

Spain - Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

2 - 7 December 2019

Report by Byron Palacios



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

Day 1

Monday 2nd December

Gatwick – Seville – Doñana National Park (Isla Mayor) – El Rocio

It was a long day for many of us who left London Gatwick early in the morning in order to catch our flight landing early afternoon in Seville where we met our last tour participant who. After a snack whilst the van was picked up, we were ready to set off leaving the Seville airport area and heading west towards Huelva, diverting into the north-eastern entrance of Doñana National Park near the village of Isla Mayor.

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 Herons, White Storks, Black Stork, Western Marsh Harrier, thousands of Greater Flamingos in the distance, Northern Lapwings, as well as Black-winged Kites. We continued our drive towards El Rocío where we checked in our comfortable hotel and, after a very short break by the marshes, we gathered together again for some drinks and dinner.

Day 2

Tuesday 3rd December

Doñana National Park (Raya Real – Hierba Buena – FAO Visitors Centre)

We gathered together for breakfast at the hotel's cafeteria in the lovely early morning at El Rocio. We jumped on our 4x4 van ready to have our first expedition within the core area of the national park where some ten Iberian Lynx territories are known to be, looking carefully every single gap and clearings amongst the Mediterranean Forest vegetation. We also checked the border with the Mediterranean forest and the flooded heathland (Marisma) where we had lots of Goldfinches, Stonechats, Corn Buntings, Red Kites, Eurasian Kestrel, and plenty of Red Deer. We then drove farther east to the lovely area of Hierba Buena, a gorgeous *Dehesa* (cork oaks and meadows) which produced great views of the endemic Spanish Imperial Eagle we all enjoyed a lot watching! We took a stroll along this area and had great views of Hoopoes, Iberian Grey Shrike, Stonechats, and four Stone Curlews. After this great morning, we drove back to El Rocio in order to have our delicious lunch. After lunch, we took a break before another excursion to the park.

We were all ready to drive back to the core area of the park searching for the mighty cat, driving to the end of the long tracks along the Mediterranean forest and the Marisma where we saw lots of Hoopoes, Eurasian Kestrel, Corn Buntings, Stonechat and Zitting Cisticolas. We soon arrived to the FAO visitors centre on foot after watching a marsh full of Greylag Geese and Black-backed Stilts; we also had great views of Western Swamphen. We then drove back to the core area of the national park where we continued our careful search for felines but despite the hard work we had no signs of Lynx.

We then drove back to El Rocío where we arrived after dusk for a quick break, drinks, dinner and big wishes for better Lynx luck for the following day.

Day 3

Wednesday 4th December

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

We had another early morning start heading into Doñana National Park as the sun rose. Once again, we drove along the Raya Real track enjoying the sounds of the wilderness of this lovely place as we drifted along the sandy tracks in search for Lynx. We search really hard again getting more nice views of Red Deer, lots of European Rabbits and Red-legged Partridge, main source of food for Iberian Lynx. We spent our first hour driving our 4x4 through very sandy tracks until one of us caught something with the corner of the eye...and there it was, an amazing male Iberian Lynx!! We could not believe it, after all those efforts we made, the sense of relief was incredible. The feline crossed the scrubby area and swiftly moved to the sandy track from where we had the chance to enjoy it for over 20 minutes at a very short distance...WOW, a truly terrific experience! The gorgeous Iberian Lynx continued his morning meandering and so we did, very happy with the views we had; we made a stop at the end of the Mediterranean forest and edge of the Marisma (flooded heathland) in order to stretch our legs and to digest the experience of seeing one of the rarest mammals in the world!

Very happy and satisfied, we drove back to our hotel in El Rocio in order to get our bags packed and set off to Andujar, having a delicious lunch in the area known as El Acebuche along the way. We then hit the motorway towards Andújar (via Seville) taking a coffee break half way along the journey; arriving to the town of Andújar and diverting northeast towards the mountains and into 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's sleep!

Day 4

Thursday 5th December

Andujar Natural Park (La Lancha –river Jandula)

We started this day with all the energy to go back in the field in a rather misty, but dry and promising weather. We hit the track which leads to the upper valley of the river Jandula; once here, we had a good scan over the vast area which covers around three territories finding plenty of Red and Fallow Deer, the always gorgeous Spanish Imperial Eagles, a pair, both sat on a boulder and flying in front of us, fantastic! Plenty of Cinereous Vultures were seen as well as lots of Griffon Vultures and a Blue Rock Thrush. We also found two groups of Spanish Ibex, one of them while having lunch, very very close to us!

