well as the sweeping Cork Oak forests of the Sierra Morena near Andújar. The group were thrilled by encounters with Spanish Ibex, Wild Boar, Mouflon, Red and Fallow Deer, as well as stunning raptors such as Spanish Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle, Cinereous Vulture and Black-winged Kite.

Doñana's wetlands were outstanding, and the nature-loving group were blown away by the spectacle of views of thousands of Greater Flamingoes and Glossy Ibis, as well as Red-knobbed Coot, Red-crested Pochard, Purple Swamphen and Marbled Duck. In Andújar, an impressive array of mountain and farmland wildlife filled our days, including Blue Rock Thrush, Schreiber's Bats, Iberian Magpies, Eurasian Hoopoe, Iberian Grey Shrikes and Crag Martins.

But of course, the outstanding highlight was our much sought-after encounter with a completely wild Iberian Lynx, relaxing and sauntering through her mountain habitat and giving various memorable sightings throughout an afternoon.

## Day 1

### Monday 19th November

Simon & Niki met the group at Seville airport, and we were soon in our minibuses, skirting the northern outskirts of the city and spotting White Storks, Common Kestrels and Spotless Starlings, as well as our first Iberian Magpies, on the short drive to El Rocío.

After driving through the picturesque, sand-covered streets of this Spanish horseman's town, admiring its Wild West ambience, we arrived at the hotel for drinks and nibbles. We took some time to settle in before making the most of our proximity to Madre de las Marismas, the beautiful village-edge lagoon, just a few paces from the hotel.

And what an idyllic sight it was! In the evening light, Red Deer, Greater Flamingoes, Black-winged Stilts and Eurasian Spoonbills waded through the shallows. Among the hundreds of bobbing Northern Shovelers, we picked out numerous Northern Pintails and Common Teal. Wintering Greylag Geese – the symbol of Doñana National Park – grazed along the water's edge.

In the reeds were many Common Chiffchaffs and Zitting Cisticolas. Penduline Tits could be heard calling. Two astonishingly iridescent Purple Swamphens showed well as they squabbled for winter territories.

As the sun set on our first evening, we drifted back to the bar for a pre-dinner *manzanilla* sherry and to reflect on our promising start!

## Day 2

### Tuesday 20th November

At first light we were collected by our hosts for the day, Doñana Nature. This excellent wildlife-watching company is the only one authorised to enter the northern parts of the Doñana National Park, and by using the

company's access-all-areas 4x4 bus we knew we'd be in for the best possible exploration of the park's wildlife, whatever came our way!

We spent the first hours of the day exploring Doñana's beautiful pine woods and native Mediterranean scrub. Our search brought us closer to Red and Fallow Deer, and a family of Wild Boar that sprinted quickly away into the undergrowth. We also saw many European Rabbits and Red-legged Partridges, some of our elusive feline's favourite snack items! We had great views of a Booted Eagle and Common Buzzards overhead.

We headed out to the heathland, another area with plentiful European Rabbits where Iberian Lynx can be sighted. We soon realised that there were numerous Griffon Vultures around us, and they appeared to be concentrating in one area. Stopping to investigate, we found that they and many other carrion feeders were gathering around a recently ex-ungulate! As well as the more numerous Griffons, we also saw Cinereous Vulture, Northern Ravens, Red Kites, and a single juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle getting in on the action. Seemingly above scavenging, a Marsh Harrier and a gorgeous male Hen Harrier continued hunting fresher meat nearby.

Our journey onwards was escorted by many Eurasian Hoopoes, both perched along the track and flying alongside the bus.

Heading on to the lagoon at the Jose Valverde Visitor Centre, we were treated to quite exceptional views of a Black-winged Kite perched on telegraph wires, consuming a small rodent. From the lake's edge we enjoyed views of Red-crested and Common Pochards and Black-necked Grebes amongst the vast assemblage of dabbling and diving ducks, egrets, herons and waterbirds. Purple Swamphens squawked from the shoreline vegetation. Spurred from their roost by some unknown disturbance, a flock of twenty or more Black-crowned Night Herons drifted overhead. As we enjoyed a warming coffee, Black-winged Stilts wandered across our sight and Cetti's Warblers sang explosively from the bushes around us. Great Egrets showed well and large flocks of Glossy Ibis drifted through the air.

At lunch we sampled more traditional Doñana fare including *pescados fritos*, a selection of fried seafood titbits, and *salmorejo*, a delicious, thickened version of *gazpacho*, before taking some time to wander the sandy streets of El Rocío and enjoy the traditional Spanish architecture.

Reconvening after a nice *siesta*, we headed into the park once more where our hosts allowed us a stroll in the permit-only area of the park known as Hierba Buena. This area of heath offers exceptional habitat, and here despite the drizzle we enjoyed views of a male Wild Boar and a stag Fallow Deer, as well as Iberian Grey Shrike, Thekla's Lark, Short-toed Eagle and Red Kite.

