

Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

23 - 27 October 2009



Wolf Country!



Male Iberian Wolf



European Tree Frog (*Hyla hyla*)

Report & images compiled by Byron Palacios with the assistance of Lee Morgan



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour leaders:	Byron Palacios Lee Morgan
Participants:	Patzi Haslimann Judy Egginton Karin Munro Chas Johnstone Jackie Johnstone Ralph Topping Elizabeth Topping Quentin Given Lorna Reith James Gerson Alan Pipe

Day 1

Friday 23rd October

Weather details: cloudy in Valladolid, then dry and sunny

The group's flight to Valladolid was on time. It was cloudy at our arrival in Valladolid but the weather soon improved as we headed off northwest towards Villafila. Soon, the first Black and Red Kites were spotted in the sky while driving. Our first stop was made after 30 minutes, producing great sightings of our first group of Great Bustards. We kept going and soon lunch time arrived. We saw Black Redstarts, Tree Sparrows, Lapwings and a many Spotless Starlings while we stopped for supplies in order to prepare a delicious picnic lunch held in Villamarin de Campos. After another quick stop which produced more and closer Great Bustards, Crested Larks and Marsh Harriers, we managed to find an alternative road to our final destination (due to roadworks along a good portion of the original planned route) which also produced Rock Sparrows, Linnets and Corn Buntings.

We finally arrived at the rural village of Villanueva de Valrojo and after we checked-in, we quickly went to spend the rest of the early evening at the nearest wolf watching point (Ferrerias de Arriba) with happy and positive results! We had great views of our very first Iberian Wolf, a lovely male clearly seen in good light. Besides this, we saw a pair of the rare Black Vulture, and many Griffon Vultures perched by meadows, plus lots of Raven and a few Red Kites. What a way to start this trip, fantastic! A delicious dinner was served at 20.30 and we enjoyed the first glasses of Mr. Moso's local 'Toro' wine.

Day 2

Saturday 24th October

Weather: overcast, cloudy and a bit rainy

An early drizzle started this morning at dawn as we returned to the Wolf viewpoint near to Ferrerias de Arriba. While scanning the area we soon spotted Griffon and Black Vultures in the meadows. Next to them, a male Red Deer was walking along further fields. But the best bit of the early morning started when a young adult Iberian Wolf was hopping around the thick bushes. Soon, two adults turned up clearly in front of the view-point, showing themselves very well.

They then walked right into the open meadow closer to us, where we got just brilliant views of these lovely canines! A few Red Deer and a Fox were spotted too. After two hours, the showers were a bit persistent in the area and we decided that it was time to go back to our hotel in order to enjoy our breakfast and a short break before we set off to our next spot.

After breakfast, we drove northwest through Villardeciervos to Valparaiso Dam (Cional area). For a minute, it looked that the weather was about to improve, but it continued unsettled as the morning went by. We checked the first wing of the dam expecting to see some Otters, but unfortunately we were not lucky enough to see them. We drove a short distance in order to explore the southern wing of the dam, finding some Otter droppings, but still not the actual animal. We started to walk along the track, but there wasn't much activity apart from a few Cormorants and Mallards flying along the dam, plus a large flock of Iberian Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tits, a few Great Tit, Nuthatch and Robin. Little and Great-crested Grebe were also seen at the dam. We enjoyed our picnic lunch by the shore (despite the threat of rain, it was a dry picnic lunch in the end!).

We returned to the hotel for a break and some of the group went on a short optional walk around the hotel area. The walk produced some nice surprises such as European Tree frog, Meadow Pipit, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Red Kite, Stonechat, Marsh Frog, Blue Tit and more Iberian Chiffchaff.

Later we went to the Ferreras de Arriba view point once again. As crowded as the place was, like never before, the activity was still outstanding! More Iberian Wolves were seen, two more different individuals, plus five Black Vultures this time, together with many Griffon Vultures, Red Kite, Raven, and a few Red Deer in the far meadow, including a large male stag. A Red Fox was also meandering around the adjacent meadows, while another Iberian Wolf (presumably a young adult) was secretly moving in the left part of the valley.

We returned to our hotel at dusk and enjoyed some drinks prior to our supper, and mixed with the locals at the village bar.

Day 3

Sunday 25th October

Weather: cold start, mist, then clearing to very warm & sunny

A cold pre-dawn start, and a drive to a second Wolf viewpoint at Boya...but the heavy mist did not allow us to see anything. We drifted back to the view-point at Ferreras de Arriba and spent the first hours of the day there, which was also fairly quiet, the active wildlife consisted of lots of Griffon Vultures and about five Black Vultures, together with Red Kite and Ravens. A few relaxed Red Deer in the distance showed how tranquil the early morning was. A few good birds such as Crested Tit and Red Crossbill were very active amongst the woods. After two hours, we decided to drive back to the hotel in order to have our breakfast.

After breakfast, the rain was heavy all over the valley. We decided to move away from the wettest areas so we drove to Villafafila where the rain stopped while we were visiting the Interpretation Centre. Around this nice complex, lots of water birds were seen, included Graylag and Barnacle Geese, Mallards, Gadwall, Tufted Duck, Little Grebe, Pochard, Shoveler, and Coot, amongst others. Chiffchaffs were around too, plus a single Water Pipit was wandering in the empty pools around. We enjoyed the Interpretation Centre here before we continued towards our picnic lunch site, while Crested Larks and Great Bustards were flying around the carpark.

