

Spain – Realm of the Iberian Lynx

Naturetrek Tour Report

27th November – 2nd December 2023



Little Owl



Andujar National Park



Spanish Imperial Eagle



Walking in Doñana National Park

Tour report and photos by Sergio Martin



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Tour participants: Sergio Martín & Sonia Alis (leaders) with nine Naturetrek Clients.

Day 1

Monday 27th November

London – Seville – Isla Mayor – El Rocio

We left Gatwick in the early morning, landing in Seville arriving on time. Sonia gathered with the group while the last details of the vehicles were sorted out. Then we left the airport and drove west towards the Doñana National Park area. We made our first stop in the area of Aznalcazar woods where we had a nice picnic surrounded by Iberian Magpies, European Serins, Common Chaffinches and Common Chiffchaffs.

Once we finished our lunch, we proceeded to Dehesa Tornero Area where we know there's a population of Iberian Lynx living on the outskirts of Doñana NP. We checked carefully and saw plenty of rabbits and tracks of Iberian Lynx, Badger, Red Fox and many other mammals as well as Iberian Shrike, Meadow Pipits, Iberian Magpies and European Stonechat.

We took a break from searching for lynx to focus on the wetlands which were quite close, as we thought it was still too warm for the Iberian Lynx. So we drove to Dehesa de Abajo Natural Reserve and we found a nice group of Greater Flamingoes, Northern Shoveler, Marbled Teal, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, some Purple Swamphens and even a glimpse of a beautiful Bluethroat. Once the sun got lower we gave the Dehesa Tornero area another go: we stayed until dusk to see if there was any mammal activity... Everything kept quiet but we had some Common Buzzards, Red Kites, Sardinian Warblers and Spotless Starlings.

We continued our drive to El Rocío arriving to our hotel where we checked into our comfortable rooms. We also had time to meet up at the bar to enjoy some drinks, followed by a delicious dinner.

Day 2

Tuesday 28th November

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

We gathered for an early breakfast at the hotel's cafeteria. And just as dawn was breaking through, we jumped in our 4x4 vans (accompanied by local guides) to start our search for Iberian Lynx in the core area of Doñana National Park. During our scan of the core area we spotted many Iberian Magpies and Red-legged Partridges, and Red Deer were constantly turning up by the side of the Royal Track. We also got very fresh tracks of Iberian Lynx which showed us the nocturnal activity of this mammal. We had also great views of a pair of Little Owls which were nesting in a very nice habitat (*Eucalyptus* stumps). We worked very hard, checking every fire-break and bush along the sandy tracks, but our friend the lynx didn't want to appear.

After intensive searching of the first portion of the core area, we drove a short distance to take a stroll around the area known as Coto del Rey. This unique native habitat of meadows & cork oaks produced lots of interesting birds such as Iberian Grey Shrike, Dartford and Sardinian Warblers, European Stonechat, Northern Lapwing, European Hoopoe, Red Kite, European Golden Plovers and a beautiful Spanish Imperial Eagle perched in front of us. After the walk, we drove back to El Rocio in order to take a break and to enjoy a delicious local lunch, and to walk beside the village marshes, which produced Common Snipes, Greater Flamingoes, Greylag Geese and Northern Pintail amongst others.

In the mid-afternoon, we drove back into Doñana National Park once again, a bit further afield this time to visit the José Valverde Visitors' centre (also known as FAO). We had a few interesting birds along the way such as Eurasian Kestrel, Crested Lark, White Wagtails, Griffon Vultures, Common Cranes and Greylag Geese, amongst others. At the visitor's centre, we had nice views of Black-winged Stilts, Pied Avocets, Common and Jack Snipes, Gadwall and some beautiful Western Marsh Harriers amongst others. After having a great time here, we drove back to the core area in order to keep searching for Iberian Lynx. We heard news that one had crossed the Raya Real track just minutes after we had been there, so we turned back to see if there was any sign of the feline... but it had already vanished into the bushes. After that attempt and it being almost dark, we returned to our hotel in El Rocío for a well-deserved break. Checklist, delicious supper and drinks!

Day 3

Wednesday 29th November

Doñana National Park (Raya Real) – El Acebuche Visitor's Centre – Andújar Natural Park

Today we had an even earlier start to be the first on the field, and to see if the cat from the previous evening might be around the same place. We drove along the Raya Real track enjoying the sounds of the wilderness in this lovely place as we drifted along the sandy tracks in search of Lynx. We searched really hard and again saw quite fresh tracks of an Iberian Lynx close to El Vicioso gate. While we were checking the area, we saw many Red Deer, Red-legged Partridge, Iberian Magpies and a few European Rabbits, plus a young Spanish Imperial Eagle on a White Stork's nest.

We made a stop in order to stretch our legs and scan the border area of the Mediterranean forest and the heathland area, which produced flocks of Woodpigeon, Goldfinches, Iberian Shrike, Sardinian Warbler, and others.

