

Spain - Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

31st January – 5th February 22



Iberian Lynx

Tour report by Niki Williamson



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Summary

Wow, what a trip! The wetlands of Doñana shone with great views of all the specialities, including Marbled Duck and Red-knobbed Coot. Wetlands were full of life with hordes of Greater Flamingoes, Common Cranes, Eurasian Spoonbills, Black-winged Stilts, Western Swamphens, Bluethroat, Penduline Tits, Black-tailed Godwits, Wood Sandpiper, Pied Avocet, Little Ringed Plover and much more!

In the mountains and rivers of Sierra Morena, Mouflon, Spanish Ibex, European Otter, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush and no less than six different Spanish Imperial Eagles enriched our lives!

But the star moment was undoubtedly the hour we spent in hushed reverence with a stunning Iberian Lynx at close quarters, as it stalked along the track beside us and then settled down to hunt rabbits at sunset - unbeatable!

Day 1

Monday 31st January

Niki and Simon met the group at Sevilla airport and once we had all assembled, we headed for lunch at a nearby *venta* or café, sampling some of the area's aged sheep's cheese and Iberian ham to kick-start our trip!

We then headed out of Sevilla towards our first base at El Rocío, on the edge of Doñana National Park and surrounded by Natural Park areas.

On the way we made a stop at the Dehesa de Abajo lagoon, to make the best of the excellent winter water levels. It didn't disappoint, and pretty much the first bird found as we got out of the bus was a Red-knobbed Coot, one of Doñana's sought-after bird species!

We could see White Storks bill-clapping on their nests – re-establishing pair bonds after arriving back from Africa. Among the wintering wildfowl, highlights included Marbled Duck, Red-crested Pochard and a stray male Garganey. Penduline Tits called from the Reedbed and we picked up Common Waxbill and Black-headed Weaver – both of these introduced but firmly established in the area.

After another couple of brief stops to admire Black-winged Kites and a Black Stork, we were soon in El Rocío, settling in to our rooms in Hotel Toruño, on the shores of the Madre de las Marismas lagoon. A pre-dinner stroll around this fabulous wetland location gave us superb views of super-close Greater Flamingoes, Glossy Ibis, Western Swamphen and a stunning Bluethroat.

Day 2

Tuesday 1st February

This morning we headed out at first light with our friends from Doñana Nature, who would use their 4x4 minibuses to take us to special areas of Doñana Natural and National Parks.

Despite covering the ground in a couple of known territories - and coming across three sets of fresh footprints - Iberian Lynx proved elusive this morning. However, the light and the habitat were brilliant, and we enjoyed exploring its realm with lots of great wildlife to encounter! An early highlight was a snuffling family of Wild Boar. A Great Spotted Cuckoo also sailed quickly by.

At the area of heathland known as Coto del Rey – the hunting estate of the king – we found groups of Eurasian Stone-curlews, Iberian Grey Shrikes, singing Thekla's Larks and Woodlarks, Eurasian Hoopoe. Royalty was indeed in residence in the form of an adult and a juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle!

After lunch at a local restaurant and some relaxing time to explore the picturesque streets of this horseman's town – complete with deep sand and hitching posts! – we headed out once more.

Highlights from our afternoon among the heaths and pines included flocks of Iberian Magpies, a cute Little Owl perched on a tree stump, more Eurasian Hoopoe action, and a male Hen Harrier in flight and then perched close by. Large flocks of Calandra Larks and Eurasian Skylarks and Spanish Sparrows flitted across the plains, and we encountered a family group of close Common Cranes.

At the Jose Valverde Visitor Centre, we watched Western Swamphens up close and enjoyed a cuppa. Then we headed back for more great local *manzanilla* sherry and traditional Andaluz fare at Restaurante Toruño.

Day 3

Wednesday 2nd February

Another morning with Doñana Nature working the Iberian Lynx territories again yielded fresh prints but no cat! We made a stop to stretch our legs at the edge of the heaths and were treated to glorious views of an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle perched in a nearby tree.

We took some last time to enjoy the glorious teeming life of our neighbouring lagoon, once more enjoying a selection of Greater Flamingoes, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Western Swamphen, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Eurasian Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Little Grebe, Pied Avocet, Northern Lapwing, Little Ringed Plover, Ruff, Common Snipe, Green Sandpiper, Common Redshank and Whiskered Tern.

