

Spain – Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

24th – 29th January 2022



Iberian Lynx by Javi Elorriaga



Spanish Ibex by Javi Elorriaga



Eurasian Black Vulture by Javi Elorriaga



Red-knobbed Coot by Javi Elorriaga

Tour report by Niki Williamson



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Summary

A beautiful sunny week in two of Andalucía's most picturesque spots yielded some fantastic nature-watching! Iberian Lynx teased us twice with close but fleeting views in both Doñana and Sierra de Andujar, and the group eventually enjoyed views of a magnificent male stalking its mountain realm - fantastic!

Wetland birding was exceptional with Red-knobbed Coot, Marbled and Ferruginous Duck and Red-crested Pochard amongst the thousands of wintering wildfowl in Doñana. Spanish Imperial Eagles dominated the Andujar skies amongst Cinereous (Eurasian Black) and Griffon Vultures.

Superb food at both bases rounded off a memorable trip!

Day 1

Monday 24th January

Niki and Javi collected the group at Sevilla airport and without further ado headed for lunch at a local *venta* or café, enabling an early sampling of Spain's delicious cheeses and hams! Then we began the journey towards El Rocío, our first base for the trip.

On the way, we made a stop at Dehesa de Abajo lagoon. Almost immediately we had great views of Red-knobbed Coot, one of Doñana's sought-after bird species! In fact, two were present and they drifted in and out of the nearby reeds giving great close views. We also had great views of Marbled Duck, Ferruginous Duck, Red-crested Pochard and Northern Pintail amongst seas of wintering Common Pochard and Northern Shoveler.

Driving through areas of pastureland, we enjoyed large flocks of Spanish Sparrows and European Serin and made another stop for two gorgeous Black-winged Kites seen in flight and perched.

We soon arrived at our first base, Hotel Toruño in El Rocío, beautifully situated on the shores of the Madre de las Marismas freshwater lagoon. A light rain had set in, and some of the group sensibly chose to simply admire the assembled Greater Flamingoes, Eurasian Spoonbills and White Storks from their bedroom window! Those of us that did head out for some pre-dinner birding were rewarded with views of Bluethroat, Glossy Ibis, Black-winged Stilt and Western Swamphen.

Day 2

Tuesday 25th January

This morning we headed out early in 4x4 minibuses with Doñana Nature – Irene and Sammy would take us into areas of the park that can only be reached with special permission – and four-wheel drive!

We drove through the stone pine woodlands in the light of the rising sun and enjoyed large groups of Red Deer out on the heath as we searched for our main quarry, the elusive Iberian Lynx.

It was not long before a male Lynx sauntered across the track ahead of us! It paused briefly in full view before vanishing, having given a close but typically fleeting view to most of the group. A good start!!

We made a stop to stretch our legs and immediately picked up two Spanish Imperial Eagles – an adult and a first-year bird – perched together in a tree, giving great scope views. We also got our first good look at an Iberian Grey Shrike.

After more searching in the Lynx habitat, we took a stroll at Coto del Rey heath, where we found a large flock of over 20 Eurasian Stone-curlews, Thekla's Lark and Woodlark, Sardinian Warbler, Iberian Grey Shrike and another stunning adult Spanish Imperial Eagle. Eurasian Hoopoes were seemingly everywhere, with 11 spotted!

We took our lunch in a restaurant back in El Rocío, where we were introduced to local delicacy *pisto* – a hearty ratatouille-type dish topped with a poached egg and eaten with delicious crusty bread – just what we needed to warm us through and get the energy levels up!

We wandered back to Toruño for a siesta along the shores of the lagoon, picking up flocks of Black-tailed Godwits, Pied Avocets, Penduline Tits and more heart-stopping Bluethroat views!

In the evening we headed out once more with Doñana Nature to explore the heaths, enjoying Little Owl, wintering Common Cranes and large herds of hundreds of Red Deer before sunset.

Day 3

Wednesday 26th January

We spent the morning once more with our friends from Doñana Nature, enjoying Iberian Magpies, Woodlarks, Black Redstart and White Wagtails amongst the pine forests and heathlands of Doñana. Although no lynx was seen, there were plenty of potential kitty treats, in the form of European Rabbits! We also admired the sharp, bright colours of the native Red-legged Partridges, another favoured Iberian Lynx prey item.

