

# Spain – Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

24th – 29th October 2021

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Iberian Lynx

Report & image compiled by Byron Palacios



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

## Day 1

**Sunday 24th October**

### Stansted – Seville – El Rocio

We left Stansted pretty much on time, arriving to a sunny and rather warm Seville. After going through all the airport formalities, we reassembled the whole group successfully in the arrivals area. After having a snack whilst we sorted out our minibus, we were ready to set off, leaving the Seville airport area and heading west towards Huelva, diverting towards El Rocío. We arrived to our hotel with its comfortable rooms and checked in, and after a very short break, we gathered together again to do our first stroll around the marshes. They were dry with a little patch of water left in the distance, full of Greater Flamingos, Northern Lapwing, Little and Cattle Egrets, Grey Heron, Eurasian Spoonbills, Spotless Starlings and a couple of Slender-billed Gulls. Nearer to us, amongst the reed-beds, a few European Stonechats, Zitting Cisticolas and Common Chiffchaffs were flycatching. The sunset was turning beautiful and picturesque, and it was time to retire to the bar in order to enjoy local drinks and nibbles, followed by a delicious dinner.

## Day 2

**Monday 25th October**

### Doñana National Park (Raya Real – FAO Visitors Centre)

We gathered together for an early breakfast at the hotel's cafeteria in a very fresh and beautiful morning. And just as dawn was breaking through, we boarded a 4x4 van with ranger José Manuel in order to start our search for Iberian Lynx in the core area of Doñana National Park. The sunrise was beautiful, perfect for photo opportunities as the many Iberian Magpies, Red-legged Partridge and Red Deer were constantly turning up by the side of the Royal Track. A local farmer driving by got in touch with our driver to report the sighting of a "creature", but nothing was seen at the spot when we got there, just fellow watchers also responding to the report. We then decided to think like a Lynx and drove to the other end of an adjacent track hoping she was going to emerge along that way, and there she was: a beautiful female Iberian Lynx walking along the edge of the Mediterranean forest and followed by her offspring, an approximately nine-month-old female. It was a wonderful sighting and we all treasured this unique first encounter with these lovely felines.

After enjoying this great moment, we drove a short distance in order to take a stroll around the area known as Hierba Buena. This beautiful dehesa habitat (meadows and Cork Oaks) produced lots of interesting birds such as Iberian Grey Shrike, Sardinian Warbler, European Stonechat, Corn Bunting, Woodlark, European Hoopoe, Red Kite and a distant perched Spanish Imperial Eagle. Towards noon, we drove back to El Rocio in order to take a break and to enjoy of a delicious local lunch.

In the mid afternoon, we drove into Doñana National Park again, this time to explore the marisma area (flooded heathland) which produced fantastic birds such as Little Owl, Spanish Yellow Wagtail, Iberian Grey Shrike, Black-shouldered Kite, Lesser Kestrel, Crested Lark and Montagu's Harrier, amongst others. In the wet marshes, we found Western Swamphen, Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Stilt and a pair of Marbled Duck, amongst other species. After having a great time in this area, we started to drive back to El Rocio but searching more Iberian Lynx territories along the core area. As we were driving very slowly along the Royal Track area, a young male

Iberian Lynx took a good look at us and jumped in the scrub very quickly...as youngsters normally do! Despite his speedy movement, some of us managed to get good views of him!

Very happy for the fantastic day we just had, we returned to our hotel for a well deserved break, delicious supper, celebrations and drinks!

## Day 3

**Tuesday 26th October**

### Doñana National Park (Raya Real) – La Rocina – Sierra de Andujar Natural Park

We had another early morning start heading into the core area of Doñana National Park in the very early morning and under gorgeous sunrise. 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 of lynx. We searched really hard, again getting more nice and enjoyable views of Red Deer, Red-legged Partridge, Iberian Magpies and a few European Rabbits, the latter two being the main food for Iberian Lynx. We were given a sudden heads-up by one of our driver's colleagues who spotted an Iberian Lynx just literally seconds before she passed by our vehicle, so we drove back to the spot but saw no signs of the cat. After waiting patiently, some of us managed to see a large male Iberian Lynx crossing the fire break behind us... it was only for five or 10 seconds, but very clear: a stocky male Iberian Lynx; however, there were no signs of him afterwards as we looked and looked for him!

After this quick lynx sighting, it was time for us to head back to our hotel in order to check out and to explore a nearby area known as La Rocina. Here, we had wonderful views of Booted Eagle, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper and Crested Tit, amongst others.

