

Spain – Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

28th November – 3rd December
2021



Iberian Lynx



Otter



Penduline Tit

Report & images compiled by Byron Palacios



Naturetrek Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Byron Palacios & Tom Mabbett (leaders) with 13 Naturetrek clients.

Foreword by Tom Mabbett

This was a special tour in many ways: It had been over two years since my last overseas tour leading and it felt extra special to be back out in Spain searching for wildlife. Most importantly, it was extra special as Byron Palacios was leading his 200th tour for Naturetrek! What a milestone of achievement!

Tour Summary

We were in search of one of the rarest cats on the planet and this elusive cat evaded us as we explored the fantastic Coto Doñana National Park, but to our delight we succeeded in our mission in the beautiful Sierra Morena, in the lovely mountains of Andújar. We enjoyed fantastic views of four different individuals of the Iberian Lynx on two different evenings, after a lot of scanning and perseverance. What a thrill to see this incredibly rare cat with prolonged views and to witness some special behaviour! We also enjoyed watching four Eurasian Otters, a lovely male Mouflon and Spanish Ibex, with birds including Spanish Imperial Eagle, Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, hundreds of Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Hoopoes, Iberian Magpies and Iberian Green Woodpeckers ... to name just a few. All with spectacular scenery in true wilderness with great food and most importantly lots of celebrations and great fun along the way.

Day 1

Sunday 28th November

London – Seville – El Rocío

We left from various airports around London and flew to Seville, arriving in the sunny Andalusian city right on time, with no delays. Other tour participants were already there waiting for us, so after going through all the airport formalities, we reassembled the whole group successfully in the arrivals area and drove to El Rocío, making a quick stop in La Dehesa de Abajo. Despite the lack of water in the marshes, we had the chance to see lots of Zitting Cisticola, Meadow Pipits, Grey Heron, Spotless Starling, Black Redstart, Common Chiffchaff and distant flocks of flying Black Storks, Greater Flamingos and Common Crane. It was a stunning end of the afternoon, with the setting sunshine painting breath-taking orange/pink tones in the sky: a great way to see Doñana and its surroundings in such gorgeous light! We continued our drive to El Rocío arriving at our hotel where we checked in its comfortable rooms.

Some of us went outside to keep on enjoying the sunset with the marshes behind the hotel turning beautiful and picturesque. It was then time for us to meet up at the bar in order to enjoy some drinks followed by a delicious dinner.

Day 2

Monday 29th November

Doñana National Park (Raya Real – Marisma area)

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 our 4x4 vehicles, accompanied by local rangers, 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. We worked very hard checking every possible hiding place in the bushes along the sandy tracks, but our felines seemed elusive this morning.

After an intensive search of the first portion of the core area, we drove a short distance in order to take a stroll around the area known as Hierba Buena. This beautiful Dehesa habitat (meadows & Cork Oaks) produced lots of interesting birds such as Iberian Grey Shrike, Sardinian Warbler, European Stonechat, Corn Bunting, Thekla's Lark, Eurasian Hoopoe, Red Kite and Griffon Vultures, amongst others.. Towards noon, we drove back to El Rocío in order to take a break and to enjoy of a delicious local lunch. We walked along the village marshes which produced Back Redstarts, Sardinian Warblers, Little Egrets, Common Snipe, European Stonechat, White Wagtail, Willow Warblers and Eurasian Penduline Tits.

In the mid afternoon, we drove back into Doñana National Park, this time to explore the Marisma area (flooded heathland) which produced fantastic birds such as Eurasian Kestrel, Crested Lark, Griffon Vultures, large flocks of European Golden Plovers, flying Common Cranes and Greylag Geese, amongst others. We drove back to the core area in order to keep searching for Iberian Lynx but no luck today, so we returned to our hotel in El Rocío for a well-deserved break, delicious supper, and drinks.

Day 3

Tuesday 30th November

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

We had another early morning start and breakfast, 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 for 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 main food for Iberian Lynx! We made a stop in order to stretch our legs and scan the border area of the Mediterranean forest and the Marisma area, watching large flocks of Corn Buntings, Goldfinches, Linnets, Greylag Geese, Greater Flamingos, amongst others.