We took our picnic lunch by the *marisma* enjoying the array of wintering wildfowl and waders, including Greylag Geese (the emblem of Doñana National Park) Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Teal, Western Swamphen, Black-winged Stilt, Common Snipe and Green Sandpiper. We also added Little Ringed Plover to our rapidly growing bird list.

We said goodbye to the sandy streets of cowboy town El Rocío and headed north-east to our second base in the Sierra Morena, near Andújar. This range of beautiful, wooded hills remains the Iberian Lynx's major stronghold, and is still home to the majority of the population.

On arrival we settled in to our villas and joined Ramón and the Los Pinos team for dinner in their locally-renowned restaurant. Here we tasted a range of local specialities including Partridge pâté, tomatoes '*a la abuela*', and a delicious bean dish as well as locally-grown meat for those that wished.

Day 4

Thursday 27th January

We set out to explore our new realm, where we focussed our first morning on the famous Iberian Lynx-spotting area of La Lancha. This stretch of track affords stunning views out over the *sierra*, and from our lofty vantage point we could observe the whole valley's lifescape, including highlights such as Mouflon, Spanish Ibex, close

flocks of Hawfinch, and a perched Spanish Imperial Eagle. Iberian Green Woodpeckers and Little Owls were very active and vocal!

Driving on a little further, we encountered a herd of Spanish Ibex really close to the track – we were able to view down upon them using the footprint of the vans as cover.

As the air warmed, the thermals filled with raptors, and we had views of Cinereous (Eurasian Black) Vultures and Griffon Vultures, as well as two distant Golden Eagles.

We took our picnic lunch seemingly surrounded by Hawfinch and Eurasian Nuthatches, and with more great views of soaring Vultures and Spanish Imperial Eagle. We then headed back to Los Pinos for a break and a coffee.

We spent the rest of the day at another famed Iberian Lynx spot, alongside the River Jándula. A flock of perched Cormorants made for an unusual sight alongside the river. Short-toed Treecreepers sang in the conifers. Dozens of wintering Common Chiffchaffs and Eurasian Blackcaps flitted fly-catching in the soft evening light. Amongst the riverside scrub, Cetti's Warblers were frequently heard. We ended the day on excellent close views of a Common Kingfisher.

Day 5

Friday 28th January

Today, after our hearty breakfast of super-whizzy coffee and giant toast, we began the day at the Río Jándula, arriving there just after sunrise and enjoying the tranquillity of the area. Great Spotted and Iberian Green Woodpeckers called, and flocks of Long-tailed Tits flitted through the trees.

We picked up Rock Sparrow (Petronia) at the dam and many Crag Martins were feeding overhead. Grey Wagtails showed well on the faster-running water areas. We also got a great look at a foraging flock of Iberian Magpies.

After coffee we headed back up to La Lancha. On the way, a male Iberian Lynx crossed our path once more! As is often the way on this trip, we can only be in the right place at the right time with the right vibe - the cat itself must bring the luck! We had never seen a lynx before on this stretch of road and yet here one was, strolling across in front of us! Another close, but fleeting look...

We suspected this animal was one being seen regularly on our favoured bend in the road, so we stayed on, hoping for another look at this elusive feline. He didn't show up for us this evening, but in waiting for him, we got to experience his realm, with Red and Fallow Deer, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Mistle Thrush, Eurasian Siskin, European Serin, Hawfinch and Rock Bunting as well as more great views of Spanish Imperial Eagle.

Day 6

Saturday 29th January

Our final day, and we decided to have one last look up at La Lancha before heading to the airport for a late afternoon flight. Taking up our places in a viewpoint on a different part of the track, we enjoyed once more the gorgeous views and got a great look at a particularly showy Blue Rock Thrush and a close Rock Bunting.

Then, the cat finally brought the luck! Angie spotted the animal heading behind a Mastick bush! Thanks to some excellent teamwork and great directions, we were soon all looking in the right place and ready, hoping the animal would emerge! It did, and we got to watch this gorgeous animal stalking across the entire hillside before it finally disappeared from view once more.