As the afternoon closed in, we headed back through the forest, and explored our active Lynx territories again. Although this typical feline was clearly avoiding the wet weather, we still enjoyed the sights and sounds of her realm, full of European Rabbits, Short-toed Treecreepers, Woodlarks and Firecrests.

## Day 3

## Wednesday 21st November

This morning we set off once more with Doñana Nature to spend more time in the realm of the Lynx, while enjoying whatever wildlife came our way during our search. Woodlarks sang from the pines and we enjoyed enormous flocks of Iberian Magpies. A Little Owl perched in the trees among calmly-grazing herds of Red Deer, which included some truly magnificent stags.

Towards the end of the morning, David glimpsed a low, sauntering shape disappearing into the tall scrubby vegetation. Despite much waiting and searching the area, this probable Lynx eluded us, and we were left hungry for now! Such is the nature of this elusive cat...

We took our picnic at a viewpoint overlooking the gorgeous Madre de las Marismas, and took the opportunity to enjoy the tranquil scenes of many Red Deer and waterbirds getting on with their daily lives as we enjoyed a selection of tasty local cheeses, meats, salads, olives, freshly baked bread, washed down with fruit juices or wine. To break up the drive to our second base near Andújar, we stopped at the wetland nature reserve of Dehesa de Abajo. This year due to heavy rains, the water levels were perfect and the natural spectacle was extraordinary, and Simon & Niki knew that the nature-loving group would love it!

For the birders in the group, we found some real 'Doñana specialities' in the form of Red-knobbed Coot and Marbled Duck, but few people could resist letting out a "Squeeee!" at the thousands of Greater Flamingoes and Northern Shovelers which covered the lake's surface, White Storks bill-clapping on their nests and an unexpected wintering flock of brightly-coloured *flava* Yellow Wagtails.

The journey up to our second base in Viña de las Peñallanas went smoothly, and we arrived in time to settle in to our individual villas before drinks and *tapas*, followed by a delicious dinner, packed full of local specialities.

## Day 4

## Thursday 22nd November

After an invigorating dose of strong coffee, freshly-squeezed orange juice and chunky *tostadas*, we headed out to spend the morning at an area known as La Lancha, where Iberian Lynx are very active and frequently sighted. As with all mammal-watching, ours was a waiting game, and how lucky we were to have such abundant wildlife to watch while we hoped for luck and the arrival of the star turn!

Across the landscape before us, a live wildlife documentary unfolded! As well as a chance to observe the herds of Red and Fallow Deer moving through the landscape, we also saw an outstanding male Mouflon as he wandered across the hill, giving exceptional views.

A Spanish Imperial Eagle and Cinereous Vultures were perched in treetops in the valley, and we enjoyed calling Dartford Warbler, low Crag Martins and Griffon Vultures.

For a few brief seconds, everyone's hearts were pounding after Niki caught sight of a female Lynx on a distant hilltop for two or three seconds. But frustratingly, she was soon invisible amongst the scrub, and our quest continued.

As lunchtime approached, we headed to a nearby area at Mirador de Jándula, where we could look out over a different part of the area's spectacular landscape and wildlife while we ate, all the while alert for nearby Lynxes! Rock Buntings called and Griffon Vultures and Red-Billed Cough passed overhead. Nearby, a pair of Little Owls showed well.

We drove down to the reservoir dam, and soon spotted some young Spanish Ibex up on the rocks. Further on, we found a group of males of the species of various ages, including one stomping adult with enormous horns! In a nearby cave, we quietly observed Schreiber's Bats roosting, and also enjoyed an adult male Blue Rock Thrush perched on nearby rocks.

The shadows were starting to lengthen, so it was time to head back to La Lancha and try our luck again for Lynx activity. We relaxed and enjoyed the scenery and wildlife, and – as is the way – suddenly there was a stunning female Iberian Lynx just metres away! She sauntered to the side of a mastic bush and sat down, looking at us, and we were able to view her cool stare in the scope! Soon she stalked off down a sandy track, but for the rest of the afternoon, she treated us to several more glimpses as she worked her way along the valley.

What an thrilling day, packed with outstanding wildlife! We celebrated it with another delicious dinner at Los Pinos, where our shared starters featured a beautiful tomato, onion and garlic salad seasoned with local olive oil and salt, a partridge pâté and an egg and potato dish known as *patatas a la pobre* but featuring local ham for those that eat meat.

## Day 5

## Friday 23rd November

Today we returned to La Lancha in the hope of getting further views of our cat, which we knew was active in the area. As the morning mist lifted, we clearly heard her calling from the same area where we had left her the previous evening. We were able to track her movement through the landscape by the groups of fleeing Red-legged Partridges and anxious Iberian Magpies! A lovely way to experience the presence of this fine feline.