After lunch and a short comfort stop at our lodge en route, we hit the road and drove down the track into the area known as El Encinarejo, just along the river Jandula and the old damn. From here, we had wonderful views of Blackcap, Spotless Starling, Sardinian Warbler, European Robin, Iberian Magpie, Black Redstart, Grey Wagtails, and fantastic views of European Otter which was hunting and eating lots of crayfish right below us from the bridge! Happy with this lovely encounter with Otters, we decided to call in to our lodge in order to take a break and later, gathered together for another nice time at the bar with the locals, drinking nice drinks and chatting about our amazing day, followed by a delicious dinner!

Day 5

Friday 6th December

Andujar Natural Park (La Lancha)

After an early breakfast, we enjoyed watching a bunch of Hawfinch (two dozen!) and Spotless Starling from our hotel's car park, amazing! We then drove for about forty minutes towards the valley of La Lancha in order to explore this area which has been a very successful Iberian Lynx spot over the last years. It was a nice sunny morning, slightly windy and chilly at times. After choosing the right spot, we started scanning throughout the mountain Mediterranean forest spotting interesting wildlife such as Red and Follow Deer, Iberian Magpies, Red-legged Partridge and European Rabbit, Blue Rock Thrush, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Crag Martins, amongst others. We moved up the track and started scanning from one of the sheltered look-out points from where we managed to see Cinereous and Griffon Vultures, and others. We found here a nice spot for our picnic whilst scanning the valley which produced more Spanish Ibex very near once again!

After lunch, we moved to another viewpoint located a couple of kilometres down the main track from where we continued scanning and scanning the valley with no results. The light was fading away after 18.00, so we decided to drive back to our lodge after dusk.

We then took the usual break and got ready to enjoy drinks and nibbles followed by our final dinner together enjoying once again the delicious local gastronomy of the place.

Day 6

Saturday 7th December

Andujar Natural Park – Seville airport

We started today very early, in order to start our two-and-a-half-hours journey back to Seville airport on a fairly busy motorway. We had a comfort stop along the way and then we arrived at the airport in time to check in our luggage and boarded our flight back to Gatwick, all in time. Once in Gatwick, we collected our luggage and said good bye to each other with all the best wishes, especially after sharing an great week experiencing the lovely Andalucía; an experience which allowed us to be lucky enough to see lots of great wildlife, the landscape, fine gastronomy and picturesque locations of this fantastic part of Spain!!

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Species Lists

Mammals (✓=recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	December						
			2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>			1				
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
3	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>				✓	✓		
4	European Mouflon	<i>Ovis orientalis musimon</i>				4			
5	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				✓	✓		
6	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
7	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	✓						

Birds (h = heard only)

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓				
2	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓					
3	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓					
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓					
6	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓					
7	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</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	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</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	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓					
20	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓		✓	✓		
21	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				✓	✓		
22	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓		✓			
23	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓					
24	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓					
25	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓				
26	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
27	Western Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		✓					
28	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓					
29	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓				
30	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓				
31	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓				
32	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓						
33	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	✓						
34	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓						
35	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓					
36	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓					
37	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓					
38	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	December						
			2	3	4	5	6	7	
39	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓					
40	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				✓			
41	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓			
42	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
43	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓				
44	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>				✓	✓		
45	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓				
46	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓					
47	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
48	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
49	Carion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓						
50	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		
51	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				✓			
52	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓			✓	✓		
53	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>				✓	✓		
54	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			✓				
55	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓					
56	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓				
57	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	✓		
58	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	h					
59	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	✓		
60	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
61	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓					
62	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓			✓	✓		
63	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			✓				
64	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>				✓			
65	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>						✓	
66	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
67	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
68	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	✓		
69	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
70	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
71	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				✓	✓		
72	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓				
73	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
74	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓			
75	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	✓		
76	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
77	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
78	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
79	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>						✓	
80	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>						✓	
81	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓				
82	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
83	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓			✓	✓		