

Spain – Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd – 28th October 2023



Griffon Vulture by Carol and Alan De Witt



Spanish Ibex by Carol and Alan De Witt



Marbled Duck by Mark Dunsford



Spanish Imperial Eagle by Mark Dunsford

Tour report by Richard Bashford



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Tour participants: Sonia Alis & Richard Bashford (leaders) with 12 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 23rd October

Ten group members and Richard met at Stansted Airport mid-afternoon for our flight to Seville which left just a few minutes late and arrived a few minutes early, just after 21:00 local time.

Amazingly, our bags beat us to the belt, and we were through to meet our local guide Sonja and Juliette and Joe who had arrived a couple of days before. Once we were all together, we walked the short distance to the favoured hire company to pick up our minibuses. We left the airport just before 22:00 and arrived in the spectacular sandy streets of El Rocío at 23:00. There had been some rain here, judging by the puddles.

We checked into the Hotel Toruño and most of the group met downstairs for some prepared food – cold meats and cheese with some welcome wine. Despite the hour, we had a good natter and enjoyed the food before retiring, ready for tomorrow.

Day 2

Tuesday 24th October

Breakfast was in the neighbouring building at 07:15 and was very welcome with great coffee. At 08:00, two vehicles with two Donana NP rangers – Ana and Angelica arrived, and we got on board and into the park as the first glimmer of light could be seen – although it was still too dark to see anything. First birds were heard only - Robin and Cetti's Warbler. Before too long, we had seen the first of many Red Deer – mostly females but one or two impressive stags were also seen during our time in the park.

Our aim this morning was to search the most favoured sites for Iberian Lynx. The territories are well known in this area, so we explored the sandy tracks and forest area but failed to find any Lynx. It was a beautiful area to search though, with the early morning mist evaporating as the sun rose. Early highlights included an Iberian Grey Shrike offering snatches of its strange song. Rattling Sardinian Warblers finally gave themselves up with good views. Best was to come with a juvenile and then an adult female Spanish Imperial Eagle perched. The female was the oldest known – over thirty years old! We drove closer and enjoyed good 'scope views of this impressive bird.

Next was lunch. Set in a small building in the park, a fine spread of pastries and other local foods was on offer for us to enjoy on the veranda. Keeping an eye on the passing wildlife we noticed a huge flock of birds about half a mile away on the rice fields – sadly private with no way of getting closer, it was nonetheless, impressive to look at the fields through the trees and see hundreds, if not thousands of Greater Flamingos. Here too were fair numbers of White Storks overhead, joined by a Peregrine for a short time. Other birds were frustratingly distant but included large flocks of Glossy Ibis and Black-tailed Godwits.

We moved on to the park centre after lunch but stopped by a bridge to see a roosting Barn Owl and then walk the last bit of road to one of the few parts of the park with water. Alongside many Mallard were a few welcome species such as Western Swamphen and Marbled Duck.

Mid-afternoon and we headed back with a stop next to a rabbit warren (a Lynx restaurant), which had been surrounded by the root balls of trees. Ana explained that the roots are from Eucalyptus trees planted under Franco

to dry the marshes for agriculture. When we entered a more enlightened period and the park was created, the trees were removed but this included the digging out of the roots to stop the trees growing again. These are now used to protect Rabbit warrens and so support the Lynx in finding their preferred food. Onward, reaching El Rocio and our hotel at 17:30.

The usually productive marisma behind the hotel has been dry until this week, but now was water filled and thankfully bird filled too!

With the constant soundtrack of the recently arrived Greylag Geese, we saw Spoonbills and hundreds of Black-winged Stilts and Ruff. Above us were a small flock of Crag Martins and a Red-rumped Swallow. Scanning the hoards of birds on the water, we added several species including far closer Glossy Ibis and Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Cattle Egret, Yellow Wagtail, Ringed Plover, Teal and Shoveler and Wigeon. We also “scoped” the starlings to add Spotless Starling to the tally! A productive hour.

A few walked back along the promenade, a few explored the town streets. Once we’d freshened up, we met for the checklist and dinner.

Day 3

Wednesday 25th October

A repeat of the previous morning with breakfast at 07:15 and Ana and Angelica arriving at 08:00. Back into the Donana NP to search for Lynx in their favoured spots. Despite our best efforts, this was another blank but we really tried! Plenty of stately Red Deer again, Griffon Vultures and Little Owl. Sonia showed us a Lynx scat placed on a Badger scat.

As we neared the edge of the park, we found a target bird species – Iberian Magpie. As we noted a few of these stunning birds passing between trees, it became clear this was quite a large flock. It was hard to be sure, but 40-50 at least including some on the ground feeding.

