Spain's Coto Donana & Extremadura

Naturetrek Tour Report

22 - 30 April 2014





Eurasian Spoon





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Report & images compiled by Tom Mabbett



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051 F: +44 (0)1962 736426
E: <u>info@naturetrek.co.uk</u> W: <u>www.naturetrek.co.uk</u>

Tour Participants: Julian Gayarre and Tom Mabbett (leaders) with 13 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Tuesday 22nd April

We all arrived into Seville airport and after meeting Julian, headed to the 'Wild West' style town of El Rocio. After checking in to our hotel we headed to the nearby reserve of La Rocina. Here we had our first lovely picnic with Nightingales singing loudly all around us, and our first Woodchat Shrike wasn't far away. Following our picnic we walked through some pine woods and out towards a wetland area. Glossy Ibis were feeding not too far from us, Night Herons were perched in an overhanging tree, and Purple Swamphen and Squacco Heron were showing well. A really great scene and full of birds!

Continuing on we heard Iberian Chiffchaff and paused to take in its very different song with some seeing it flitting above us. Continuing across more open areas, Crested Larks were flying up in front of us, Stonechat was noted and Marsh Harrier seen from one of the hides.

We returned to the vehicles after getting better views of the Iberian Chiffchaff in the same spot, and were soon back at the hotel. On the large pool behind the hotel Black-winged Stilts were feeding in the shallows with Glossy Ibis, a flock of Greater Flamingoes was a little further out, and Whiskered Tern was over the water. This lagoon, being a few yards from the hotel, is very productive and always held interesting species. After an excellent first day we enjoyed our evening meal with a view over the lagoon, and then we all got some well-earned sleep.

Day 2

Wednesday 23rd April

After a good breakfast with plenty of tea and coffee we set off for the day. Our first stop was an area of pine forest and open grassland near Aznalcazar. The area is excellent Iberian Lynx habitat and we drove around the narrow tracks keeping sharp-eyed. Bee-eaters performed for us on the drive in, and although no Lynx were seen we did see fresh tracks which we inspected whilst measurements were taken.

After exploring the area we continued on to Dehesa de Abajo, a large lagoon containing many birds. White Stork were nesting on the driveway allowing amazingly close views, and we went for a walk to the lagoon. On the lagoon itself we watched some smart Black-necked Grebes and nearby a Black Kite was eating a snake on a post. After a while we spotted two Red-knobbed Coots and watched the birds for some time; one sporting a neck collar.

Following an excellent time here we headed on to the Val Verde centre and watched the large numbers of egrets and herons, with Glossy Ibis and Purple Swamphen showing very well.

Before returning to the hotel we had another drive around the Lynx habitat to try our luck again, but none were seen. We did, however, see a very impressive Ladder Snake crossing the path and we all got out to watch this impressive snake.

Back at the hotel we enjoyed another nice meal and recapped the day's events.

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Day 3

Thursday 24th April

Today was spent in the private areas of Coto Donana National Park. We were collected early and headed on our way. We drove around the pine forests, learning about this habitat and seeing what we could spot. Woodlark was seen well and Booted Eagle was found on a nearby pylon. We hoped to find Iberian Lynx but this extremely rare cat was not going to be easy to find.

Wild Boar were found and we watched them trundling across the tracks. We moved to a more open area where Southern Grey Shrikes were seen along with Woodchat Shrike and Crested Lark. We also saw Bee-eaters along the way and Red-rumped Swallows over some grassland.

As the day was heating up we returned to town for lunch, a look around and to scan over the lagoon. At this time of year the lagoon, yards from the hotel, can hold different birds each day. Whiskered Terns were seen while Curlew Sandpiper was new along with Dunlin and Ruff, and a Collared Pratincole passed overhead.

We headed back into the reserve as the day started to cool but despite our best efforts at some of the best sites, we couldn't find any Lynx. It had been an interesting day with our local guides, learning about the reserve, and we enjoyed our evening meal back in El Rocio.

Day 4

Friday 25th April

Today we drove to the other side of the river to look at different areas of the park. Our first visit was to a tiny lagoon which we hoped would hold one of our target species. As we walked down the track and across the fields to view the lake we saw Red-rumped Swallows, and on finding a good spot to view the lake we soon found our target: White-headed Duck. A smart male provided some excellent views and we enjoyed this rare bird.

