

Spain - Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

26 - 31 January 2020



Iberian Lynx Images by Andrew Crowder

Report compiled by Byron Palacios
Images courtesy of Andrew Crowder



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Summary

It is worth remembering that the Iberian Lynx is one of the rarest cats on the planet, with unpredictable behaviour as they could be diurnal, crepuscular and nocturnal during the hot period of the year. Any sighting of an Iberian Lynx in the wild, no matter how brief it is, is a great result and we should consider ourselves very lucky and fortunate. Although the population has increased in the last decade, it's still a very hard task finding this feline, even in the right areas. We were very lucky to get to see Iberian Lynx in four out of the six days of this expedition, not counting the travelling days - a great achievement! We spent a lot of time looking for them during this whole trip and we had a lot of luck when we bumped into two beautiful individuals in Doñana getting great views of them, plus another two different individuals in the mountains of Andujar! Hence, our efforts were greatly rewarded and we all enjoyed the truly incredible encounters with this mystical creature.

Day 1

Sunday 26th January

Gatwick – Seville – El Rocio – Doñana National Park

It was an early start for all of us in order to make it in time to our direct flight to Seville from Gatwick Airport. As soon as we arrived, we met up with Silvia and sorted out our vans and drove straight to El Rocio in the early afternoon. We checked in to the lovely Hotel El Toruño and after a short break we were ready to set off on our first expedition in 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 this elusive feline could be either hidden amongst the scrub or simply meandering around - you never know with cats! We then took a break in order to stretch our legs and look around the edge of the pristine Mediterranean forest and the marisma area (seasonally flooded heathland) where birds such as Sardinian Warbler, Common Kestrel and Common Buzzard were seen. Dozens of Red Deer and Iberian Magpies were seen along the marisma too. Suddenly, a different creature emerged from two Mediterranean Dwarf-Palms by the rangers old house...it was a beautiful and rather young male Iberian Lynx right in front of us, amazing, simply amazing! We all were astonished with this sighting, getting terrific views of the rarest cat in the world! With great pleasure, we watched this gorgeous Iberian Lynx until he continued with his walk, crossing right in front of our vehicles and vanishing amongst the thick vegetation. After a good five minutes watching him, we moved on, heading towards El Rocio looking at the gorgeous sunset in the horizon and very happy with the results of our very first excursion!

Once back in our lodge, we retired to our rooms in order to get ready for celebration drinks at the bar followed by a delicious dinner and a well-deserved restful night.

Day 2

Monday 27th January

Doñana National Park (Royal Track, Hierba Buena)

After a relaxing breakfast and still in the dark, we met our park ranger once again around 8.15am and headed to the heart of the National Park. We were all very positive given the success of the previous day. We were still looking for them of course, but we were also hoping to see other wildlife. We drove through concealed sandy

tracks once again, taking a nice stroll in the area known as Hierba Buena, a beautiful dehesa (meadows and cork oaks) which was very enjoyable as it produced great birds such as Red Kites, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Sardinian Warbler, Meadow Pipits, Goldfinch, Eurasian Hoopoe, White Stork, Stonechat, Iberian Grey Shrike, Black Redstart, among others. We also found lots of Red Deer walking together along the marisma. It was a nice walk and we all certainly enjoyed walking amongst this unique Mediterranean habitat, ending up back at El Rocio to take a break and enjoy a delicious local lunch and drinks.

After lunch and having taken a restful break, we checked the marshes behind our hotel which produced a few interesting bird species such as Black-winged Stilts, Common Snipe, Teal, Pintail, Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbills, Common Chiffchaff, Glossy Ibis, Marsh Harrier, Whites-spotted Bluethroat, and a very rare vagrant Isabeline Shrike, amongst others. Shortly after that, we jumped in our National Park vehicles and embraced the core area once again, searching the usual territories and getting as far as the Coto del Rey area making a stop in La Escupidera from where we had great views of Western Marsh Harriers, Grey Herons, Short-eared Owl, Hen Harrier, Red Kite, and a juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle. We then started heading back to the core area along the Royal Track. As soon as we were about to head to El Rocio, a lovely male Iberian Lynx was spotted nearby so we rushed to the spot where we found this beautiful male walking along the dehesa and showing himself very well to our impressed eyes...what a treat, a second Iberian Lynx for our tour, with amazing views for at least ten minutes!

