

Spain – Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

5th – 10th December 2021



Spanish Ibex



Raya Teal



Black Redstart



Iberian Lynx

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 (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients.

Summary

Once again, the unique and colourful land of Andalucia delivered to its visitors a collage of landscapes, culture, music, gastronomy and fantastic wildlife! It is not only the most visited Community in Spain, but it is the land that keeps the secrets of great traditions, great produce and great creatures ... such as the mighty Iberian Lynx! This beautiful feline, alongside other wildlife, are the true jewels of this area. The empty canvas we arrived with holding in our hands became painted with amazing species: Iberian Magpie, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Spanish Ibx...and nine different individuals of Iberian Lynx ... all of them seen in the most amazing way! Those are the colours painted in our memories and the vivid colours we experienced through this wonderful week in the Realm of the Iberian Lynx.

Day 1

Sunday 5th December

Stansted – Seville – El Rocío

The group left the UK from two different airports; those on the Stansted flight arrived on time in Seville and joined me and other two participants who were already in Seville. Unfortunately, the other three participants coming from Heathrow airport didn't arrive till late in the evening. We started our journey heading west towards Huelva, diverting towards El Rocío. We arrived at our hotel and checked into its comfortable rooms, and after a very short break, we gathered to take our first stroll around the marshes. They were full of Greater Flamingoes, Northern Lapwing, Little and Cattle Egrets, Grey Heron, Eurasian Spoonbills, Spotless Starlings and a couple of Common Snipe. Nearer to us, amongst the reedbeds, a few European Stonechats 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 6th December

Doñana National Park (Raya Real – FAO Visitors Centre)

We gathered 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 with our local ranger, in order to start our search for Iberian Lynx in the core area of Doñana National Park. It was a nice, dry and chilly morning, and the light was breaking through along the Royal Track or Raya Real. We had only been driving along the sandy track for about 10 minutes when a dark shape was seen, sitting in the middle of the track: it was a lovely male Iberian Lynx! We stopped our vehicle in order to enjoy this wonderful animal ... he remained sitting and relaxed for about three minutes and then continued his way through the bushes. It was a good shock for all of us to get to see an Iberian Lynx that quickly and we all loved it, of course! We could have done, perhaps, with a little bit of more light on him in order to see more colours or more detail of his fur pattern ... but that would have been too much to ask already - the views we had were good enough!

With our Iberian Lynx moment done and dusted, we continued our excursion in the Doñana National Park exploring other different areas. 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 then took a stroll around the area known as Hierba Buena, a beautiful Dehesa habitat (meadows and Cork Oaks) which produced lots of interesting birds such as Iberian Grey Shrike, Sardinian Warbler, European Stonechat, Corn Bunting, Woodlark, Eurasian Hoopoe, Red Kite and 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, Iberian Grey Shrike and Crested Lark, amongst others. In the wet marshes, we found Western Swamphen, Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Stilt, and at least five Marbled Duck, which was a very nice surprise! After having a great time in this area, we started the drive back to El Rocio while searching more Iberian Lynx territories through the core area, but it all looked quiet.

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

Day 3

Tuesday 7th December

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 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 main food for Iberian Lynx. Unfortunately, we didn't see the feline itself this morning, so after this it was time for us to head back to our hotel in order to check out and explore the nearby area of La Rocina. Here we found lots of Greater Flamingoes, Eurasian Spoonbills and lots of wildfowl, amongst others. We then started our journey to Andújar Natural Park, making a stop somewhere nearby to enjoy our delicious picnic lunch. Afterwards, we joined the motorway and continued 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's sleep!

Day 4

Wednesday 8th December

Andujar Natural Park (River Jándula – La Lancha – Los Escoriales)

Our very first full day in the mountains of the Sierra Morena started with a cold and fairly overcast morning. We had our early breakfast, and we were all ready to explore the area of Andújar Natural Park afterwards, starting with a visit to the lower valley of the river Jándula. So we drove 15 minutes down the main road and once in the spot, we took a walk which produced lots of interesting birds such as Hawfinch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Crested Tit, Spotless Starling and Rock Sparrow, amongst others. The riverbanks produced a fair number of birds such as Common Chiffchaff, Grey Wagtail, Great Cormorant, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, White Wagtail and terrific views of Common Kingfisher.

After this visit, we drove towards the upper valley via our hotel where we took a short break. We then 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. 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 and 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 Eurasian Black Vultures, Iberian Magpies, Red-legged Partridge and European Rabbit, amongst others. While we were doing this, one of the main park rangers warned us about the existence of a Fallow Deer carcass found two days ago right above one of the gullies. We kept our eyes open, when suddenly we saw an Iberian Lynx on the carcass! It was quite eager, trying to pull it to a very concealed area and even trying to bury these remains. We had partial views of the individual, and then a second Iberian Lynx, a much younger one, joined the adult. We waited and waited till both showed themselves right in the open by climbing a big boulder amongst the trees and making themselves comfortable for a siesta! It was a terrific and long sighting of these fantastic animals, and we decided to have our picnic lunch right there whilst we watched them - absolutely amazing!

We spent a good chunk of the afternoon watching these two individuals and their movements. We then went to check the upper part of the dam, which produced around 10 Spanish Ibex we enjoyed watching lots! And as we were driving back towards the lodge, we were stopped by a contact of mine who told us that a female Iberian Lynx with three young had been spotted in the area of Los Escoriales, so we dashed there and managed to see these wonderful creatures too! That gave us a staggering number of six lynx seen in just one day...amazing!!

The light was fading, so we drove back to our hotel in order to take a break and to get ready to celebrate this day's results, enjoying local drinks and nibbles followed by the delicious local gastronomy.

Day 5

Thursday 9th December

Andujar Natural Park (La Lancha)

We had another early start which felt very promising! The day was quite misty and overcast, with a few sunny spells at times but overall good! We had our early breakfast and we drove to the town of Andújar in order to complete a COVID-19 test requirement. Once the testing task was done, we soon drove back to the upper valley of La Lancha where we had our usual scanning, full of great wildlife such as Red and Fallow Deer, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Sardinian and Dartford Warbler, Rock Bunting and a pair of Mouflon. Then, all of a sudden, two Iberian Lynx turned up in the same place where the deer carcass was the previous day, and they were the same individuals too. We managed to see them again very well but not for as long as the day before. After this fantastic sighting, we drove to our picnic spot where we found more Spanish Ibex nearby. We then took a stroll to the dam in order to scan the area; this produced Crag Martins, Black Redstart, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle and a very nice Eurasian Otter which we managed to watch very well for a good period of time!

After enjoying the sightings on this site, we drove back to La Lancha in order to spend our last hour scanning for more Iberian Lynx, and the waiting was not long: as soon as we got there, one Iberian Lynx was spotted hunting and we got great views of him. He then went off but soon after that a second individual was seen sticking his head out right by the track: it was brilliant, then the second one walked in the open once again...just fantastic! We had fantastic views of both individuals!

As we finished the day, we drove back to the lodge with plenty of wine, beer and local brut flowing in order to celebrate a record of nine different Iberian Lynx seen during this tour altogether! We enjoyed our last dinner together; alongside large amounts of tasty local food 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 10th December

Andujar Natural Park – Seville airport

A very early start was required on this morning in order to catch our mid-morning flight to the UK from Seville airport. Lots of birds were sporadically seen 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 arrived at the airport in time to check in our luggage and boarded our flight back to Stansted which was all 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 in 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; most importantly, fantastic views of nine different Iberian Lynx individuals, a truly remarkable record of seen Iberian Lynx on a single tour...we were incredibly lucky and fortunate to enjoy in such way 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!