We moved round to the north-west end of the *marisma* for lunch, getting a picture-perfect, sunlit view of El Rocío reflected in the lagoon, as well as Black-winged Stilts, Black-tailed Godwits and an elegant Wood Sandpiper feeding.

Then it was time to head to our second base up in the hills of Sierra de Andujar. We arrived at Los Pinos around sunset and settled in to our rooms before Ramón and the team treated us to a magnificent spread of Partridge pâté, *tomates "a la abuela"* and local *retinto* beef.

Day 4

Thursday 3rd February

Today we began our searching at the famous Lynx-watching area of La Lancha. From our corner on the road, we could see right across two valleys and all the way to Virgen de la Cabeza monastery in the distance. We could see numerous red deer moving amongst the Holm Oak, Mastick bushes and Wild Olive trees which adorn this vast,

boulder-strewn landscape. It wasn't long before we spotted a group of Mouflon, a wild sheep species. We spent a leisurely morning soaking in the extraordinary views, and enjoying local wildlife such as Hawfinches, vocal Iberian Green Woodpeckers and Little Owls, Iberian Magpies, Woodlarks, Dartford Warbler and Black Redstart.

At our lunch stop, we enjoyed the displays of the local Eurasian Nuthatches and were treated to stunning views of Spanish Imperial Eagles, Griffon and Cinereous (also known as Eurasian Black) Vultures low over our heads. We also came across the fresh remains of a European Rabbit – had a lynx been lunching here before us..? We also found a large helping of lynx poo to further confirm our suspicions!

Driving on a little further we came upon a group of Spanish Ibex really close to us. Wandering among the ruins of an abandoned village, seemingly without fear of humans, they made for quite a post-apocalyptic scene!

Dropping down to a large dam at the end of the Encinarejo reservoir, we found many Eurasian Crag Martins flying, roosting and preparing to nest. We also had outstanding views of Black Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush as well as a handful more Spanish Ibex.

We had ensconced ourselves for an afternoon's spotting at La Lancha, and were enjoying once more Spanish Imperial Eagles and Northern Goshawk, when a young Swiss lad we had befriended came running towards us – his friend had an Iberian Lynx in view! Like a well-oiled machine, we scooped him up and headed to the site.

And there it was by the road! Giving a dismissive glance in our direction, this gorgeous cat allowed us to follow him – silently on foot and at a respectful distance – as he stalked along the track, traversing the gullies, rocks and folds in the landscape at a relaxed pace. Soon he settled down at the mouth of a rabbit warren to hunt, and there we watched him for over an hour as he sat just metres away, sometimes alert, sometimes dozing, sometimes seemingly about to pounce! Although we were completely silent throughout, the excitement in the air was palpable – what an experience!!

Finally, the sun set on our beautiful cat, and we left him sitting right there in the dark, undisturbed and wild. We returned to Los Pinos for another slap-up meal, where there was much rejoicing, and more than a little *cava* flowed!

Day 5

Friday 4th February

We began our day with a change of scene down at the tranquil River Jándula, with views of Common Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail, Woodlark, Long-tailed Tit, Hawfinch and Short-toed Treecreeper in this beautiful place.

After a coffee back at Los Pinos we headed back up to La Lancha for picnic. We were forced to make a stop for views of six Spanish Imperial Eagles together on the way up, a quite extraordinary sight to say there are only around 700 pairs of this gorgeous endemic raptor! They were amongst circling Griffon and Cinereous (Eurasian Black) Vultures, perhaps having recently fed together at some carrion.

We spent our last afternoon taking in once more the wildlife of Sierra Morena – not forgetting the Iberian Wall Lizards, Moorish Gecko and mounting butterfly list, which by now included Southern Brown Argus, Bath White, Small Copper and Provence Hairstreak as well as many Red Admirals, Painted Ladies and Clouded Yellows.

But the area had one last surprise in store for us! As we watched out across the valley, we could see a white van traversing the tracks of the estate. On closer inspection, what should be following it but an Iberian Lynx! The European Rabbit population in the area is low and currently must be maintained by introduction in order for the conservation of this Critically Endangered cat to be a success. Seemingly this individual knows about this and has learnt how to “hunt smarter”!

Day 6

Saturday 5th February

Sadly, our last day had already arrived, but with afternoon flights for all we had time to spend the morning down at the Río Jándula once more. This time we were privileged to share our time with some very active European Otters! We could hear one calling, presumably from its holt, and another was swimming, fishing and just generally having a lovely time in the water!