We were very happy and satisfied when we arrived back at our lodge in El Rocio, just in time for celebrations, for the second evening in a row! We again enjoyed delicious local food at the restaurant with great wine, beer and others drinks.

Day 3

Tuesday 28th January

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

After a relaxing breakfast, we packed up our things and left El Rocio behind, heading east in order to start our drive to Andujar Natural Park. But before leaving Doñana National Park behind, we planned a good exploration of the north eastern areas not far from Seville. We drove around 45 minutes until we arrived in the area of Isla Mayor from where we entered the park along the irrigation canal that heads to the spot known as Lucio del Lobo, making a few stops along the way. By the old pump building, we saw Great Egret, Marsh Harrier, Black Stork, Hen Harrier, Spanish Sparrows, Cetti's Warbler, Grey Heron, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Common Cranes, and a group of nice large group of Black-crowned Night-Herons roosting by the main canal. We then continued birding along the tracks of Doñana, finding a group of Stone Curlews in one of the fields adjacent to the old park ranger's barracks, also several wintering Short-eared Owls. We also had one pair of Lesser Kestrels wintering again in Doñana as in previous years. Other birds seen here were Corn Bunting, Crested Lark, Glossy Ibis, Black-winged Kites, Greylag Geese, Common Cranes, and over a dozen Black Storks all relaxed in a field while ten Wild Boars ran across in the background...spectacular!

We continued with our excursion, driving to a different spot nearby called Dehesa de Abajo. This seasonal marsh was the only place with fresh water following the harsh summer which had left many of the water sources within the park completely dry. We found large numbers of water birds and waders here, perhaps from all over the park as the only water source left around. Dozens of Northern Shoveler, Grey Herons, Common and Red-crested Pochards, Mallard, Little Grebe, Great-crested Grebe, Black-necked Grebes, White Storks, Common Coots,

Purple Swamphen and a Booted Eagle soaring the sunny skies. The highlight of the visit to this wetland was the sightings of three Marbled Ducks found shortly after we got here! It was now lunchtime, so we drove towards the village of Aznalcázar where we found a very nice spot to have our picnic lunch, followed by our afternoon drive towards Andujar, taking a coffee break along the way.

Once in Andujar, we drove up to the mountains where our lodge was located, we checked in our rooms. After a short break, we met in order to enjoy some local drinks and nibbles, followed by a delicious and generous supper!

Day 4

Wednesday 29th January

Andujar Natural Park (La Lancha)

This morning, we had breakfast earlier while it was still dark and then went out to explore the area known as La Lancha. The mist covered most of the valley but it cleared up eventually. We found very interesting wildlife such as Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Eurasian Hoopoe, Iberian Magpie, Eurasian Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush, amongst others. We found a couple of Mouflon in the valley and shortly after that, we heard an alarm of Iberian Lynx: a good size male was drifting over the boulders area, not far from the hill top. He stopped and then continued his walk just below the top of the hill and sat down between two boulders. The light wasn't the best, but we had good views of him while he walked to the boulders and had great views while he was sitting all chilled. He then continued walking down the hill passing through bushes and boulders until he vanished.

Very happy with this sighting, we drove down the valley where we found a great spot to enjoy our picnic lunch in the sunshine and with terrific views of the valley right above the dam. After lunch, we took a short stroll to a lovely viewpoint which overlooked the river Jandula, from here we had terrific views of a two males Spanish Ibex, finding over a dozen of them later on. We also had great views of Golden Eagle, and more Griffon and Cinereous Vultures. Happy with our sightings, we drove back to the upper valley in order to keep looking for Iberian Lynx, and we spent the rest of the afternoon working very hard. As soon as we were about to drive back to our lodge, another male was spotted walking amongst bushes and boulders, disappearing after we had some views of him.

We started our drive back to our hotel at dusk and after a quick break, we gathered together at the bar for celebration drinks followed by another superb dinner and more drinks!

Day 5

Thursday 30th January

Andujar Natural Park (El Encinarejo – La Lancha)

We had a relaxing breakfast today before heading off again for another quest for Iberian Lynx. The morning was chilly, with a light layer of mist but sunny - perfect weather conditions for wildlife. We found lots of Red Deer on our drive to the river Jandula, and lots of Iberian Magpies were seen along the track together with Chaffinch, Black Redstart, Hoopoe, and Iberian Green Woodpecker. All of a sudden, a young Iberian Lynx was spotted right next to the main road in the area known as El Encinarejo. We all had great views but unfortunately not for that long, and despite the efforts we couldn't find him again. We continued our drive down to the river Jandula

where we took a walk along the track which goes parallel to the river and had great views of Woodlark, Cirl Bunting, Rock Sparrow, Grey Wagtail, Hawfinch and Rock Bunting.