After this morning excursion, it was time for us to head back to our hotel in order to check out with our belongings and to explore a nearby area known as La Rocina. Here, we had wonderful views of Marsh Harrier, Sparrowhawk, plenty of Greater Flamingos, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Western Swampphen, Eurasian Curlew, Black-tailed Godwits, Black-winged Stilt and Pied Avocet, amongst others. We found a lovely place in this area where we enjoyed our delicious picnic lunch. Afterwards, we joined the motorway in order to start our journey to Andújar (via Seville), making a break en route for coffee etc.

We arrived in the town of Andújar and soon 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 1st December

Andujar Natural Park (La Lancha & dam)

After an early breakfast, we drove for about 30 minutes towards the upper valley of La Lancha in order to explore. We scanned the multiple gullies which have been potential Iberian Lynx hotspots over the last few years. It was a sunny morning but a bit quiet, generally speaking. 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, 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 a clear blue, and the sun was shining, perfect for going to a different spot which overlooks the dam. Here we saw a herd of Spanish Ibex really close by and were able to really appreciate this endemic ungulate. We also 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 nicely, warming up the day, so it was time to drive back to the valley area in order to spend the rest of the afternoon there, scanning for felines. Lots of Red and Fallow Deer were seen along the way, alongside Iberian Green Woodpecker, Iberian Magpies and Red-legged Partridge calling loudly. We chose a nicely located viewpoint, different from the one we chose in the morning, from where we started scanning the adjacent valleys; Dartford Warbler, Black Redstarts, Iberian Magpies and European Jay were seen from here.

After a while Phil decided to leave the rest of the group to explore the next gully because he thought it would improve our chances of seeing a lynx. Once at the gully his attention was drawn to a deer which was behaving rather strangely and when he focused in on it with his binoculars, he could see it was watching a lynx. He watched the lynx for a couple more minutes and then ran back to the first gully to tell the rest of the group. We all walked to the second gully where Phil had seen the lynx and scanned it with binoculars and telescopes. After some time without a further sighting Phil decided to walk back to the first gully as he thought it may have headed in that direction. There he joined a German guy who had a telescope and together they scanned the first gully. After approximately 60 minutes he spotted a lynx lying up at the base of a tree where the two gullies met. Phil made his way back to the rest of the group to let them know about this sighting only to discover we were all watching the same lynx from a different angle!

We kept on looking for them, 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. We were very, very happy and pleased with the wildlife seen and appreciative of the good luck we have had finding them, especially those two Iberian Lynx! It was also a wonderful late afternoon with a breath-taking sunset!

As the light faded, we drove back to our hotel in order to take lots of celebrations over our break! Then the evening continued with drinks and nibbles followed by the delicious local gastronomy.

Day 5

Thursday 2nd December

Andujar Natural Park (River Jandula & Baños de la Encina)

It was another fabulous morning for our early start in the wonderful scenery of Andújar Natural Park! 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 Great Cormorants. 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 group of four Eurasian Otters turned up from nowhere, right in front of us; it was great seeing them swimming and fishing, also scratching their bodies on a tree trunk after eating a feast! Most of them were out on the shore for quite a good time, long enough to see them very well!

After enjoying this fantastic sight, we drove back to our lodge for a quick break and in order to get ready for our visit to a private finca in the area of Baños de la Encina. We met up with our hosts Paco and Inma who took us in their 4x4 vehicles to this lovely and tranquil location. We had a nice lunch upon our arrival and soon we started scanning the hills and boulders around us. Towards the mid afternoon, Inma spotted a young Iberian Lynx drifting down the hill and through boulders and gaps, till she finally got right in the open and sat on a rock! We had amazing sightings of this lovely young individual. Then, suddenly, another young Lynx was spotted, a young male from this year and sibling of the female we were all already watching. It was an amazing experience as we all had great views of these two individuals through the telescopes, especially of the female Iberian Lynx who remained sitting on the rock for a long time, even until we were setting off: we had to leave her there!