We were able to watch quietly from just metres away, which we spent a long time doing, getting some fantastic photos to boot!

After spending a bit more time at the dam, we headed over to nearby pine woods overlooking the reservoir, where we finished this amazing trip with views of Short-toed Treecreeper, Crested Tit and Firecrest.

We headed back to Los Pinos where Ramón, Montse and the team gave us a fantastic send-off with a delicious *paella* lunch.

We said our goodbyes at the airport, but Simon and Niki are hopeful we'll see many of you again on tour, if only to reminisce over the great laughs, fun times, outstanding wildlife and jaw-dropping views of Iberian Lynx we enjoyed together in Andalucía!

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Checklist

Birds

	N=Near-endemic, H = Heard only		January - February 2022					
	Common name	Scientific name	31	1	2	3	4	5
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	50	50	✓			
2	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	1					
3	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓			
4	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	2	✓	✓			
5	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			✓			
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	2		
7	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	6	3	✓			
8	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	10	✓	✓			
9	Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	4					
10	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓	✓				
11	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓				
12	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	1					
13	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>		1	1			
15	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
16	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				1		
17	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
19	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	1					
20	Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	4	4	✓			
21	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓		3	✓
22	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>	3					
23	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓			
24	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		30				
25	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓	✓			
26	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	200	200	✓			
27	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>		20				
28	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
29	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	6	6	✓			
30	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
31	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		1				
32	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			4			
33	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	12	✓	✓			
34	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>		1	16			
35	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	4	3	✓			
36	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		1				
37	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		4	✓			
38	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		2	✓			
39	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>			1			
40	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	1					

41	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	2					
42	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓				
43	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	1					
44	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓		2			
45	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓				
46	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>		10	✓			
47	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	3					
48	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
49	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓		10	✓
50	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
51	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓			
52	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	1					
53	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
54	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	1	1	✓
55	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	3					
56	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓			
57	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	1					1
58	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	1			✓	✓	✓
59	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				✓	✓	✓
60	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	1					
61	Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		3	1	4	6	
62	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				1		
63	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	1			
64	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		1				
65	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	1		✓
66	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓		1	4
67	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			1	1	1	
68	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		1		✓	✓	
69	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		4	✓	1	2	2
70	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			1		1	2
71	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			1		1	✓
72	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>			1	✓	✓	✓
73	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1					
75	Ring-necked Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	1					
76	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	2	10	✓			
77	Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
79	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
80	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	1	2	
81	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>					1	1
82	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
84	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	3					
85	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		10	✓	✓	✓	✓

86	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓				
87	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		6				
88	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓			
89	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		12				
90	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	✓	✓
92	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
94	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	4	1	✓			
97	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>				1	1	
99	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>						1
101	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			1	1	1	✓
102	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓	✓	✓
103	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓	✓		4	✓
104	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	1		
107	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓
108	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
109	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	2	1	3			
110	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				1		1
112	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
113	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>				1		
114	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		3				
115	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
116	Black-headed Weaver	<i>Ploceus melanocephalus</i>	1					
117	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>				✓	✓	✓
118	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		3	✓		2	2
119	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
120	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
121	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
122	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>				✓	✓	✓
123	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓
124	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓		1		
125	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
126	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			1	✓	✓	
127	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
128	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	4	4	
129	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					2	
130	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>					1	1

131	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	1					
132	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	3					

Others

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced, S=Signs			January – February 2022					
	Common name	Scientific name	31	1	2	3	4	5
	Mammals							
1	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Iberian Lynx - E	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>		S	S	1	2	
3	Eurasian Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>			S			
4	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		5	12			
5	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		300	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>				✓	✓	
7	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				26		
8	Mouflon	<i>Ovis orientalis</i>				7		
9	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>						2
	Reptiles and Amphibians							
10	Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanicus</i>	✓					
11	Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>						
12	Iberian Pond Frog	<i>Rana iberica</i>	✓					
	Invertebrates							
13	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>						
14	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>						
15	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>						
16	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>						
17	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>						
18	Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>						
19	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>						
20	Southern Brown Argus	<i>Aricia cramera</i>						
21	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>						
22	Provence Hairstreak	<i>Tomares ballus</i>						
23	Pine Processionary	<i>Thaumetopoea pityocampa</i>						
24	Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>						
25	Violet Carpenter Bee	<i>Xylocopa violacea</i>						