

Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report Compilation

October 2006

Summary

Twenty-four of you joined our 'Wolves & Bustards' tours in rural Spain in October and, judging from your reports, thoroughly enjoyed this unique trip! Both groups saw Wolves; indeed we had sightings on 4 days, sometimes of as many as six Wolves in a day! We watched Wolves playing and feeding on prey. We also saw Wild Boar, plenty of deer and thirteen species of bird of prey and up to 200 Great Bustards a day during our visits.



Wolf country at dawn by Gerald Broddelez

The following are extracts from the two Naturetrek tour reports:

Wolves

The overnight storm and winds showed no sign of abating as we set off at 0700 hrs to our destination. There was a search for the track to direct us to the area where park guards had told us the previous evening that wolves had recently been seen. This brought us a brief view of a Barn Owl, and in spite of the slight delay we were still in place well before first light.

As dawn rose the rain became heavier and more persistent. Redwings, Wrens, Robins and Song Thrushes were the only birds heard which together with the rain gave the dawn a distinctly British feel. Initial scanning of the far ridge was a battle with the rain to keep the optics mist free.

The rain and our spirits were getting heavier as the first hour passed but we heard a Dartford Warbler and then Bill, Jem and Marcus went to investigate the area. This proved a wise move as in spite of the limited visibility Bill spotted a Wolf on the far side of the ridge. It disappeared almost as soon as it was found, but was quickly relocated, as the rain suddenly eased. There then followed a marvellous hour of observation of at least two Wolves on the far ridge. Sightings were brief at first as the Wolves, if visible, were fairly still, but soon everyone was observing them as one animal came out on a path where its black jowls and black in the tail suggested a good example of the supposed Iberian Wolf sub-species signatories. The second Wolf seemed far paler and in



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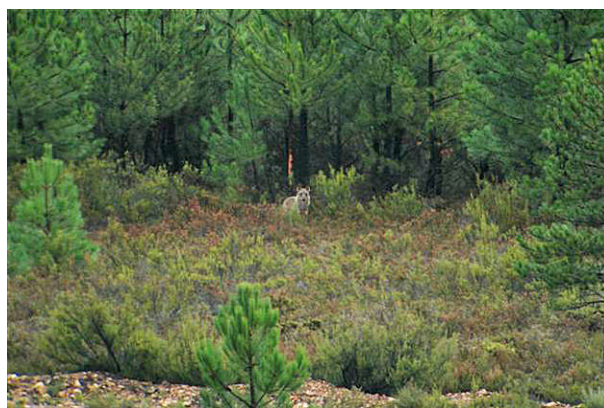
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the course of the next hour we watched them briefly together, one animal chewing a bone whilst another was seen trotting along with characteristic gait. The Lopus did not disappoint, and in what was to prove to be the only hour in the day when there wasn't some rain we all enjoyed repeated views of these highly impressive, elegant animals.

We were incredibly fortunate to have any views on the first morning, let alone such prolonged observations, and it was a late breakfast we had back at the hotel.

In spite of the inclement weather conditions, our first day had been very successful and rewarding, and we all felt very fortunate to have managed to find such a rare and special mammal on such a howler of a day (sic).

A pre-dawn start was made but, as dawn was around 8.30am, a quick breakfast was taken beforehand. A rough night had given way to an initially hopeful morning, weather-wise, but as we set off in the minibuses towards the watchpoint the rain descended once more. It was to be a surprisingly good omen, however, of what was to come! Within a few minutes of arriving at the watchpoint in the pre-dawn gloom Gerard spotted a wolf close by on the edge of a line of trees. Everyone managed to get excellent views through the 'scopes as the wolf moved in and out across the heather. Soon we realized that there



Wolf by Gerald Broddelez

was actually more than one wolf – they are all unique colours, and so we could identify individuals and watched 5 different individuals taking turns in feeding off a carcass. We saw one animal pounce on what was probably a rodent during all this activity too. Eventually one of the wolves dragged a leg off into the deeper heather and that was the last we saw of the pack, although we had been watching them for well over an hour. The showers and mist drifted across the beautiful valley we were watching over, adding to the atmosphere of the place. The excitement of watching these beasts had almost distracted us from the other wildlife of the area, but now we became more aware of the Dartford Warblers, Jays and Ravens which surrounded us, along with migrating flocks of Meadow Pipits and Chaffinches flying over. Scanning the valley we also saw some distant Black Vultures perching on rocky outcrops, waiting for the day to warm before taking flight and a distant small group of Red Deer, including a beautiful stag spotted in the same area. Perhaps some members of the group, over-awed by our luck on our first morning, were just beginning to think of moving on to the next site when Di spotted a lone wolf, a new individual, in full view on a track just below us. Not quite believing our continuing luck we watched this individual, much closer than the others, for a very long time as it moved across, lazily in front of us. At one point it seemed to notice our presence, and spent a while under a tree watching us! Eventually the wolf moved off across the valley, but we kept him (or her?) in our sights until it finally disappeared into the distant heather.

Great Bustards & Cranes

Having had such stunning views of wolves on previous days, we decided that instead of watching again, we would make earlier tracks towards the airport, with a scheduled stop at some lakes, which were promising good things due to the return of the water. Travelling back into the agricultural area we quickly started to notice Great Bustards once again, but many were on the move, often flying across the road, and we realized that many Spaniards were out hunting and so disturbing these amazing birds. Just as we were arriving at the lagunas a flock of birds flying past proved to be 17 Common



Common Cranes by Su Gough

Cranes, amongst the first coming back to spend winter in the region. We drove to the near-abandoned village where we saw Kestrels and hundreds of Feral Pigeons in the highly ornate local dovecotes.

Species seen on tours in October 2006

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	21-25 October	25-29 October
Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>	✓	✓
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓
Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>	✓	
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa suidae</i>		✓
Soprano Pipistrelle Bat	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	✓	✓

Birds

Common Name	Scientific Name	21-25 October	25-29 October
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		✓
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		✓
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elegans caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓
Black Vulture	<i>Gyps monachus</i>		✓
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	✓	✓
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		✓
Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		✓
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	✓	✓
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓	✓
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓	✓
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		✓
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	✓	✓
Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>		✓

Common Name	Scientific Name	21-25 October	25-29 October
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>		✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
Rock dove/feral pigeon	<i>Columba livea</i>	✓	✓
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓
Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	✓	
Eagle owl	<i>Bubu caperensis</i>	✓	
Long-eared owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	✓	
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	✓	✓
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓	✓
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	✓
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>	✓	✓
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	✓	✓
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	✓	
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓
Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogene rupestris</i>		✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓	✓
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	✓	✓
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		✓
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	✓	✓
Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cettia</i>	✓	✓
Wood warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	✓	
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	✓	✓
Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>	✓	✓
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	✓	✓
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓

Common Name	Scientific Name	21-25 October	25-29 October
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>		✓
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	✓	✓
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	✓	
Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	✓	
Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>	✓	✓
Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	✓	✓
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	✓	✓
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	✓	✓
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