Back at our lodge, of course, plentiful of wine, beer and local brut was flowing in order to celebrate a fantastic day and the entire tour! A surprise cake and candles celebrating my 200th tour with Naturetrek was the icing on the cake and what a way to celebrate ... with amazing wildlife seen and the best company!

My special thanks goes to the marvellous Tom Mabbett and to every single tour participant that witnessed this special moment...THANK YOU...THANK YOU...THANK YOU!!!

We had our last dinner together on this wonderful tour; alongside large amounts of tasty local food, we certainly 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 3rd December

Andujar Natural Park – Seville airport

A very early start was made by Tom and other tour participants who travelled back to the UK this morning. The rest, including myself, had a relaxing start and breakfast, leaving for the beautiful Seville, where we arrived at lunch time. We 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 see great wildlife, the landscapes, enjoy fine gastronomy and the great locations of this fantastic part of Spain; most importantly, we had fantastic views of the mysterious and very rare Iberian Lynx!

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit.

Checklists

Mammals

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced		November - December					
Common name	Scientific name	28	29	30	1	2	3
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		X	X	X	X	
Iberian Lynx - E	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>				2	2	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>					X	
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		5	3			
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>				X	X	
Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				X		
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>					4	

Birds

N=Near-endemic			November - December					
	Common name	Scientific name	28	29	30	1	2	3
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	X	X	X			X
2	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		X				
3	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		X	X			
4	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			X			
5	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		X	X			
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
7	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	X	X	X			
8	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		X	X	X	X	
9	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
10	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X

	N=Near-endemic		November - December					
	Common name	Scientific name	28	29	30	1	2	3
11	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	X	X	X		X	
12	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	X	X	X			
13	Western Swamphe	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>			X			
14	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	X	X				
15	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			X			
16	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	X	X	X			
17	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		X	X			
18	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		X	X			
19	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	X	X	X			
20	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		X				
21	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		X	X			
22	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		X	X			
23	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		X	X			
24	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	X					
25	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		X				
26	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	X					
27	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	X					
28	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	X					
29	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	X	X	X			X
30	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	X			X	X	
31	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	X	X				
32	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	X	X	X			
33	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	X	X		X	X	X
34	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	X	X	X			
35	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	X	X	X			
36	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		X	X	X	X	
37	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>			X	X	X	
38	Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		X		X		
39	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				X	X	
40	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		X		X	X	
41	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	X	X				
42	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	X	X	X			X
43	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	X	X	X			
44	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			X	X	X	
45	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				H	H	
46	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		X	X		X	
47	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		X			X	
48	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		X		X	X	
49	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>				X	X	
50	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	X	X	X			X

	N=Near-endemic		November - December					
	Common name	Scientific name	28	29	30	1	2	3
51	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		X		X		
52	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		X		X	X	
53	Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
54	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
55	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>					X	
56	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	X					
57	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		X	X	X	X	X
58	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			X		X	
59	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
60	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		X	X	X	X	
61	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		X			X	
62	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		X			X	
63	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		X	X			
64	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		X				
65	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		X				
66	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				X	X	
67	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H			X	
68	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			X	X	X	
69	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		X	X			
70	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
71	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	X	X				
72	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		X		X	X	
73	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
74	Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>		X		X		
75	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		X		X	X	
76	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>					X	
77	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			X			
78	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	X	X	X			X
79	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
80	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		X		X	X	
81	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				X		
82	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
83	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
84	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				X	X	
85	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
86	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
87	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	X					
88	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>					X	
89	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		X		X	X	
90	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>					X	
91	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	X	X	X	X	X	

	N=Near-endemic		November - December					
	Common name	Scientific name	28	29	30	1	2	3
92	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	X	X	X			
93	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		X	X	X	X	
94	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>				X	X	
95	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		X	X	X	X	
96	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		X	X		X	
97	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	X	X	X		X	
98	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		X	X	X		
99	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					X	
Our tour checklist follows the names and taxonomy (including species order) of the International Ornithological Congress list of the birds of the world (version 11.2, July 2021) which seems destined to become the global standard in future.								