After this lovely walk and amazing successful morning with Iberian Lynx, we found a nice picnic spot nearby to enjoy our lunch, before hitting the motorway to start our journey to Andújar (via Seville), making a break for coffee and facilities half-way through the journey. We arrived at the town of Andújar and diverted north-east 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 sleep!

## Day 4

**Wednesday 27th October**

### Andujar Natural Park (La Lancha – River Jandula)

After an early breakfast, we drove for about 30 minutes towards the upper valley of La Lancha in order to explore and scan the multiple gullies which have been potential Iberian Lynx hotspots over the last few years. It was a sunny morning but generally a bit quiet. After choosing the right spot, we started to scan the different gullies, finding other important wildlife such as Blue Rock Thrush, Iberian Grey Shrike, Crested Tit, Dartford Warbler and having fantastic views of Spanish Imperial Eagle flying over the valley and very close. We also saw plenty of Red and Fallow Deer, Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, Iberian Magpies, Red-legged Partridge and European Rabbit, amongst others. The sky was clear blue, and the sun was shining, perfect for going to a different spot which overlooks the dam, from where we saw Golden Eagle, Crag Martins and more Cinereous and Griffon Vultures soaring over the hill tops and forming kettles.

We then found a nice place with great views of the dam to have our lunch; from here, we found a group of Spanish Ibex, alongside more Cinereous and Griffon Vultures. The sun was hitting the valley and temperatures went up to 27°C, so it was time to drive back to our lodge in order to take a little break before going out again in the mid afternoon. This time, we drove down the main road towards the river Jandula itself, taking the track that follows the river towards the old dam. The place was quiet, and we were very impressed by the quantity of wildlife sounds we heard here, with great views of active Kingfishers, Cetti's and Sardinian Warblers and Grey Wagtails by the river; flocks of Long-tailed, Blue and Great Tits, Iberian Magpies, Spotless Starlings and Rock Sparrows perched on top of trees and electric wires, and large squads of Great Cormorants were flying in formation, ready to go to their roosting place. It was a wonderful late afternoon with a breath-taking sunset!

The light was fading, so we drove back to our hotel in order to take a break and to get ready to enjoy drinks and nibbles followed by the delicious local gastronomy.

## Day 5

Thursday 28th October

### Andujar Natural Park (River Jandula & La Lancha)

Another fabulous morning! We had our early breakfast and soon drove down the main road and towards the lower basin of the river Jandula. We took a walk along the track that follows the river and soon we saw lots of bird activity: noisy flocks of Iberian Magpies, Hawfinch, Common Chiffchaff, Long-tailed, Blue and Great Tits, Short-toed Treecreeper, Crested Tit, Rock Bunting, Iberian Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Woodlark and a beautiful male Cirl Bunting perched on a branch and singing away! The river was full of activity with Great Cormorants, Grey Heron, European Kingfisher, White and Grey Wagtails, Sardinian Warblers and Blackcaps feeding by the shore. Then, a beautiful Eurasian Otter turned up from nowhere and right in front of us: it was great seeing her swimming and out on the shore for quite a good time, long enough to see her very well!

The time went by and soon the lunch arrangements took us to another spot at the top of the valley, from where we had great views of a very close soaring Golden Eagle, Cinereous and Griffon Vultures and plenty of Iberian Magpies crossing right in front of our picnic table. After enjoying our food at this super location, we drove to our hotel in order to take a break and to sort out our Covid-19 paperwork in preparation to our return flight to the UK.

Once completed, we set off to the upper valley of La Lancha in order to spend the rest of the afternoon there. Lots of Red and Fallow Deer were seen along the way, alongside Iberian Green Woodpecker, Corn Buntings, Iberian Magpies and a group of European Serin. Once at La Lancha, we chose a nicely located viewpoint from where we started scanning the adjacent valleys; Dartford Warbler, Black Redstarts, Iberian Magpies and European Jay were seen from here. I took a little stroll down the track on my own in order to check the next gully, when suddenly a good size male Iberian Lynx turned up from the bushes, so I called the rest of the group who got to where I was just in time to see this lovely creature. He was on the move, but he gave us the chance to see him through the telescope as he sat on top of a rock for at least one minute – fantastic: our fifth Iberian Lynx of the tour! He then continued walking along the bushes and disappeared (as they do!) and it wasn't seen again. We kept trying, but the natural light was fading away with a gorgeous sunset in front of our eyes, so we decided to drive back to our hotel, very, very happy and pleased with the wildlife seen and appreciating the good luck we had had finding them, especially another Iberian Lynx!