Back at the hotel, we thanked our guides and packed our bags. Our aim was to leave at noon, pick up lunch and position ourselves around the other side of the marisma. In the warm sun, we scanned the water adding a few species to the trip list including Lapwing, Jackdaw and Spotted Flycatcher. But the stars of the show were the beautiful Great Flamings and the large numbers of Black-winged Stilts.

We left this amazing town in the early afternoon, after a welcome coffee. Although later than we planned, we made good time as we headed around Seville and on towards Córdoba. Splitting the journey with a comfort stop, we then headed off the main road and into the hilly ground and eventually the forested hills of Andujar. Our hotel was Los Pinos, in among the trees. Once refreshed, we met for the checklist and a magnificent meal.

Day 4

Thursday 26th October

We awoke to drizzle – and unfortunately that was to be the order of the day apart from a couple of short periods. Our 07:30 breakfast complete, we got into our minibuses and headed up the road, taking Lancha Road towards Jandula reservoir. We were keeping everything crossed for some improvement to the weather. Passing through a key Lynx territory, we stopped to scan as best we could, but it was hard work with showers and cloud hampering

our viewing. Heading on, we spent some time searching the terrain around Jandula reservoir catching up with a few nice things such as a perched Hawfinch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Nuthatch and Black Redstart. A few Woodlarks flew over. There was a light passage of Chaffinches and Meadow Pipits overhead, which at one time contained a small group of Redwings.

We then retraced our route and made a few stops hoping for a chance to scan for Lynx and other mammals. It was not easy and as we approached lunchtime, we decided to retreat to the hotel for our picnic lunch and dry off a bit.

At 14:15, we went out again. This time to Encinarejo Reservoir and dam. As we approached in relatively dry weather, it started to rain off and on again! But we persevered and managed some nice sightings here with calling Spanish Imperial Eagles overhead, Grey Wagtails and Kingfishers showing well below the dam and frustratingly, a two second view of the back and then the tail of an Otter – our main reason for being here. We continued our searching until 16:45 when we enjoyed a low flyover by a colossal Black (Cinereous) Vulture and as we were leaving, a small passage of Griffon Vultures and a couple of Spanish Imperial Eagles.

It continued to be fairly dull so we headed back just before 17:30 for a warm drink before checklist and dinner.

Day 5

Friday 27th October

There were stars in the sky as we loaded up the minibuses and went for breakfast at 07:30. This was a good sign after yesterday's weather.

We headed up the same road and noted the different atmosphere created by actually seeing the hillsides and distant landscape... Our first stop was overlooking a gully in the territory of a female Lynx who had two cubs in the previous season. Quite exciting to search in-between the rocks and trees. We briefly saw Wild Boar and of course several Red Deer. A Red-billed Chough could be heard calling and we managed to pick this up circling high overhead. After a good look, we moved on to the main valley where there were a few other hopeful watchers. Conditions were good and we were able to have a really thorough search. Red Deer of course and eventually an Iberian Ibex moving along the ridge – seen only briefly but a little better a few minutes later. A local Spanish guide spoke to Sonia pointing out that the agitated Magpies (around 40 in one tree top), could be an indication of a Lynx. A few of the group gathered around and within a few seconds of Richard training his telescope on the tree, a Lynx appeared from below the canopy, ran across a bit of ground and then down into the gully out of sight. Well, it was sort of good news – there was a Lynx here at least. The Magpies dispersed and we waited, and waited, and waited. Sadly that was it. Our further searching revealed our first Mouflon. Two animals appeared from the trees and lay down on the ground. Other highlights included Black and Griffon Vultures.

Lunch was calling so we moved along the road a little to view more of the impressive landscape. The weather was warm and despite our searching, nothing feline was seen.

Moving on to the dam area, we drove further than yesterday and reached the dam itself – here we saw a good number of Crag Martins, a Black Redstart and a fabulous Blue Rock Thrush. Not a bad start but best was a mother and fawn Iberian Ibex on nearby rocks. Great views in the binoculars and frame filling in the telescopes. Walking along the edge of the valley, we found an impressive male Ibex – again offering excellent views as he watched us from on high. A short while later, we discovered the male Ibex was on the path next to us – about fifty metres

away. It then jumped down an impressive slope and down towards the river. Then came the mother and fawn. Scanning the area, we found a few more before we headed back to the minibuses.

Driving back, we had a comfort stop at the hotel before our mid-afternoon trip back to the dam. It was a beautiful still late afternoon for gazing along the water with Kingfishers, Grey Wagtails, a fabulous group of Iberian Magpies and many vultures overhead. But despite best efforts we did not see the hoped for Otters. We added Mediterranean Pond (Spanish) Turtle and Little Grebe to our sightings. Calling it at day around 18:00, we returned to the hotel to freshen up before checklist and the traditional massive meal.

