

# Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

21 - 25 October 2011



Fire Salamander



Natterjack Toad



Bosca's Newt



Girl Bunting

Images and report compiled by Lee Morgan



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## Day 1

Friday 21st October

### London Stansted - Asturias Airport -Villaneuva de Valrojo

After a reasonably early start and a minor delay of about 15 minutes it had been a long day on the flight out from Stansted and we were all a little weary on our arrival in Asturias. However, a relatively speedy turn around with our luggage and hire vehicle saw us on the road in good time and we were all feeling re-energised by the sunny skies and great scenery around us. A little bit of birding from the car as we travelled and Buzzards, Red Kites and even a few Griffon Vultures seemed to be the order of the day. A brief stop about half way provided some nice views of Hen Harrier, Crested Lark and some large flocks of House Sparrows. We also managed to spot a few Roe Deer en route too.

We arrived at the hotel a little after 7pm to a cheery welcome from our hosts and a lovely Spanish meal after which we all took a little torch-lit stroll to get a better look at the clear starry skies. Shooting stars and magnificent views of Jupiter and its outer moons made for a lovely end to the evening.

## Day 2

Saturday 22nd October

### Ferreras de Ariba (watch point) – Villafafila – Ferreras de Ariba

We decided to make an early start, and a 6.30am 'night' drive along the road to Ferreras de Ariba spots us a few small mammals that scuttle past on the road in front of us, but this was not our intended quarry. We stopped and watched along a few likely looking tracks as the sun slowly rises before making our way up to the watch point to start our mornings search for wolves. There was very little moving at the watch point other than a few Red Deer and the odd Roe, but it was a beautiful clear start to the day and the cold temperatures soon warmed as the sun got up above the mountains.

We returned to the hotel for coffee and toast before setting off to look for Bustards around the prairies around Villafafila lagoons. We stopped at the bridge over the Rio Esla to look for Otters and watch the Crag Martins and Swallows sitting along the edges of the Bridge. Scanning the river we also managed to spot a Kingfisher and a Great White Egret too.

Our first stop around Villafafila provided us with a good chance to look for Lesser Kestrels around some of the beautiful old dovecotes. The dovecotes provide home to large colonies of Lesser Kestrels during the breeding season and, although most of the colonies had dispersed, it was nice to see one or two adult birds still sitting around on the walls and roof tops in the near vicinity. We were also lucky enough to see two Barn Owls popping their heads out of the wind eyes and post holes in the old cob-walled buildings and got some great views of Crested Lark, Stone chat and Wheatear; making it a very worthwhile place to begin our morning's bird watching.

By late morning we headed round to stop for lunch near Otero de Sariegos, affording us a wonderful view across the parched landscape of Salina Grande. Whilst enjoying our picnic lunch in the midday sunshine we had some wonderful views of little owl, hundreds of Cranes, a flyover of half a dozen Great Bustards, dozens of Marsh Harriers, Hen Harriers and even a single Montagu's Harrier. It was a great way to spend the afternoon.

After lunch we explored some of the agricultural roads in search of wildlife and spent the remainder of our time watching Great Bustards strutting around in the wide open fields as well as getting some great views of a Peregrine hunting pigeons around the ruins of Sariegos.

The afternoon went by quickly and we eventually had to make our way slowly back to Villaneuva de Valrojo where, after a short stop at the hotel, we set off back up to Ferreras to look for wolves. A few Deer, an icy cold wind and no wolves made for a tough evenings watching but we persevered until darkness inhibited our vision before heading back to the hotel for dinner and a glass or two of red wine.

## Day 3

## Sunday 23rd October

### Ferreras de Arriba (watch point) – Cional – Boya & Ferreras de Arriba (watch points)

The day started mild but with a blustery wind and rain in the air we were a little apprehensive as we headed out to try our luck at the Boya watch point. However, low cloud cover and rainy weather hanging in the valley inhibited our likely success so we cut our losses and headed back to Ferreras to complete the mornings search for wolves. There were obviously a few more deer active in the valley (and better viewing conditions too) and the trees around us buzzed with Crested Tits, Dartford Warblers and Firecrests, but the wolves continued to elude us.

A brief stop in the village to pick up some fresh picnic supplies gave everyone the chance to look for Rock Sparrows, Serins and Black Redstarts amidst the tumble-down walls and pan-tiled roofs of the pretty village streets before we headed back up to Ferreras to have a look at the ancient Corallas and to explore a few of the logging roads in search of wild boar. There was little moving so at lunch time we headed out to Cional for a picnic by the Embalse de Valparaiso. Fortunately, the mornings rain showers had passed and a glimmer of sunshine had started to warm us all up, but there was still a thumping wind pushing along the valley forcing most of the small birds into deep cover.

After lunch we went for a walk around the lake to look for otters (or anything else) but, apart from some nice views of Subalpine and Dartford Warblers, the odd Great Crested Grebe and the Cormorants fishing in the lake, there was little moving in this normally productive wildlife area. So after taking the chance to stretch our legs we returned to the hotel for a little more time to explore the village and the chance of some rest before our evening wolf watch.

