

Spain – Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

12th – 17th March 2023



A true goddess...Iberian Lynx!



Spanish Ibex at lunch!



A powerful Short-toed Snake Eagle



The always beautiful Rock Bunting

Tour report and images by Byron Palacios



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Tour participants: Byron Palacios and Taea Romagnuolo (Leaders) with 11 Naturetrek clients.

Day 1

Sunday 12th March

London Stansted – Seville – El Rocío

We left the UK from London Stansted to Seville in the very early morning, arriving in the sunny Andalusian city right on time and with no delays. The remaining tour participants were waiting for us there already so after going through all the airport formalities, we reassembled the whole group successfully at the arrivals area. We then drove up out of Seville heading west towards El Rocío. We made a short diversion towards the northern entrance of Doñana National Park, more precisely at La Dehesa de Abajo where we had the chance to see lots of interesting birds such as White Stork, Marsh Harrier, Eurasian Coots, Black Kites, Black-headed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Coot, Red-crested Pochard, Eurasian Spoonbill, Ruddy Shelduck and Northern Shoveler, amongst others.

It was a stunning end to the afternoon with the setting sun painting breathtaking 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 into its comfortable rooms. Some of us went out to the marshes behind our hotel and enjoyed watching plenty of Common Chiffchaffs, Greater Flamingos, Sedge Warbler, plenty of Red Deer, Black-winged Stilts and hundreds of Glossy Ibis getting ready to roost. All this alongside a beautiful and picturesque sunset. It was also time for us to meet up at the bar in order to enjoy some drinks followed by a delicious dinner.

Day 2

Monday 13th March

Doñana National Park (Raya Real – Coto del Rey – FAO visitor's centre)

We gathered together for an early breakfast in the hotel's cafeteria under a beautiful early morning. After breakfast, we set off to explore the core area of Doñana National Park; we looked carefully along the main Raya Real (Royal Track) where flocks of Red-legged Partridge, Iberian Magpies and plenty of Black Kites and White Storks were seen. A pair of Little Owls and Great Spotted Cuckoos gave us an entertaining show at the eucalyptus-made rabbit burrows, with plenty of Red Deer around it. The mid-morning was spent walking along the beautiful area of Coto del Rey from where we had great views of Black-eared Wheatear, Corn Bunting, Iberian Grey Shrike, Iberian Chiffchaff, Sardinian Warbler, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Woodchat Shrike, European Stonechats and Eurasian Hoopoes. Dozens of Black Kites were also seen. We worked very hard checking every concealment and bushes along the sandy tracks but our felines seemed elusive this morning. Towards noon, we drove back to El Rocío in order to take a break and to enjoy a delicious local lunch, walking along the village marshes which produced Black Redstarts, Sardinian Warblers, Little Egrets, Common Snipes, European Stonechat, White Wagtail, Iberian Yellow Wagtail, plenty of Great Flamingos and Eurasian Spoonbills, amongst many others.

After a break, we resumed our activities in the afternoon by driving through the main core area of the park to the FAO Valverde Visitors Centre. Here plenty of wildfowl such as Northern Shoveler, Gadwall and the rare Marbled Duck were seen, and also two pairs of Ferruginous Ducks. We had great views of Purple Swamphen, Common Snipe, Eurasian Teal, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Green Sandpiper and lots of Black-tailed Godwits. After spending good quality time here, we were back on our search for Iberian Lynx along the Royal Track, and towards

the end of the day, luck wasn't on our side. No luck today, so we returned to our hotel in El Rocío for a well deserved break, delicious supper and drinks!!

Day 3

Tuesday 14th March

Doñana National Park (Raya Real) – Dehesa de Abajo – Sierra de Andujar Natural Park

We had another early morning start and breakfast, heading into the core area of Doñana National Park in a rather pleasant and mild early morning.. 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 several European Rabbits, the latter the 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, Iberian Shrike, Great Spotted Cuckoo, amongst others.

After this morning's excursion, it was time for us to head back to our hotel in order to check out with our belongings and to drive ten minutes in order to make a stop at El Acebuche where we enjoyed our delicious picnic lunch, hitting the motorway afterwards in order to start our journey to Andújar (via Seville) making a coffee break and facilities half way through the journey..

We arrived to the town of Andújar and soon diverted northeast 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 15th March

Andújar Natural Park (El Encinarejo – La Lancha – river Jándula)

After an early breakfast, we drove for about fifteen minutes towards the lower valley of the river Jándula. Here, we had great views of Hawfinch, Greenfinch, Spotless Starling, Sardinian Warbler, Great Cormorant, Grey and White Wagtails, European Kingfisher, Cetti's Warbler, Rock Sparrow, Crag Martins, Red-rumped Swallows and Blackcaps, amongst others. We found a nice spot by the river and had a good scan of the boulders and clearings in case Iberian Lynx were around but had no luck; instead, we had great views of two European Otters!

After having a nice time in this lower valley of the river Jándula, we drove towards the upper valley of La Lancha, taking a convenience break along the way. We then continued to La Lancha in order to explore and scanned the multiple gullies which have been potential Iberian Lynx hotspots over the last few years. It was a sunny day so far, very unusual for this time of the year, so it was a bit quiet generally speaking. We found plenty of Red and Fallow Deer along the way and a nice Mouflon. We then drove straight to our picnic spot from where we had amazing close views of Spanish Ibex! . Plenty of Griffon and Eurasian Black Vultures were spotted from here too alongside the endemic Spanish Imperial Eagle!