After this successful stop we had a comfort break. From a roadside café a very smart Black-shouldered Kite was found, and at the other side of the road we had excellent views of Collared Pratincole sat in a field near a small pool.

We continued to another area at EL Brazo Del Este. On the way we had good views of male Montagu's Harrier, and on reaching the wetland area we saw the exotic and introduced Golden Bishop, with a Night Heron close by. We reached an area of really superb birding and stayed here for our picnic. The lagoon was covered in Whiskered Terns, a Penduline Tit was seen near its nest, and an Osprey was seen on a nearby pylon. As we watched, the Osprey took to the skies and plunged into the lagoon, caught its meal and returned to its perch to eat it - what a sight! A Little Bittern and more Collared Pratincoles were also seen.

We ate our picnic before carrying on and driving very slowly along the edge of some excellent wetland habitat teeming with birds. As we drove Greater Flamingoes were flying by and Collared Pratincoles were everywhere, along with Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns. Also a Curlew Sandpiper was on a small pool, a Great Reed Warbler showed well, and Squacco Herons were spotted. It really was stunning birding.

Eventually we dragged ourselves away, scanning the area as we left, and made the journey back to the hotel for dinner.

Day 5

Saturday 26th April

Today we transferred from Coto Donana to Extremadura. We left El Rocio early and headed to the coast and an area of scrub with an impressive view along the beach. In the scrubland area Dartford Warbler showed well and lots of lizards were on show including Spiny-footed and Large Psammodromus. We had a nice walk and scanned the beach before returning to the vehicles and heading back to the hotel to pick up our bags.

After loading the vehicles we started our drive. We stopped for a picnic at a nice riverside spot where we saw a Nightingale, Wryneck was heard, and alongside the river were Western Olivaceous Warblers. An excellent stop! After the picnic we continued, heading north to a totally different region.

We stopped in the impressive town of Merida and, birding from the bridge, we had stunning views of Little Bittern in a small reedbed, and Penduline Tit was also seen.

Back on the road and it wasn't long before we arrived at Vina Las Torres, our hotel in Extremadura. We were welcomed by Juan Pedro and Belen and sat down to our first delicious meal.

Day 6

Sunday 27th April

Today we explored the classic Extremadura Steppes and, full of anticipation, we headed past Trujillo and out onto these vast open plains.

On scanning the first field we were delighted to find a displaying male Little Bustard. Whilst we enjoyed excellent views, Calandra Larks were above us and Crested Larks on every post. Hoopoe was also seen, and our first Extremadura Montagu's Harrier drifted by. A great start.

Moving on, we drove slowly down a dirt track and carried on scanning the fields. Our next target, Great Bustard, was soon found. These huge birds were striding across a distant field and we moved a little closer for a better views. There was some half-hearted display and, as we watched them, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse were heard and then seen in flight overhead, and Griffon Vultures were taking to the air as the day warmed up.

After a fantastic start we continued to the town of Santa Marta de Magasca where we stopped for a drink and break. Shortly afterwards we were back on the steppes and walking across a field to a water hole. Short-toed Larks were singing above us and some were on the ground. At the water hole we saw a stunning melanistic Montagu's Harrier; a smart looking bird as it drifted and quartered low over the steppes. Our first Black (Cinereous) Vultures were also seen overhead.

Next we stopped for lunch at an idyllic riverside spot and while the picnic was prepared, the group enjoyed the Crag Martins and the Grey Wagtail on the river. Whilst eating lunch a splendid young Bonelli's Eagle drifted overhead - there is always something to look at here!

We carried on to an area where Roller boxes had been put up by the local electricity board, and to our delight a box near the road was being used. We enjoyed these stunning birds for a while, and watched Kestrels and

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Jackdaws in other boxes. Further along the road we enjoyed a superb scene as Montagu's Harrier grappled with Black and Griffon Vultures overhead, producing a real raptor fest!

We dragged ourselves away and headed back to Trujillo, stopping to watch Lesser Kestrels on the old bullring before returning to our hotel. The grounds of the hotel were superb with Azure–winged Magpie, Woodchat Shrike, Nightingale and Serin always to be found.