We headed to another active territory for midday, by the banks of the Rio Jándula. We enjoyed our picnic at a peaceful riverside spot, surrounded by wildlife. Nuthatches were in the trees, Grey Wagtails frequented the waters edge and a Cetti's Warbler showed well at the shore. But the best moment – and for many a highlight of the trip – was when a Golden Eagle flew low over the group and circled for several minutes, being mobbed by a Common Buzzard which look miniscule by comparison!

As these birds rose higher, they joined a group of raptors which included Griffon and Cinereous Vultures and a Spanish Imperial Eagle!

We moved on to another area where Iberian Lynx are frequently sighted, by the dam of the reservoir. We spent time at both sides of it and enjoyed an afternoon of Hawfinches, Common Kingfishers, Rock Sparrows and another view of a Spanish Imperial Eagle. We also found two roosting Golden Eagles high on the crags.

Our last stop of the day was at Mirador del Peregrino, a delightful spot overlooking the whole valley as far as the monastery high in the hills at Santuario de Virgen de la Cabeza. Here we found several more Spanish Ibexes, peacefully grazing on the rocky slopes, before heading back for our final fantastic dinner at Los Pinos.

## Day 6

Saturday 24th November

For most, the flight from Seville airport meant an early start, so we gathered into the minibus and started our journey home. Having made good time towards the airport, we stopped at a roadside café for a coffee and a final reminisce. There had been some superb experiences with our cats, some face to face, some auditory, and some simply enjoying all the wildlife in their realm!

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## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	November					
			19	20	21	22	23	24
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>				1	1H	
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		2		✓	✓	✓
4	European Mouflon	<i>Ovis orientalis musimon</i>				1		
5	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				6	3+	
6	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		1				3
8	Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>					✓	
9	Schreiber's Bat	<i>Miniopterus schreibersii</i>				✓		

## Birds

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓			
2	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓			
3	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓	✓			
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓		1	
5	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	5+		✓			
6	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	4	2	✓			
7	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>			6			
8	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>		8	✓			
9	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	10+	10	✓			
10	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>		2				
11	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓		1	
13	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		4	✓			
14	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		2				
15	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	15+		200+			
16	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	3	1	30+			
17	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	5	50+	150+			
18	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	10	7	50+			
19	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		40+				
20	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
21	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	2	4	✓
22	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		6	10+			
23	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	5+			
24	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	2	3	
25	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		1	1			1
26	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		30+		8	20+	3
27	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		1	1	3	5+	1
28	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		1				
29	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		1				
30	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>				1	3	
31	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>					3	
32	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				2	5+	1
33	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	2	20+	✓			
34	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		1				
35	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓			2
36	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	4	✓		3+	10+

	Common name	Scientific name	November					
			19	20	21	22	23	24
37	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	2	4	5+			
38	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	2	3	3		1	
39	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>			1			
40	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓			
41	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	8+	20+	30+			
42	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			5+			
43	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		30+	✓			
44	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		4	4			
45	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			10+			
46	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	2	10+	✓			
47	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
48	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>			✓			
49	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	1		✓			
50	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>			1			
51	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
52	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
54	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>					1	1
55	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				3	2	1
56	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			1		2	
57	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	2	8	3	2	5+	3
58	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				2	3	1
59	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>				5+	20+	10+
60	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2	10+	4			1
61	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>						1
62	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		3	2			
63	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				✓	✓	✓
64	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>				3		
67	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	20+	3+		1	3
69	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				2	3+	2
70	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	2	5+	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	1	3	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	1		2			
73	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			1		1	1
74	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		2				
75	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		2		1	1	1
76	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
77	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			2			
78	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	✓	✓
79	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	2	4	3		3+	
80	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	✓	
81	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		3	✓			
83	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	2		✓	✓	✓	✓
84	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				3	2	
85	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>					2	1
87	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	November					
			19	20	21	22	23	24
88	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				1	5+	2
89	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		2	2	2	✓	✓
90	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
91	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				2	3	2
93	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				1	2	
96	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
97	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
98	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>					1	
99	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>					1	
100	Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>			✓			
101	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				1	2	
102	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	2	10+	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	10+	✓	✓
104	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>					4+	2
106	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		4	✓		✓	✓
107	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		3	✓			✓
108	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
109	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			3+	1	10+	2
110	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					2	
112	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>						1

### Reptiles & Amphibians

1	Iberian Pond Tortoise	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>					✓	
2	Iberian Pool Frog	<i>Rana iberica</i>		✓	✓		✓	
3	Mediterranean Tree Frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	
4	Natterjack Toad	<i>Epidalia calamita</i>			✓			

### Dragonflies

1	Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>		✓	✓			
2	Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>		✓	✓			