After lunch, we drove to the valley and found a good spot to start our intense search for the Lynx, finding lots of Red Deer,, Iberian Magpies, Red-legged Partridge and European Rabbit in the process. The sun was hitting a bit

hard at some point although it suddenly freshened up towards the end of the afternoon but there was no sign of Iberian Lynx around. The light was fading away so we drove back to our hotel in order to enjoy local drinks followed by the delicious local gastronomy at Los Pinos Restaurant.

Day 5

Thursday 16th March

Andújar Natural Park (La Lancha – river Jándula)

After another early breakfast, we went out to the upper valley of La Lancha once again. It was another sunny and warm morning, but promising and full of great wildlife around already! We started our scan of the valley from a different spot to the previous day as we were told there was some activity in the area, . We keep scanning the area when a pair of Mouflon were spotted in the distance, plus lots of Red Deer and some had views of some Wild Boar. Plenty of raptors such as Griffon and Eurasian Black Vultures, Western Marsh Harrier, Short-toed Snake Eagle and Spanish Imperial Eagle were spotted. As the sun started to hit a bit, we drove down towards the dam and took a little stroll which produced Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting, a pair of Golden Eagles soaring in front of the hill and hundreds of House and Crag Martins. After this productive walk, we moved to our ‘traditional’ picnic spot from where we had great views of Woodlark, Serin, Great and Blue Tits and Eurasian Nuthatch, amongst others.

After lunch, we drove back to our lodge in order to take a quick break, driving to the lower valley of the river Jándula right afterwards. The temperature seemed to be better by then; we had clouds sheltering the bright blue sky and it felt definitely cooler. Once in the area, we walked along the track parallel to the river spotting a European Otter and Common Kingfisher straight away! Then most of the group continued walking along the tracks with Taea towards the old dam bridge, finding more Kingfisher and European Otters once there, alongside Black-crowned Night-Heron. Some of us stayed scanning from the hides located 500 metres from the bridge. All of a sudden, one of the group, Paul gave us a heads up as he was having an unexpected Iberian Lynx encounter! We all rushed towards where he was and shortly after we got there we spotted the female Lynx which has passed right in front of him scarcely minutes ago...truly unbelievable! Luckily, we managed to gather everyone together and the Lynx settled herself on top of a comfortable boulder from where she shows herself beautifully to us! We were over the moon, it was a magnificent experience for all of us! And after a lot of hours of hard work in the field looking for them, we found this magnificent individual! Our hard work had finally paid off and in such a fantastic way!! We enjoyed watching and photographing this beautiful animal until she continued on her way in the bushes.

Surprised and greatly happy, we drove back to the hotel in order to get ready for a very special evening full of celebrations! Plenty of wine, beer and local brut was flowing in order to celebrate the fantastic sighting we had of Iberian Lynx...and more celebrations!! Our last dinner together during this wonderful tour, alongside large amounts of tasty local food and certainly we all deserved to be 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 17th March

Andujar Natural Park (Los Escoriales – Mirador del Peregrino) – Seville airport

Another early breakfast for us today, in order to spend a few last hours in this lovely Andalusian area. We drove to the old bull fighting farm of Los Escoriales where we took a stroll along the track finding interesting wildlife such as Iberian Magpies, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Corn Bunting, Woodlark, Mistle Thrush, Fallow and Red Deer, amongst others. A heavy drizzle covered the area so we decided to move to the Mirador de El Peregrino from where we had nice views of the lower valley and a very beautiful Crested Tit! We then returned to our hotel in order to pack our belongings and have some lunch before setting off to Seville airport afterwards.

By mid-afternoon, we arrived at Seville airport in time for our late afternoon flight to Stansted.. Some of us were catching a different flight and others were staying in Seville for an extra time. We said good bye to each other with all the best wishes, especially after an amazing experience lived in the last week in lovely Andalusia!

We were lucky enough to see the great wildlife, landscapes, fine gastronomy and great locations of this fantastic part of Spain; most importantly, we enjoyed fantastic views of the mysterious and very rare Iberian Lynx!

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

N=Near-endemic		March 2023					
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>		H				
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓					
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</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>		✓				
Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>		✓				
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	✓					
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓				
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>		✓				
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓			
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>					✓	
Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</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>		✓				
Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>	✓	✓				
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓				
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓				
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓					
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</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>		✓				
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓				
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		H				
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		✓				
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓

N=Near-endemic		March 2023					
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓	✓	✓
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓			✓	
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓				
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓				✓
Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓					
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>						✓
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</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>			✓	✓		
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				✓	✓	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</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		
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓	✓	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				H	✓	✓
Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>				✓		
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓				
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>		✓				✓
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>					✓	✓
Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>					✓	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>				✓	✓	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓
European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				H	✓	✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	✓

N=Near-endemic		March 2023					
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>						✓
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		H				
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H	H	✓	H	H
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		✓				
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	✓					
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		✓				
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>					✓	
Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>				✓		
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			H	H	H	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				✓	✓	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓	✓	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			✓	✓	✓	
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>					✓	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
Western Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>		✓				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓				✓
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓		
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	✓	✓				
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>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

N=Near-endemic		March 2023					
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					✓	✓
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>					H	H

Others

E=Endemic		March 2023					
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17
MAMMALS							
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iberian Lynx - E	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>					1	
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>		✓	✓			
European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				✓	✓	
Lesser Mouse-eared Bat	<i>Myotis blythii</i>			✓			
REPTILES							
Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanicus</i>						
Ladder Snake	<i>Rhinechis scalaris</i>						
Spanish Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>						
Ocellated Lizard	<i>Timon lepidus</i>						
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>						
BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS							
Continental Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon gorganus</i>						
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>						
Green-striped White	<i>Euchloe belemia</i>						
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>						
Spanish Festoon	<i>Zerynthia rumina</i>						
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>						
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>						
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>						
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>						