Day 7

Monday 28th April

Today was all about the stunning Monfrague National Park. We set off bright and early and before long were arriving at Pena Falcon, an imposing outcrop of rock at the start of the park. Here there were a great number of Griffon Vultures circling on the morning thermals and Egyptian Vulture was noted with them. It was a treat to watch Black Storks on their nest with two pairs seen. Also Black Redstarts and Rock Buntings were around. Eventually we dragged ourselves away from this superb spot and continued into the park.

Our next stop was at a bridge crossing the river and here we stopped to watch the Alpine Swifts amongst hundreds and hundreds of House Martins. These large powerful Swifts were enjoyed, dashing past us at close range - a real treat. Black Kites were ever present and with so much else to see, we carried on and stopped for a coffee after a very productive morning.

Our next stop was for a short walk in a different habitat: low scrub and recently planted trees on the banks above the river. Here we had excellent views of Thekla Lark while Woodlark sang overhead and Dartford Warbler was also seen. The highlight, though was a very smart male Black-eared Wheatear which showed very well for us. Following a productive walk we moved on for lunch and our picnic overlooking another vulture colony with Griffon Vultures coming in to the ledges nearby. Spanish Sparrows fed on bread scraps.

Continuing on towards the end of the park and before reaching Portilla del Tiétar, we stopped and enjoyed the privilege of watching an Egyptian Vulture on its nest. After enjoying this we went for a very enjoyable walk between the Cork and Holm Oaks and managed to see two Golden Orioles, Common Cuckoo, Nuthatch and Bee-eaters. Again, another fascinating habitat was experienced.

We finished the day looking over the famous vulture colony at Portilla del Tiétar. Here simply stunning views can be had of the vultures; and a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles was our target. We had some time here, and we needed it as the eagles were not appearing for us. As we waited we saw both adult and well developed young Eagle Owls which gave superb views. Also a Golden Eagle was seen through the telescope, very high overhead. After soaking up this special place the star of the show, Spanish Imperial Eagle, did appear and gave a superb flypast, low in front of the rock face, showing the extensive white leading edge to the wings. A great bird and a fitting end to the day.

We made our way back to the hotel, passing back through the park and enjoyed another of Belen's meals.

Day 8

Tuesday 29th April

Today, after breakfast, we headed the short distance to Madronera and made our way, eventually, to an excellent area of tamarisks where we focussed our attentions for the morning. This is a superb area for Great Spotted Cuckoo and we weren't to be disappointed. We had great views of these birds flying overhead and calling, and two showed very well together, low in a tamarisk with Magpies nearby. Also Black Vultures were seen and a Quail was heard nearby. After watching the Cuckoos, we carried on our way and crossed over the Belen plain. On our way we noticed three Little Owls and had great views of them. Bee-eater and Hoopoe were also seen as we covered this vast open countryside.

Having crossed this area, it was time for lunch and we stopped in a park for our picnic. After eating and feeling refreshed and ready for more birds, we continued to look over the Santa Marta de Magasca Steppe once more. On the way a Black Stork was spotted in a shallow pool. On the steppe we again saw the impressive Great Bustard, along with Short-toed and Booted Eagles, Montagu's Harrier and Southern Grey Shrike.

We finished the day in Trujillo. This historic town is fascinating to explore, and with Pallid Swifts and Lesser Kestrels breeding in the town, there was lots to see. After a walk around the town we made our way back to the hotel for our final meal.

Day 9

Wednesday 30th April

Today was about making our way to the airport. Once there we said our farewells after a superb week, having watched a great number of special birds and having had a lot of fun along the way.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓= recorded but not counted; H = heard only; c. = approximately)