The picnic site, a seasonal birding hide located at Otero de Sariegos, produced good views of Little Owls, Lapwing, Marsh Harrier, Greylag Geese and two small groups of wintering Cranes. After enjoying our lunch we drove towards the River Esla area. A few Corn Buntings, Kestrel, Red Kite, Common Buzzard, Tree Pipits and Black Kites were seen on the way down to the river banks. The tracks were amongst cork oak orchards. Once at the river shore, we started a walk up to the crags and high rocky parts, where we had a good range view of the southern bank of the river. Our patience was rewarded when amongst some Rock Sparrows and Crag Martins, an elusive American Mink began to wander right by the edge of the water, giving us very clear views. On the way down, a group of Rock Buntings were showing off beautifully on top of the bushes next to the rocks.

After having a great time here, we drove to Boya as the weather was nice, sunny and clear, and much better than it was in the early morning. Several Red Deer were very close in the valley. A group of eight Wild Boar suddenly turned up in the meadows, moving to the left of the valley towards us. We managed to see them through the scopes, including the massive male of the group. The light became poor as dusk time arrived and the sky became full of stars, including Jupiter (with its moons included), and a romantic half-full moon.

We went back to the hotel to relax and enjoy the local food for supper. After dinner, some of us went out in search for some nocturnal amphibians, and found some Fire Salamanders and Marsh Frogs.

Day 4

Monday 26th October

Weather: mild morning, misty and cloudy start, very sunny the rest of the afternoon

On this last morning, we went to Ferreras de Arriba for one last time. It was cloudy and mild, but the visibility was not great and it did not clear up so we decided to drive back to the hotel for breakfast. After breakfast, we returned to our vehicles and went to Ferreras de Arriba, where the local hermitage is located, by the 'back road', a picturesque route twisting through oak-covered hills. On the edge of Ferreras de Arriba, we stopped and parked near the *corrales*, the traditional drystone sheep pens, topped with a bushy rim of thatch, and said to be wolf-proof. We made a short walk up to the hermitage watching a few birds such as Dartford Warblers, Red Kite, Blue and Great Tits, Chiffchaf, and more. We had our picnic lunch by the tables around the ancient sheep corrales, enjoying the local food while Iberian Green Woodpeckers were calling and singing actively around our tables. A few butterflies were spotted: Large and Small Whites, Brimstone, Long-tailed Blue and Specklewood. After lunch and a bit of a walking around, we drove back to the hotel for a quick break and get prepared to go for our last wolf watching experience.

We arrived at Boya in the sunny late afternoon with a clear blue sky. Not much was going on at this valley at our arrival, but soon, a group of Red Deer and a beautiful male Hen Harrier started to entertain us. It was not until the very late afternoon, and still sunny, when we spotted a very large group of 18 Wild Boar, crossing the track very close to us and carrying on amongst the bushes - what a brilliant large group and sighting! Just great to finish our day!

We went back to the hotel in order to have our last supper together and to relax and enjoy local nibbles and drinks!

Day 5

Wednesday 27th October

Weather: sunny & windy

We had an early start and drove this morning for three hours, heading north to Asturias airport, where we arrived in time to catch our flight. Certainly, living for five days in the heart of the pure and rural Spain, meeting its local people, experiencing its food and traditions, watching lots of wildlife, and seeing the mysterious Iberian Wolf, meant we all enjoyed a fantastic holiday!

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	October			
			23	24	25	26
1	Great crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓	✓	✓
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	
3	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	
4	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>		✓		
5	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓		
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		✓	
7	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			✓	
8	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	✓		✓	✓
9	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				✓
11	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
13	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓		✓	✓
16	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
17	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			✓	
18	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓	
19	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓
20	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	
21	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	✓		✓	✓
22	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		✓		
26	Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>		H		
27	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			✓	
28	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			✓	
29	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	✓	
31	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			✓	H
32	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	✓		✓	
33	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓	✓	
34	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓		✓	
35	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>				
36	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>				
37	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	
38	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	
39	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓	
40	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	
41	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	
42	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓
43	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	
44	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>				
45	Common Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓	
46	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	✓	✓	✓	
47	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>				✓

	Common name	Scientific name	October			
			23	24	25	26
48	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓		✓	
49	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓		
50	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	
51	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>		✓	✓	
52	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓		
53	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓		✓
54	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓
55	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			✓	
56	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓
57	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>				✓
58	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓		
59	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	✓		✓	✓
60	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	
61	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓	
62	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	
63	Jackdaw	<i>Covus monedula</i>			✓	
64	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		✓	✓	
67	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓		
68	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		✓		
69	Serín	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓	✓	
70	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		✓	✓	✓
71	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			✓	
72	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	✓			
74	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		✓		

Mammals

1	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	✓	1+1+1		
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	1	2	2	
4	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		1		
5	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>		sign		

Butterflies:

Peacock (*Inachis io*)
 Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*)
 Long-tailed Blue (*Lampides boeticus*)
 Mazarine Blue (*Cyaniris semiargus*)

Large White (*Pieris brassicae*)
 Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*)
 Little Blue (*Cupido minimus*)
 Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)

Reptiles and Amphibians

Fire Salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*)
 Marbled Newt (*Triturus marmoratus*)
 Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea*)
 Viviparous Lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*)
 Iberian Rock lizard (*Lacerta monticola*)

Sharp-ribbed Salamander (*Pleurodeles waltl*)
 Bosca's Newt (*Triturus boscai*)
 Marsh Frog (*Rana ridibunda*)
 Common Wall Lizard (*Podarcis muralis*)
 Iberian Wall Lizard (*Podarcis hispanica*)

Plants of note, in flower

Autumnal Squill (*Scilla autumnalis*)
 Merendera (*Merendera pyrenaica*)

Carthusian Pink (*Dianthus carthusianus*)
 Purple Spurrey (*Spergularia purpurea*)