As it was beginning to rain, we decided to return to our hotel in El Rocío to check out, have a nice picnic lunch and hit the motorway to start our journey to Andújar (via Seville), making a facilities break halfway on the journey.

We arrived at 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. As it wasn't raining we decided to check the closest area while we had still daylight hours. So we drove toward the Encinarejo Dam and we walked very silently to find several European Kingfisher, Iberian Magpies, Common Chiffchaff, Grey and White Wagtail amongst others. While we watched all these birds, a silent Otter appeared swimming below us: just a beautiful welcome to the mountains. We all agreed we could spend hours in such a place. After dusk we checked in, took a well-deserved break and had a delicious dinner, followed by a good night's sleep!

Day 4

Thursday 30th November

Andújar Natural Park (La Lancha valley - Los Escoriales - Encinarejo Dam)

After an early breakfast, we drove for about thirty minutes towards the upper valley of La Lancha to explore and scan the multiple gullies which have been Iberian Lynx hotspots over the last few years.

It was a rainy morning, so we took our waterproofs and we began to check every bush and rock of the valley. Just as we arrived, a beautiful Spanish Imperial Eagle was perched on top of an Holm Oak greeting us. We also saw

some Sardinian Warblers, Little Owl, Mistle Thrush, Eurasian Magpies and Griffon and Cinereous Vultures standing the rain. European Rabbits, Mouflon and Red Deer were also observed... but no Lynx.

As it was getting wetter we decided to move further down to the Jandula Dam to see if other species could be observed. At the dam we had great views of Spanish Ibex, Blue Rock Thrush and Black Redstart amongst others. A Golden Eagle was standing on a ridge in the distance and we managed to spot it right before we left the area. Around noon the rain eased and stopped, so we got back to the valley to make a good scan while having our picnic lunch. The Griffon and Cinereous Vultures enjoyed broken sunshine, flying around us together with a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles. Great photo opportunities...

After lunch we continued scanning the valley in search of the elusive cat, but only European Rabbits, Red Deer and Fallow Deer were spotted instead. As the sky got darker again we decided to give a chance to the lower valley where we could be more sheltered. We drove about 35 minutes and got to the Encinarejo Dam where we walked along the lower Jandula river. We managed to have nice views of Eurasian Kingfisher, Grey and White Wagtails, Common Chiffchaff, Iberian Magpies and Great Cormorant, amongst others. Some Red Deer were standing on the top of one hill close to the dam and the Eurasian Otters gave a brief show.

Day 5

Friday 1st December

Andújar Natural Park (River Jandula & La Lancha)

Our last full day in Andujar NP. We made a slightly later start, as the forecast was quite bad for the morning, so after a relaxed breakfast we got to the outlook at the River Jandula, close to the Encinarejo dam where Gary spotted something that was quite likely to be our feline... but it vanished behind a bush after few seconds and no one else could confirm the sighting. As we were waiting for the cat to jump from the bush, we had some great views of Crested Tits, Common Firecrest, Griffon Vultures and Grey Herons.

As it seemed that the rain would stop soon, we began to head to the upper valley where we expected to spend the rest of the day. The mist was lifting and soon we began to have a beautiful landscape where Griffon and Cinereous Vultures and Spanish Imperial Eagles began to display. We also got a female Golden Eagle perched on a tree on our way to La Lancha.

The mammals began to enjoy the sunshine too, and some Red and Fallow Deer and some Spanish Ibex moved through different areas of the valley. We had also a picturesque image of a Mouflon together with a sheep: apparently good friends! We were all focusing our attention to the movement of the Eurasian Magpies as they normally show where the predators are located...but we had no luck.

We moved further down the valley to have our picnic lunch, enjoying the sun at least, and we had great views of Griffon Vultures and a Short-toed Treecreeper amongst others. We moved to different observatories looking for the most suitable locations to spot the Iberian Lynx, but yet again it was really elusive. Some Little Owls, Blue Rock Thrush and Iberian Green Woodpecker were spotted instead.

We had a great sunset over the hills and when the light was getting poorer we decided to get back to the hotel.

We all had the sensation of having had a great week plenty of wildlife and beautiful locations, but the mythic Iberian Lynx remained like a shadow over us. We had some drinks chatting about all the great wildlife we got to see in these pristine locations and we enjoyed our superb last dinner.

Day 6

Saturday 2nd December

Andújar Natural Park – Seville airport

A very early start was necessary, in order to get to Seville in time for our flight back to the UK. Some of the group were staying a few days longer, so we wished them the best for their onward journeys! After arriving in time at Sevilla airport, we said goodbye to each other with all best wishes after an amazing experience over the week in the lovely Andalucia! We had been lucky to enjoy great wildlife, stunning landscapes, fine gastronomy and great locations in this fantastic part of Spain.