Time to go, and we headed back to Los Pinos for a celebratory *paella* lunch, before saying our goodbyes to Ramón, Montse and the team and heading back to Sevilla for homeward bound flights and onwards journeys.

Niki and Javi would like to say thanks to you guys for being a lovely team, bringing a great vibe, and being great company for this memorable trip.

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Species lists

Birds

| N=Near-endemic | | January | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Common name | Scientific name | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| Greylag Goose | <i>Anser anser</i> | 30 | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Northern Shoveler | <i>Spatula clypeata</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Gadwall | <i>Mareca strepera</i> | 20 | ✓ | | | | |
| Eurasian Wigeon | <i>Mareca penelope</i> | | | ✓ | | | |
| Mallard | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | | |
| Northern Pintail | <i>Anas acuta</i> | 6 | ✓ | | | | |
| Eurasian Teal | <i>Anas crecca</i> | 20 | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Marbled Duck | <i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i> | 6 | | | | | |
| Red-crested Pochard | <i>Netta rufina</i> | 20 | | | | | |
| Common Pochard | <i>Aythya ferina</i> | ✓ | | | | | |
| Ferruginous Duck | <i>Aythya nyroca</i> | 3 | | | | | |
| Red-legged Partridge | <i>Alectoris rufa</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Rock Dove | <i>Columba livia</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Common Wood Pigeon | <i>Columba palumbus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Eurasian Collared Dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Water Rail | <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> | | 1 | | | | |
| Common Moorhen | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | |
| Eurasian Coot | <i>Fulica atra</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Red-knobbed Coot | <i>Fulica cristata</i> | 2 | | | | | |
| Western Swamphe | <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i> | 3 | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Common Crane | <i>Grus grus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Little Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Greater Flamingo | <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i> | 300 | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Eurasian Stone-curlew | <i>Burhinus oediconemus</i> | | 20 | | | | |
| Black-winged Stilt | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Pied Avocet | <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> | 4 | ✓ | | | | |
| Northern Lapwing | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> | 6 | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Little Ringed Plover | <i>Charadrius dubius</i> | | | 1 | | | |
| Black-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa limosa</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Common Snipe | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> | 5 | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Green Sandpiper | <i>Tringa ochropus</i> | | 1 | 2 | | | |
| Black-headed Gull | <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> | 1 | | | | | ✓ |
| Yellow-legged Gull | <i>Larus michahellis</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus fuscus</i> | | | ✓ | | | |
| White Stork | <i>Ciconia ciconia</i> | 50 | ✓ | 50 | | | ✓ |
| Great Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | 16 | |
| Glossy Ibis | <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Eurasian Spoonbill | <i>Platalea leucorodia</i> | ✓ | 90 | ✓ | | | |
| Western Cattle Egret | <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 1 | |