Plenty of wine, beer and local brut flowed to celebrate a fantastic last dinner together and this wonderful tour, alongside large amounts of tasty local food. Certainly, we were all in great spirits, sharing unforgettable memories which will be kept in our minds forever. We enjoyed our last supper together very much, a truly good farewell from this lovely and wild area!

## Day 6

Friday 29th October

### Andujar Natural Park – Seville airport

After a relaxing start, we enjoyed the very last morning in Andújar Natural Park by sharing the main moments of our expedition over a local breakfast. We then checked out and hit the road, in order to make it in time for our flights home, departing from Seville airport. Lots of birds were seen sporadically by my travel companions and myself during our drive: White Stork, Booted Eagle, Red Kite, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Little and Cattle Egrets, Crested Lark, Blackbird, Iberian Magpies, House Sparrows and Spotless Starlings.

We had a comfort stop along the way and then we arrived at the airport in time to check in our luggage and board our flight back to Stansted, which was on time. Three of us had a different flight to catch later on, so they stayed at an airport café after we said goodbye to them, wishing the best for them in the future. Once we arrived at Stansted, we collected our luggage and said goodbye to each other with all the best wishes, especially after an amazing experience lived in the last week in the lovely Andalucia! We were lucky enough to enjoy great wildlife, the landscapes, fine gastronomy and great locations of this fantastic part of Spain, and most importantly, fantastic views of the mysterious and very rare Iberian Lynx!

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## Checklists

### Mammals

	E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced		October					
	Common name	Scientific name	24	25	26	27	28	29
1	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		x	x	x	x	
2	Iberian Lynx - E	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>		3	1		1	
3	Egyptian Mongoose - I	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>		2				
4	Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>					1	
5	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		1				
6	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	
7	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>				x	x	
8	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				x		
	OTHER WILDLIFE:							
1	Ladder Snake							
2	Moorish Gecko							
3	Spiny-footed Lizard							

### Birds

	N=Near-endemic		October					
	Common name	Scientific name	24	25	26	27	28	29
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	x	x	x			
2	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		x				
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	x	x	x		x	
4	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>		x				
5	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		x				
6	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		x	x	x	x	
7	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x
8	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x
9	Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		x				
10	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		x		x		
11	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		x				
12	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	x	x	x			
13	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	x	x	x			
14	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	x	x	x			
15	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			x			
16	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		x				
17	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			x			
18	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	x					
19	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	x		x			
20	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>						x
21	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				x	x	
22	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	x		x			
23	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	x	x		x		x
24	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x

25	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	x					
26	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	x	x	x			x
27	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		x				
28	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		x	x	x	x	
29	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				x	x	
30	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>			x			x
31	Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		x			x	
32	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>					x	
33	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		x	x	x	x	
34	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		x	x			
35	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		x	x			
36	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		x	x			x
37	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	x	x	x		x	x
38	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		x			x	
39	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		x		x		
40	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				x	x	
41	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>		h	x			
42	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		h	x	x	x	
43	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>				x	x	
44	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		x				
45	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	x	x	x			x
46	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		x		x		
47	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				x	x	
48	Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x
49	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x
50	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	x	x				
51	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			x	x	x	
52	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			x	x	x	
53	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	x		x	x	x	
54	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>		h	x			
55	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		x	x	x		
56	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		h				
57	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		x	x			x
58	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				x	x	
59	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	x	x				
60	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		x	h	x	x	
61	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		x	x	x	x	
62	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		x	x	x	x	
63	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	x	x	x			
64	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			x	x	x	
65	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>		x	x	x	x	
66	Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>				x	x	
67	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			x			
68	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				x	x	
69	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		h			x	



70	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x
71	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x
72	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>				x	x	
73	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				x	x	
74	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	x	x	x	x	x	
75	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	x	x	x	x	x	
76	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>					x	
77	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				x		
78	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	x	x	x	x		
79	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		x				
80	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x
81	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				x		
82	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	x					
83	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				x	x	
84	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	x	X	x	x	x	x
85	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	x	x	x	x		
86	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	x	x	x	x	x	
87	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>				x	x	
88	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		x	x	x	x	
89	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		x	x	h		
90	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	x	x	x		x	
91	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>					x	
92	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		x	x	x	x	
93	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				x	x	
94	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				x		