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Species lists

Mammals

| E=Endemic, I=Introduced | | November – December 2023 | | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|----|---|---|
| Common name | Scientific name | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 1 | 2 |
| European Rabbit | <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Iberian Lynx - E | <i>Lynx pardinus</i> | E | E | E | | | |
| Red Fox | <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> | E | ✓ | E | | ✓ | |
| Wild Boar | <i>Sus scrofa</i> | | | | | | |
| Eurasian Badger | <i>Meles meles</i> | E | E | | | | |
| Wild Boar | <i>Sus scrofa</i> | E | E | E | | | |
| European Otter | <i>Lutra lutra</i> | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| Red Deer | <i>Cervus elaphus</i> | E | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Fallow Deer | <i>Dama dama</i> | | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Spanish Ibex | <i>Capra pyrenaica</i> | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Mouflon | <i>Ovis orientalis</i> | | | | | ✓ | |
| European Hedgehog | <i>Erinaceus europaeus</i> | E | | | | | |

Birds (H = Heard only)

| N=Near-endemic | | November – December 2022 | | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|----|---|---|
| Common name | Scientific name | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 1 | 2 |
| Red-legged Partridge | <i>Alectoris rufa</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Greylag Goose | <i>Anser anser</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> | ✓ | | | | | |
| Rock Dove | <i>Columba livia</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Common Wood Pigeon | <i>Columba palumbus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Eurasian Collared Dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Western Swamphen | <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Common Moorhen | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Eurasian Coot | <i>Fulica atra</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Common Crane | <i>Grus grus</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Greater Flamingo | <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Black-winged Stilt | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |

| N=Near-endemic | | November – December 2022 | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|----|---|---|
| Common name | Scientific name | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 1 | 2 |
| Pied Avocet | <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Northern Lapwing | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Common Ringed Plover | <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Black-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa limosa</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Dunlin | <i>Calidris alpina</i> | ✓ | | | | | |
| Little Stint | <i>Calidris minuta</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Common Snipe | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Green Sandpiper | <i>Tringa ochropus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Spotted Redshank | <i>Tringa erythropus</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Common Greenshank | <i>Tringa nebularia</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Black-headed Gull | <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> | ✓ | | | | | |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus fuscus</i> | ✓ | | | | | |
| Black Stork | <i>Ciconia nigra</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> | | ✓ | | | | |
| 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> | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Black-winged Kite | <i>Elanus caeruleus</i> | | | ✓ | | | |
| Griffon Vulture | <i>Gyps fulvus</i> | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Cinereous Vulture | <i>Aegypius monachus</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> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Common Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Tawny Owl | <i>Strix aluco</i> | | | 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 | | H | H | |

| N=Near-endemic | | November – December 2022 | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|----|---|---|
| Common name | Scientific name | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 1 | 2 |
| Iberian Green Woodpecker | <i>Picus sharpei</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Lesser Kestrel | <i>Falco naumanni</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Common Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Merlin | <i>Falco columbarius</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Iberian Grey Shrike | <i>Lanius meridionalis</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Eurasian Jay | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> | | | | | ✓ | |
| Iberian Magpie - N | <i>Cyanopica cooki</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Eurasian Magpie | <i>Pica pica</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Western Jackdaw | <i>Coloeus monedula</i> | ✓ | | | | | |
| Northern Raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> | H | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 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> | | | | ✓ | | |
| Crested Lark | <i>Galerida cristata</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Eurasian Crag Martin | <i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Cetti's Warbler | <i>Cettia cetti</i> | | ✓ | H | H | H | |
| Long-tailed Tit | <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| Willow Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> | | | ✓ | | | |
| Common Chiffchaff | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Blackcap | <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> | H | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Dartford Warbler | <i>Sylvia undata</i> | | ✓ | | | H | |
| Sardinian Warbler | <i>Sylvia melanocephala</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Common Firecrest | <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i> | | | H | | ✓ | |
| Eurasian Wren | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | | ✓ | | | H | |
| Eurasian Nuthatch | <i>Sitta europaea</i> | | | | | H | |
| Short-toed Treecreeper | <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i> | | | | | H | |
| Common Starling | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> | | ✓ | | | | |
| 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> | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |

| N=Near-endemic | | November – December 2022 | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|----|---|---|
| Common name | Scientific name | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 1 | 2 |
| European Stonechat | <i>Saxicola rubicola</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Spanish Sparrow | <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i> | ✓ | | | | | |
| Eurasian Tree Sparrow | <i>Passer montanus</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> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| European Greenfinch | <i>Chloris chloris</i> | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Common Linnet | <i>Linaria cannabina</i> | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| European Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| European Serin | <i>Serinus serinus</i> | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Corn Bunting | <i>Emberiza calandra</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Jack Snipe | | ✓ | | | | | |
| White-throated Dipper | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Rose-ringed Parakeet | | | | ✓ | | | |
| European Siskin | | | | | | ✓ | |

Invertebrates noted

Red Admiral

Crimson Speckled Moth

Pimelia Beetle