| N=Near-endemic | | January | | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Common name | Scientific name | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| Great Egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> | | 1 | | | | |
| Little Egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | | | |
| Black-winged Kite | <i>Elanus caeruleus</i> | 2 | | | | | |
| Griffon Vulture | <i>Gyps fulvus</i> | | | | 6 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Cinereous Vulture | <i>Aegypius monachus</i> | | 4 | | 20 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Spanish Imperial Eagle - N | <i>Aquila adalberti</i> | | 5 | | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Golden Eagle | <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i> | | | | 2 | 1 | |
| Eurasian Sparrowhawk | <i>Accipiter nisus</i> | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| Northern Goshawk | <i>Accipiter gentilis</i> | | | | 1 | | |
| Western Marsh Harrier | <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Red Kite | <i>Milvus milvus</i> | 1 | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Common Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo</i> | 8 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Little Owl | <i>Athene noctua</i> | | 1 | 2 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Eurasian Hoopoe | <i>Upupa epops</i> | | 11 | | | | |
| Common Kingfisher | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | | | | 1 | | |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i> | | 1 | 1 | 1 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Iberian Green Woodpecker | <i>Picus sharpei</i> | 1 | | 1 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Common Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Iberian Grey Shrike | <i>Lanius meridionalis</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Iberian Magpie - N | <i>Cyanopica cooki</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 50 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Eurasian Magpie | <i>Pica pica</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Red-billed Chough | <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> | | | | | 2 | |
| Western Jackdaw | <i>Coloeus monedula</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Northern Raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> | 1 | 2 | | ✓ | | |
| Eurasian Blue Tit | <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Great Tit | <i>Parus major</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Eurasian Penduline Tit | <i>Remiz pendulinus</i> | | 2 | | | | |
| Woodlark | <i>Lullula arborea</i> | | 3+ | | 3 | | ✓ |
| Thekla's Lark | <i>Galerida theklae</i> | | 4 | | | | |
| Crested Lark | <i>Galerida cristata</i> | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | | | ✓ |
| Lesser Short-toed Lark | <i>Alaudala rufescens</i> | | 1 | | | | |
| Eurasian Crag Martin | <i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i> | | | | ✓ | 50 | ✓ |
| Barn Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Common House Martin | <i>Delichon urbicum</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Cetti's Warbler | <i>Cettia cetti</i> | 2 | ✓ | 2 | | | |
| Long-tailed Tit | <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> | | ✓ | | ✓ | 12 | |
| Common Chiffchaff | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Zitting Cisticola | <i>Cisticola juncidis</i> | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Eurasian Blackcap | <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> | 1 | | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Sardinian Warbler | <i>Curruca melanocephala</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Eurasian Wren | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | | | | | | ✓ |
| Eurasian Nuthatch | <i>Sitta europaea</i> | | | | 4 | 2 | |
| Short-toed Treecreeper | <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i> | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |

| N=Near-endemic | | January | | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Common name | Scientific name | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| Spotless Starling | <i>Sturnus unicolor</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Common Blackbird | <i>Turdus merula</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Mistle Thrush | <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> | | | | 4 | ✓ | ✓ |
| European Robin | <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> | 1 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Bluethroat | <i>Luscinia svecica</i> | 1 | 1 | 2 | | | |
| Black Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 6 | 2 | ✓ |
| Blue Rock Thrush | <i>Monticola solitarius</i> | | | | | | 1 |
| European Stonechat | <i>Saxicola rubicola</i> | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Rock Sparrow | <i>Petronia petronia</i> | | | | | 2 | 2 |
| Spanish Sparrow | <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i> | 6 | | | | | |
| House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Dunnock | <i>Prunella modularis</i> | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Grey Wagtail | <i>Motacilla cinerea</i> | | | | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| White Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Meadow Pipit | <i>Anthus pratensis</i> | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Common Chaffinch | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Hawfinch | <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i> | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| European Greenfinch | <i>Chloris chloris</i> | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Common Linnet | <i>Linaria cannabina</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| European Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Eurasian Siskin | <i>Spinus spinus</i> | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| European Serin | <i>Serinus serinus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Corn Bunting | <i>Emberiza calandra</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Rock Bunting | <i>Emberiza cia</i> | | | | 1 | 1 | |

Others

| E=Endemic | | January | | | | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---------|-----|----|----|----|----|
| Common name | Scientific name | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| European Rabbit | <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Iberian Lynx - E | <i>Lynx pardinus</i> | | 1 | | | 1 | 1 |
| Red Fox | <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> | | 1 | | | | |
| Red Deer | <i>Cervus elaphus</i> | ✓ | 500 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Fallow Deer | <i>Dama dama</i> | | | | 6 | | |
| Spanish Ibex | <i>Capra pyrenaica</i> | | | | 20 | 10 | ✓ |
| Mouflon | <i>Ovis orientalis</i> | | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Pipistrelle spp | <i>Pipistrellus spp</i> | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| Butterflies | | | | | | | |
| Clouded Yellow | <i>Colias croceus</i> | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Red Admiral | <i>Vanessa atalanta</i> | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | | | | | | | |
| Reptiles | | | | | | | |
| Iberian Wall Lizard | <i>Podarcis hispanicus</i> | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Moorish Gecko | <i>Tarentola mauritanica</i> | | | ✓ | | | |