				April								
	Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
1	Greylag Goose	Anser anser	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
2	Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna	✓			✓						
3	Gadwall	Anas strepera	✓	✓		✓	✓					
4	Eurasian Wigeon	Anas Penelope										
5	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
6	Northern Shoveler	Anas clypeata	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
7	Northern Pintail	Anas acuta	✓		✓	✓						
8	Red-crested Pochard	Netta rufina	✓	✓	✓	✓						
9	Common Pochard	Aythya farina	✓	✓	✓	✓						
10	White-headed Duck	Oxyura leucocephala				4						
11	Red-legged Partridge	Alectoris rufa	✓	✓	✓	✓						
12	Common Quail	Coturnix coturnix		Н	Н							
13	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		
14	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus	✓	✓	✓	✓						
15	Black-necked Grebe	Podiceps nigricollis		20		✓						
16	Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus roseus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
17	Black Stork	Ciconia nigra							✓	✓		
18	White Stork	Ciconia ciconia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
19	Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus	✓	✓	√	✓	✓					
20	Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia	✓	✓	√	✓	✓					
21	Little Bittern	Ixobrychus minutes				✓	3					
22	Black-crowned Night Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax	✓	✓		✓	✓					
23	Squacco Heron	Ardeola ralloides	✓		√	✓						
24	Western Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	✓	✓	√	✓	✓			✓		
25	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	✓	✓	✓	√			1	✓		
26	Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea	✓	c20		√						
27	Great Egret	Ardea alba		✓		✓						
28	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	✓	✓	✓	✓						
29	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo				✓			✓			
30	Western Osprey	Pandion haliaetus				√						
31	Black-winged Kite	Elanus caeruleus				√			1			
32	Egyptian Vulture	Neophron percnopterus							1			
33	Griffon Vulture	Gyps fulvus	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	√		
34	Cinereous Vulture	Aegypius monachus		✓	✓				1	✓		
35	Short-toed Snake Eagle	Circaetus gallicus		✓	✓	√			1	✓		
36	Booted Eagle	Hieraaetus pennatus	√	✓	✓	√		✓	✓	✓		
37	Spanish Imperial Eagle	Aquila adalberti							✓			
38	Golden Eagle	Aquila chrysaetos							1	1		
39	Bonelli's Eagle	Aquila fasciata						1				
40	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus						-	1			
41	Western Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus	√	✓		✓						
42	Montagu's Harrier (1 melanistic)	Circus pygargus				✓	15	✓		✓		
43	Red Kite	Milvus milvus		✓	✓		1.0		✓	✓		
44	Black Kite	Milvus migrans	✓	✓	✓	✓			1	✓		
45	Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo						✓	✓	✓		
46	Great Bustard	Otis tarda						✓		✓		
47	Little Bustard	Tetrax tetrax						✓			 	

						April					
	Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
48	Purple Swamphen	Porphyrio porphyrio	✓	✓		c80					
49	Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	✓	✓	✓	✓					
50	Red-knobbed Coot	Fulica cristata		2							
51	Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra	✓	✓	✓	✓					
52	Eurasian Stone-curlew	Burhinus oedicnemus	✓								
53	Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
54	Pied Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta	✓	✓		✓					
55	Grey Plover	Pluvialis squatarola				✓					
56	Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula		✓	✓	✓					
57	Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius				✓			✓		
58	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa				✓					
59	Common Redshank	Tringa tetanus				✓					
60	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	✓	✓	✓	✓					
61	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos		✓		✓			✓		
62	Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea			✓	✓					
63	Dunlin	Calidris alpine			✓	✓					
64	Ruff	Philomachus pugnax			✓	✓					
65	Collared Pratincole	Glareola pratincola	✓		✓	✓					
66	Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus		✓		✓					
67	Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis		✓		✓					
68	Gull-billed Tern	Gelochelidon nilotica		2	2	✓					
69	Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias hybrid	✓	<u>-</u>	15	✓					
70	Black Tern	Chlidonias niger	✓		10						
71	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	Pterocles alchata	_					✓			
72	Rock Dove	Columba livia	✓	✓	/	✓		· ·	V	✓	
73	Common Wood Pigeon	Columba iivia	· ✓	· /	· ·	· /			· ·	· /	
74	European Turtle Dove	Streptopelia turtur	_		· ·				·		
75	Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	✓	✓	'	✓			✓	✓	
76	Great Spotted Cuckoo	Clamator glandarius	•	•		•			·	c8	
77	Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus	√	Н	Н				Н	√ ✓	
78	Eurasian Eagle-owl	Bubo bubo	•	- 11	111				11 ✓	•	
79	Little Owl	Athene noctua		✓	/				•	3	
80	Alpine Swift	Tachymarptis melba		•	\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \				✓	3	
	Common Swift		✓	✓	/	✓			V ✓	✓	
81	Pallid Swift	Apus apus Apus pallidus	✓	_	\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \	V ✓			V ✓	-	
82		<u> </u>	V			V		✓	V		
83	European Roller	Coracias garrulous Alcedo atthis						V	✓		
84	Common Kingfisher		✓	✓	/	✓		✓	∨ ✓		
85	European Bee-eater	Merops apiaster	V	∨ ✓	V /	∨ ✓		∨ ✓	∨ ✓	✓	
86	Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops		· ·	-	V	✓	V	V	V	
87	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major			H						
88	Iberian Green Woodpecker	Picus sharpie			Н						
89	Lesser Kestrel	Falco naumanni		✓				√	√	√	
90	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
91	Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrines			_				√		
92	Southern Grey Shrike	Lanius meridionalis	√		✓				√	√	
93	Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator	✓	✓	✓	√			✓	✓	
94	Eurasian Golden Oriole	Oriolus oriolus			2	Н			2		
95	Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius							√	√	
96	Iberian Magpie	Cyanopica cooki	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
97	Eurasian Magpie	Pica pica		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
98	Western Jackdaw	Coloeus monedula		✓					✓	✓	

