

Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report Compilation

March 2006

Summary

Many of you joined our 'Wolves & Bustards' tours in rural Spain this March and, judging from your reports, thoroughly enjoyed this unique trip! By the time of the first tour, Naturetrek staff had paid 14 visits to the region, and had successfully encountered Wolves on all but one of these visits. We were therefore delighted that this success rate proved sustainable whilst visiting in groups. All three of our groups saw Wolves; indeed we had sightings on 8 days, sometimes of as many as five Wolves! We watched Wolves chasing Red Deer and Ravens as well as playing and feeding on prey. We also saw Wild Boar, seventeen species of bird of prey and up to 500 Great Bustards a day during our visits.

The following are extracts from several Naturetrek tour reports:

Wolves

We began our day at dawn from a viewpoint overlooking a mosaic of moorland, fields, deciduous woods and pine plantations. Scanning over this frosty landscape we had soon seen several Red Deer, and with 20 minutes Andy exclaimed "Wolves", to our great excitement. Beyond a plantation we initially saw 2 Wolves, but this number increased to 5 as we tracked the group with bins and scopes, as they moved off to our right, sometimes walking, trotting, stopping and even occasionally sitting! We watched them cross a public road, which we had a little earlier driven along. For over 30 minutes we watched them as they moved across fields and clumps of woodland before they eventually disappeared from our view. What a wonderful start to our first day.



Wolf watching by John Walsh



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Great Bustards

. we headed west, making our way along country roads and into the protected area that surrounds the village. It was only a matter of minutes before we were watching our first flock of Great Bustards striding across the rolling fields. This area supports one of the most important populations of this magnificent species in the world. A careful count of the surrounding countryside revealed over 300 individuals. Turning onto dirt tracks we found a spot that provided shelter from the wind. As we stopped a male Hen Harrier drifted across the track in front of us and then continued to hunt the area. From this spot we enjoyed watching two flocks of Great Bustards which included some displaying birds.



Great Bustards by Paul Marshall

Raptors

As we approached the gorge the lead bus brought us to a halt, having spotted a pair of Egyptian Vultures, which gave us a demonstration of their aerial skills. Meanwhile a pair of Golden Eagles had also taken to the skies and Michael had followed one of the birds down to a where it alighted on a rocky outcrop, allowing it to be scoped by all the members of the party. Just as we were about to depart, not to be out done a Peregrine put in an appearance.

Our next stop was by a monastery and here over our picnic lunch we were able to observe in detail at least three adult Golden Eagles, which treated us to aerial displays and quite often landed across the void on the Portuguese cliffs. A little closer to hand Serins were also displaying and singing. It was in this general area too, that we saw Southern Grey Shrike, Hoopoe and our first Griffon Vultures.



Griffon Vulture by Paul Marshall

Travelling a little further, we arrived overlooking a tributary of the main river. Here at one of Gilles' recommended locations for Bonelli's Eagle we had more marvellous views of Egyptian and Griffon Vultures and another adult Golden Eagle, plus a Peregrine, which appeared to take delight, much to our delight, at stooping at the Griffons! After sometime studying the various aerial manoeuvres, Dave drew our attention to a different raptor that was gliding in swiftly and our expectations were rewarded when it was identified as a Bonelli's Eagle. Scrutinising the numerous large vultures also paid off when a Black Vulture was found, floating slowly by alongside a Griffon. We carried on

down into this beautiful valley, stopping for a while to enjoy a lovely meadow, before climbing out the other side to halt again by a huge dam where amongst other things, we were able to look down in to the occupied nests of several Griffon Vultures.

On our return journey, a hovering, silhouetted, raptor was at first glance believed to be a Kestrel, as it hunted ahead close to the road, but as we neared, it glided out of the hover to reveal a superb Black-shouldered Kite! A little further on and by now at dusk, we stopped to allow Gilles the opportunity to make Wolf howls. It is a performance to behold and though we did not hear a Wolf respond, it was still amazing. However, Gilles did direct our hearing to a Nightjar churring nearby.

And more wolves

Most of the group returned to the usual viewpoint (with others choosing to have a more relaxing start to the day after the success of the previous day). A perfect spring day complete with a stunning sunrise and singing Woodlarks was the ideal setting to watch wolves feeding on the carcass. At first light five Wolves were present but two quickly disappeared into the wood. The remaining animals showed extremely well on and off for another hour. We were able to watch them feeding, resting and chasing the Ravens.



Wolf country at dawn by Paul Marshall

Species seen on tours in March 2006

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	5-9 March	9-13 March	13-17 March
Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	ü	ü	
Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>	ü	ü	ü

Birds

Common name	Scientific name	5-9 March	9-13 March	13-17 March
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		ü	
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	ü	ü	ü
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	ü	ü	ü
Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		ü	
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	ü	ü	ü
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	ü	ü	ü
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	ü	ü	ü
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	ü	ü	ü
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	ü	ü	ü
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	ü		ü
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	ü	ü	ü
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	ü	ü	ü
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	ü	ü	ü
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	ü	ü	ü
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		ü	
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	ü		
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	ü	ü	ü
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	ü		
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			ü
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	ü	ü	
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	ü	ü	ü
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	ü	ü	ü
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	ü	ü	
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>	ü	ü	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	ü	ü	ü
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	ü	ü	
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	ü	ü	ü
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	ü	ü	

Common name	Scientific name	5-9 March	9-13 March	13-17 March
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	ü	ü	
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	ü	ü	ü
Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>		ü	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		ü	
Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	ü	ü	ü
Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	ü	ü	
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>			ü
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			ü
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		ü	ü
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	ü		
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		ü	ü
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>		ü	ü
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		ü	
Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>			ü
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>			ü
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	ü	ü	ü
Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>	ü		
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	ü	ü	ü
Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	ü		
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		ü	
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	ü	ü	ü
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	ü	ü	ü
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>		ü	ü
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus minor</i>			ü
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	ü	ü	ü
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	ü	ü	ü
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	ü	ü	ü
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		ü	ü
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	ü	ü	ü
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>		ü	ü
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	ü	ü	ü
Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogene rupestris</i>	ü	ü	ü
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	ü	ü	ü
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	ü	ü	ü
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			ü
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	ü	ü	ü
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		ü	ü
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		ü	ü
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		ü	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	ü	ü	ü
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	ü	ü	ü
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		ü	ü
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	ü	ü	ü
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		ü	ü
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	ü		
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			ü
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			ü

Common name	Scientific name	5-9 March	9-13 March	13-17 March
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>			ü
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		ü	ü
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		ü	ü
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			ü
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignacapilla</i>		ü	ü
Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	ü	ü	ü
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	ü	ü	ü
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	ü		ü
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		ü	ü
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	ü	ü	ü
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	ü	ü	ü
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	ü		
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	ü	ü	ü
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	ü	ü	ü
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	ü	ü	ü
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	ü	ü	ü
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	ü	ü	ü
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	ü	ü	ü
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		ü	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		ü	ü
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		ü	ü
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	ü	ü	ü
Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	ü	ü	ü
Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	ü	ü	
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>			ü
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	ü		ü
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>	ü	ü	ü
Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	ü	ü	ü
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	ü	ü	ü
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	ü	ü	ü