Day 6

Saturday 28th October

With a late flight, we could repeat the morning's excursion along La Lancha road to spend the whole morning looking for Iberian Lynx. The hotel allowed us to keep our rooms until we had to leave, and provided us with a picnic lunch so we had a good four and a half hours to search.

As this was a Saturday, there were a few other hopeful watchers. A cooler morning of scanning provided more Mouflons, one of which appeared to be paired with a sheep, plenty of vultures, Spanish Imperial Eagle, a perched Iberian Green Woodpecker and of course, many Red Deer. A highlight was, finally, good views of two Wild Boar after a few earlier fleeting glimpses of animals running to cover.

We had certainly tried. Several other Lynx watchers had had similar luck over several days so we had done all we could.

Back at the hotel for 14:30, we packed and got on board for our return journey to Seville at 15:45. The journey passed without incident, arriving at 19:00 where we dropped off our vehicles and said goodbye to Sonia who had looked after us so well. Our flight was delayed by 30 minutes but arrived a few minutes late into an exceedingly wet Stansted where we said our goodbyes and continued on our various journeys home.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

N=Near-endemic		October 2023				
Common name	Scientific name	24	25	26	27	28
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	7	3	4	✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓			
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	40	✓			
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	10	✓			
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	1				
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	1	1	
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	1				
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	5				
Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	6				
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓			✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓			✓
Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	2				
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	3		3	1	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓			
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				1	
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	✓	✓			
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓			
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		40			1
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	5	20			
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	20			
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	✓	✓			
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	4				
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	2				
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	15	H			
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓			
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	1				
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	1				
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	5			
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	1		✓	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓		✓		
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓				
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓			6
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	5	3	1	2	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	1				
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓			
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	3	2	8	50	40
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>			1	4	2
Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	2		3	6	2
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1		2	2

N=Near-endemic		October 2023				
Common name	Scientific name	24	25	26	27	28
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	8	3			
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	5	3			1
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	5	5	1	1	2
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	1				
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			H	H	H
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		1		H	H
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	4	2		3	2
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			2	3	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>		H			
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1	2		1
Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>			H	3+H	4
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	10	15		1	1
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1				
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	2			1	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				H	✓
Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>		45	30	50+	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	8	✓	✓
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>			H	1	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		20			
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2			1	
European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			?		
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		2	3	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	4		5	5	3
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	h				1
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	3			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	2				
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	20	2	1	35	
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	1				
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	H	1	1+H	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	H	H	H	✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	10	✓	2	✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	3	4	5	✓	1
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>			1		
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			1	H	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			2	3H	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			1	H	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		1			
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	2				
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1	3	5	✓	2
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			3	10	5

N=Near-endemic		October 2023				
Common name	Scientific name	24	25	26	27	28
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			5		
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	H	✓	✓	✓	H
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			1	6	
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	1				
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				1	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	1		
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	5				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		1			
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	5	10			
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			2	1	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	1	1	1
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			3	2	2
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	5	✓	10	✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓			H	H
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓		
Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			✓	✓	✓
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	1		✓	H	H
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	3				

Others (E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced, D = Dead, LO - Leader Only, S = Signs)

		October 2023				
Common name	Scientific name	24	25	26	27	28
Mammals						
Granada Hare - N	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>				1	
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	2	✓	2	✓	✓
Iberian Lynx - E	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>				LO	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>					1
Eurasian Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>		S		S	
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>				4	2
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	10		✓	✓	
Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				8	
Mouflon - I	<i>Ovis orientalis</i>				2	5
Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	✓				
Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>			LO		
Reptiles & Amphibians						
Mediterranean House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>		1	2	2	1
Viperine Water Snake	<i>Natrix maura</i>		D			
Horseshoe Whipsnake	<i>Hemorrhois hippocrepis</i>			D	1	
False Iberian Smooth Snake	<i>Macroprotodon brevis</i>				D	
Lizard sp						

		October 2023				
Common name	Scientific name	24	25	26	27	28
Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>				1	
Mediterranean Pond Turtle	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>				2	

Others noted

Invertebrates	
Crimson Speckled Moth	<i>Utetheisa pulchella</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>
Pale Clouded Yellow sp	<i>Colias sp</i>
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
African Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria knysna</i>
Field Cricket sp	<i>Gryllinae</i>
Dung Beetle sp	
Flora	
Autumn Snowflake	<i>Acis autumnalis</i>
Autumn Crocus	<i>Colchicum autumnale</i>



Cinereous Vulture by Bryn Parry