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			April									
	Common name	on name Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
99	Carrion Crow	Corvus corone			✓				✓			
100	Northern Raven	Corvus corax	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓		
101	European Crested Tit	Lophophanes cristatus	Н									
102	Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus	✓		✓				✓	✓		
103	Great Tit	Parus major			✓				✓	✓		
104	Eurasian Penduline Tit	Remiz pendulinus				✓						
105	Skylark	Alauda arvensis				✓						
106	Woodlark	Lullula arborea		✓	✓				✓			
107	Thekla Lark	Galerida theklae							✓	✓		
108	Crested Lark	Galerida cristata	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
109	Greater Short-toed Lark	Calandrella brachydactyla		✓						✓		
110	Calandra Lark	Melanocorypha calandra						✓		✓		
111	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia		✓	✓							
112	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
113	Eurasian Crag Martin	Ptyonoprogne rupestris							✓	✓		
114	Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
115	Red-rumped Swallow	Cecropis daurica	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
116	Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti	Н	✓	Н	Н						
117	Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus	✓		✓				✓	Н		
118	Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita	Н									
119	Iberian Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus ibericus	✓									
120	Great Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus arundinaceus		✓		✓						
121	Eurasian Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus	Н	✓	✓	Н						
122	Western Olivaceous Warbler	Iduna opaca				✓						
123	Savi's Warbler	Locustella luscinioides	Н			Н						
124	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis	Н	✓	✓	√						
125	Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla							√			
126	Common Whitethroat	Sylvia communis				✓						
127	Dartford Warbler	Sylvia undata								✓		
128	Subalpine Warbler	Sylvia cantillans							✓			
129	Sardinian Warbler	Sylvia melanocephala	Н	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
130	Common Firecrest	Regulus ignicapilla	✓									
131	Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	✓						Н			
132	Eurasian Nuthatch	Sitta europaea							✓			
133	Short-toed Treecreeper	Certhia brachydactyla	Н		Н				✓			
134	Spotless Starling	Sturnus unicolor	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
135	Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
136	Common Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos	✓		✓	Н			Н	✓		
137	Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros							✓			
138	Blue Rock Thrush	Monticola solitaries							✓			
139	European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola	✓		✓	√			✓	✓		
140	Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe				✓				✓		
141	Black-eared Wheatear	Oenanthe hispanica		✓					✓			
142	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
143	Spanish Sparrow	Passer hispaniolensis		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
144	Spanish Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava iberiae	✓	✓	✓	✓						
145	White Wagtail	Motacilla alba							✓	✓		
146	Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
147	European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris		✓	✓	✓						
148	Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina		✓					✓			
149	European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	/	✓	/	✓			1	✓		

			April								
	Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
150	European Serin	Serinus serinus	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
151	Corn Bunting	Emberiza calandra	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
152	Rock Bunting	Emberiza cia							✓		
153	Golden Bishop	Euplectes afer				✓					

Mammals

Granada Hare, Lepus granatensis

Red Fox, Vulpes vulpes

Red Deer, Cervus elaphus elaphus

Wild Boar, Sus scrofa Iberian Lynx (tracks only), Lynx pardinus

Butterflies

Clouded Yellow, *Colias crocea*Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*Spanish Marbled White, *Melanargia ines*Small Copper, *Lycaena phlaeas*Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*Brimstone, *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Reptiles & Amphibians

Natterjack Toad, *Epidalea calamita*Viperine Snake, *Natrix maura*Ladder Snake, *Rhinechis scalaris*

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