We then drove to the La Lancha area where we found more Mouflon, Dartford Warblers, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Iberian Magpies, Sparrowhawk, Spanish Imperial Eagle, amongst others. We went to the usual spot to have lunch and drove down to the dam itself in order to take a short stroll afterwards. We found another group of Spanish Ibex which were closer than the previous day. We then drove back to our usual spot from where we continued our scanning patiently. It was paid off for some who had brief views of an Iberian Lynx. The feline started to make mating noises which called our attention and we soon spotted it walking down one of the ravines fairly slowly. The light was just fading away and it was difficult to put everyone on the cat with the light conditions but some managed good views through the telescopes as he was walking right in the open. He vanished eventually but he continued calling away, but we could not find it again.

As dusk arrived, it was time to make our way back to the hotel in order to get ready of our last supper together . We all enjoyed a great meal, celebrating the fantastic wildlife watched in the last week, particularly Iberian Lynx!

Day 6

Friday 31st January

Andujar – Seville – Lon Gatwick

We had an early breakfast today, and then had to say ‘hasta pronto Sierra de Andujar!’ (so long Sierra de Andujar!) and drive to the airport for our midday flight. We had some delicious sandwiches to take away with us too!

Once we had landed in Gatwick, we all gathered together and wished each other all the very best and a safe journey to our homes, after a great experience that we had together at the domains of the Iberian Lynx....

We were very lucky to have had so many sightings of the critically endangered Iberian Lynx, and this is how nature and wildlife works sometimes! Perhaps there were others in the bushes in the mountains of Andujar, but we certainly couldn't complain with the great number of sightings we had in the week, giving us a great taste of seeing this wonderful cat!

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Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	January					
			26	27	28	29	30	31
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>	1	1		2	2	
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>				3	2	
6	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				18	10	
7	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>		✓				
9	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>			10			
10	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				✓		
11	Soprano Pipistrel	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	✓	✓				
12	Garden Dormouse	<i>Eliomys quercinus</i>				✓		

Birds

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓			
2	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓			
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓			
5	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓				
6	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓			
7	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>			✓			
8	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>			✓			
9	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			✓			
10	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓			
12	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓			
13	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			✓			
14	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
15	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
16	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			✓			
17	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
18	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
19	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓			
20	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</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	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
28	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>				✓	✓	
29	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				✓	✓	
30	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>			✓			
31	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
32	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				✓		
33	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	January					
			26	27	28	29	30	31
34	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				✓		
35	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	✓			✓
36	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓	✓			
37	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
38	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
39	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓	✓	✓			
40	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
41	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓			
42	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>		✓				
43	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
44	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
45	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			✓			
46	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	✓			
47	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓			
48	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓		✓			
49	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		✓	✓			
50	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
51	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>			✓			
52	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
54	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			h	h	h	
55	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
56	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>			✓			
57	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					✓	
58	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
59	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>		✓				
60	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		h		✓	✓	
61	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>	✓			✓	✓	
62	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	✓		✓			
63	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
64	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓			✓	
65	Isabelline Shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus</i>		✓				
66	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax</i>				✓		
69	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓			
70	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>				✓	✓	
72	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		h				
73	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
74	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>					✓	
76	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		h				
77	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓				
78	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>			✓			✓
79	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓			
80	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	✓	
81	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓			✓	
82	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			✓	h	h	
83	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		h		✓	✓	
84	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	January					
			26	27	28	29	30	31
85	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	✓			
86	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓		✓	✓	
87	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				✓	✓	
88	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
89	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					✓	
90	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓	✓	
91	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	✓	✓		h		
92	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	✓	
95	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓		✓	✓	
96	White-spotted Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>		✓	✓			
97	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
98	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
99	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>					✓	
100	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				✓		
101	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
102	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓			
104	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>					✓	
105	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>					✓	
106	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
107	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
108	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
109	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>				✓	✓	
110	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
111	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
112	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
113	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
114	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
115	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					✓	
116	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>					✓	