

Spain – Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

22nd – 27th January 2023



A gorgeous Iberian Lynx!



A Spanish Ibex at rest



Little Owl



Sardinian Warbler

Tour report by Byron Palacios, photos by Sara-Jane Eastman



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Tour Participants: Byron Palacios & Taea Romagnuolo (Leaders) with 11 Naturetrek clients.

Summary

The Andalusian landscape offers first class wildlife for lovers of the natural world! The mosaics of different landscapes, villages and local gastronomy were definitely the way to get to know this land from a very different approach! We enjoyed watching a great array of birds and mammals, including great views of the fantastic and very elusive Iberian Lynx! The fidgety Iberian Magpies, the powerful and rare Spanish Imperial Eagle, the agile Spanish Ibis...and of course, the wonderful habitat that they used as an empty canvas which they filled with lots of colours. Those are the colours painted in our memories and the vivid colours of the Andalusian wilderness and great landscape of a land full of traditions, great food produce and great hosts! They made us feel at home after experiencing a terrific week in the Realm of the Iberian Lynx!

Day 1

Sunday 22nd January

London – Seville – Dehesa de abajo – El Rocio

The group left the UK in the very early morning and arrived on time in Seville. After clearing up airport formalities, Taea and the rest of the group met up with Byron at the arrival gate. We then boarded our vehicles and drove up outside Seville for nearly an hour heading west, making our first stop right in the outskirts of Doñana Natural Park where we had our picnic lunch. A few birds such as Blackcap, Sardinian Warblers, Iberian Magpies and European Robins were spotted here. After that, we called at a nice wetlands known as Dehesa de Abajo where we saw lots of Greater Flamingos, Glossy Ibis, White Storks, Eurasian Spoonbills and plenty of wildfowl such as Northern Shoveler, Ruddy Shelducks, Red-crested and Common Pochards, Northern Pintail and Eurasian Teal, amongst others!

The sunset was turning beautiful and picturesque, and it was time to resume our journey to El Rocío in order to check in our hotel, meet up at the bar after a short break in order to enjoy local drinks and nibbles followed by a delicious dinner!

Day 2

Monday 23rd January

Doñana National Park (Raya Real – Coto del Rey – FAO Visitors Centre)

We gathered together for an early breakfast at the hotel's cafeteria on a very fresh and beautiful morning. And just as dawn was breaking through, we jumped into 4x4 vans in order to start another exploration in search for Iberian Lynx in the core area of Doñana National Park. It was a nice, dry and chilly morning, the light was breaking through along the Royal Track or Raya Real. 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 & cork oaks) which produced lots of interesting birds such as Iberian Grey Shrike, Sardinian Warbler, European Stonechat, Corn Bunting, Woodlark, European Hoopoe, Red Kite, Booted Eagle, Great Spotted and Iberian Green Woodpeckers, amongst others. After a pleasant walk around Coto del Rey, we drove back to El Rocio in order to take a break and to enjoy a delicious local lunch! We took a little break and some of us took a stroll along the promenade enjoying views of the marshes behind our hotel.

In the mid-afternoon, we drove back into Doñana National Park again. This time, we drove towards the marisma area (flooded heathland) which produced fantastic birds such as Little Owl, Iberian Grey Shrike and Crested Lark, amongst others. We arrived at the FAO (Valverde visitor's centre) where we enjoyed the marshland finding Purple Swamp-hen, Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Stilt, Common Snipe, Northern Shoveler and Greater Flamingoes, amongst others.

After having a great time in this area, we started to drive back to El Rocio while searching more Iberian Lynx territories along the core area, but it looked quiet; we did find though a group of Wild Boar crossing by the main track. Very happy for the fantastic day we just had, we returned to our hotel for a well deserved break, delicious local supper and drinks!!

Day 3

Tuesday 24th January

Doñana National Park (Royal Track) – El Acebuche – Sierra de Andujar Natural Park

Today we enjoyed another early breakfast and then back in Doñana National Park in order to keep searching for wildlife along the Raya Real or Royal Track. We spent a good couple of hours searching for the cat but had no luck. We then drove back to the hotel in El Rocío in order to pack our belongings and head out towards our picnic spot, the area known as El Acebuche. We enjoyed delicious food here with the company of many Iberian Magpies, Eurasian Hoopoes, Crested and Thekla's Larks and others.

After lunch, we hit the motorway and started our journey to Andújar (via Seville) making a coffee break and facilities halfway of the journey; arriving at the town of Andújar and diverting 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 25th January

Andujar Natural Park La Lancha)

After an early breakfast, we drove for about 35 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 a bit quiet generally. After choosing the right spot, we started to scan the different gullies finding other important wildlife such as Red and Fallow Deer, Iberian Magpies, Iberian Green Woodpecker, and fantastic views of Spanish Imperial Eagle flying over the valley and perched very close. We also saw Griffon and Eurasian Black Vultures, Red-legged Partridge and European Rabbit, amongst others. It was clear blue sky and bright sunshine, perfect for going to a different spot which overlooks the dam from where we saw a herd of Spanish Ibex really close, making the most out of this endemic ungulate. We also saw Golden Eagle, Crag Martins and more Eurasian Black 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 more Black and Griffon Vultures, another Spanish Imperial Eagle, Crag Martins and Great, Blue and Crested Tits. After lunch, we moved back to the main Valley in order to resume our scanning, finding a group of Mouflon in the mid-distance plus a beautiful pair of Rock Buntings. It was towards the end of the afternoon when we decided to move a bit

further up the track where we heard lots of alarm calls from Eurasian Magpies and Red-legged Partridge; then, all of a sudden, a beautiful Iberian Lynx emerged from a thick bush catching our eyes...we couldn't believe it, he was so close and the sunlight was beautiful on him! We had amazing close views of this male Iberian Lynx and this was definitely the icing on the cake, what a wonderful animal! We enjoyed every minute watching his features, colour and body patterns, simply amazing! After a good few minutes showing himself to us, he then continued on his way, all relaxed vanishing into the bushes!

Happy and buzzing with excitement with the whole experience, we decided to drive back to our hotel very happy and pleased with the wildlife results of the day, and what a day! It was also a wonderful late afternoon with a breathtaking sunset, ideal for a celebration drink! Back at our hotel, the evening was completed by more celebration drinks and nibbles followed by the delicious local gastronomy.

Day 5

Thursday 26th January

Andujar Natural Park (Rio Jándula - La Lancha)

Another fabulous morning with an early start and 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, including noisy flocks of Iberian Magpies, Hawfinch, Common Chiffchaff, Long-tailed, Blue and Great Tits, Short-toed Treecreeper, Crested Tit, Rock Bunting, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Common Firecrest and Great Cormorants. The river was full of activity with Grey Heron, European Kingfisher, White and Grey Wagtails, Sardinian Warblers and Blackcaps feeding by the shore.

After enjoying this site, we drove back to La Lancha in order to have lunch and continue scanning for more Iberian Lynx and other wildlife; we had a pair of Mouflon, Wild Boar and other beautiful birds such as a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles, Serin, Little Owl and the gorgeous Iberian Magpies. As soon as we scanned the upper tracks, two Iberian Lynx were spotted walking up the gully, going out of view eventually. Minutes later, they were spotted once again on the side of the upper track, interacting with each other over a very obvious boulder. We got very good views of these two animals interacting with each other, fantastic! After a good ten minutes, they continued their way towards the end of the hill; meanwhile, a third individual was spotted nearby and this one continued walking on the opposite side of the gully showing himself quite well too!

As we finished the day, we drove back to the lodge with huge reasons for celebration in our minds! So plenty of wine, beer and local brut started flowing in order to celebrate the Iberian Lynx sightings of today! We enjoyed our last dinner together alongside large amounts of tasty local food and 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 wild area!

Day 6

Friday 27th January

Andujar Natural Park (river Jándula) – Seville airport

A more relaxed start was required on this morning in order to explore the lower valley of El Encinarejo walking next to the riverbank as we had done on a previous day. We managed to see more Hawfinch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Sardinian Warblers, Common Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Firecrest and European Kingfisher, amongst others.

We drove back to our lodge in order to pack up our belongings, followed by a delicious lunch at the hotel's restaurant. After this, we hit the road and drove towards Seville airport in order to catch our mid-afternoon flight to the UK. Lots of birds were sporadically seen during our drive: White Stork, Red Kite, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Little and Cattle Egrets, Crested Lark, Blackbird, Eurasian 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 on time. Once we arrived at Stansted, we collected our luggage and said goodbye to each other with all the best wishes, after an amazing experience lived in the last week in lovely Andalusia! We were lucky enough to see great wildlife, the landscapes, fine gastronomy and great locations of this fantastic part of Spain. Most importantly, fantastic views of different Iberian Lynx - we were incredibly fortunate to enjoy in such a way this mysterious and very rare carnivore!

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

N=Near-endemic		January 2023					
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	✓					
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓					
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓					
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓	✓		
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Swamphe	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		✓				
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓				
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	✓					
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓	✓			
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓				
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓				
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>		✓				
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓				
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓		✓			✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓			✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓				

N=Near-endemic		January 2023					
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		✓				
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				✓	✓	
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		✓	✓			
Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>				✓	✓	
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				✓		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				✓	✓	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>			✓			
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>		✓				
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				H	H	H
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>		✓		✓	✓	H
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>				✓	✓	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓			✓	
European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				✓		
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			H	
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓	✓	✓		
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓				
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>					✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H	H		✓	H
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	H	✓	✓	✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓					
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓		✓	✓	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>					✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H		✓	✓	✓

N=Near-endemic		January 2023					
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓	✓	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		H	H	H	✓	✓
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	✓					
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				✓	✓	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓			
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>					✓	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>				✓	H	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓			
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>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	H	H	H	✓	✓	
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				✓	✓	
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	✓		✓			

Mammals (T = tracks)

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced		January 2023					
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iberian Lynx - E	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>				1	3	
Eurasian Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>		T				
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓			✓	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>				✓	✓	
Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				✓		
Mouflon	<i>Ovis orientalis</i>				✓	✓	
Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	✓					

Others

BUTTERFLIES	
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
OTHER SPECIES	
Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanicus</i>