A return to Boya for the evening watch provided some improved viewing conditions with some lovely views across the valley. But the weather soon closed in and we were once again forced to finish our watch at Ferreras before eventually calling it a night and returning to the hotel for dinner.

The absence of wolves and the tough watching conditions had taken their toll on most of the group so after dinner most people took to opportunity for an early night. However, the mild, damp evening provided perfect conditions for a torch-lit walk and, those hardy enough to rise to the challenge, were rewarded with an excellent night of amphibian hunting with Natterjack toads, Fire Salamanders, Edible Frogs, Bosca's Newt and even a glimpse of a Marbled Newt added to the day's list of wildlife sightings. It was a great way to finish the evening, leaving us very pleased with our efforts.

## Day 4

Monday 24th October

### Ferreras de Arriba – Villafafila - Ferreras de Arriba

Another day dawned after a night of heavy rain and after breakfast we headed out for another early watch at Ferreras. The cold wind was still thumping along the valley but slightly clearer skies and a nice sunrise made for some nice viewing of the Red Deer moving through the forested valley. Duncan then caught a brief glimpse of three wolves disappearing into cover, which livened everything up considerably as we all scrambled to the scopes to try to find the animals. However, despite our best efforts and extending our mornings search by almost an hour we did not see the wolves again. Nonetheless, this single sighting, albeit brief, was enough to invigorate the groups' interest, making it clear to all that our searches to date had not been in vain.

After a quick stop in the village, we once again headed out to Villafafila for a second chance to search the plains for Great Bustards. A brief stop along a narrow agricultural road provided us with some nice views of Great Bustards in the distance so we opted to venture off onto an agricultural track for some better views. Having stopped the vehicles we trained our scopes on the Great Bustards in the fields around us when four Little Bustards and a flock of Black-bellied Sandgrouse broke cover, providing us all with some great views. Having scanned the large mixed flocks of Pipits, Larks and Buntings for anything out of the ordinary we opted to move on and it was at that moment we spotted a large Wolf moving stealthily across an open field, no more than a couple of hundred yards away from us! It was an amazing chance encounter and nearly all the party got a great view of the animal as it broke into a run and disappeared over a slight rise in the landscape. Although brief, it was a view that none of us will forget. Wow! Needless to say that we spent a little while searching for the animal again but we had no luck (a grim reminder of how easy it is for these animals to disappear into the landscape).

We headed on to Salina Grande for lunch where a beautiful fly over by hundreds of Cranes heralded our arrival, providing some amazing photographic opportunities in the afternoon light. After lunch we took a walk along the agricultural tracks where we spotted Lapwings, Red-legged Partridges, Corn Buntings and mixed flocks of Calandra Larks, Skylarks, Crested Larks and the odd Meadow Pipit while scanning the distant pools (that had been dry on our previous visit) revealed that the winter flocks of Shelduck and Greylag Geese had started to arrive.

By late afternoon we began to make our way back to the hotel, stopping at the bridge for some nice views of Little Grebes, Grey heron, Mallards, Gadwall and the chance to see the Great White Egrets again.

It was getting late and after a quick stop at the hotel we managed to get back up to the watch point by about 6 pm. It was a very cold evening, made worse by the wind, and another 'no show' for the wolves. Nonetheless we persevered, watching the Red Deer and the Hen Harriers moving through the valley in the evening light before we eventually called it a day and made our way back to the hotel for dinner and to thaw out.

## Day 5

**Tuesday 25th October**

### Ferreras de Arriba – Asturias - London Stansted

It had been a long and arduous few days of watching but, spurred on by our wolf encounter in Villafila, we were all keen to make the best of our last morning and we headed up to Ferreras for one last wolf watch. Unfortunately, our search was, fruitless but we left the watch point, having enjoyed a wonderful sunrise, happy with efforts. It was a great way to end our short trip and, having made ourselves a quick packed lunch, we hit the road for our journey back to Asturias.

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## Species Lists

Mammals (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			21	22	23	24	25
1	Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>				✓	
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓			
5	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>		✓	✓		

## Birds

1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓		✓	
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				✓	
3	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓		✓	✓
4	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>		✓		✓	
5	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓		✓	✓
6	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				✓	
7	Black Kite	<i>Milvus nigra</i>	✓	✓			✓
8	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gypus fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓		✓	
11	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
12	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		✓			
13	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
15	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		✓		✓	
16	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓		✓	
17	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓		✓	
18	Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		100+		✓	
19	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>		20+		20+	
20	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓		✓	
21	Black headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
22	Western Yellow Legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓				✓
23	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
24	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓			
25	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columbia livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	
26	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>		2			
27	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓		✓	
28	Great spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus brachydactyla</i>		H			
29	Sky Lark	<i>Alauda arevensis</i>		✓		✓	
30	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓		✓	
31	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓		✓	
32	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogene rupestris</i>		✓			
33	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
34	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓			
36	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓		✓	
37	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓			
38	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
39	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓			
40	Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓		✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			21	22	23	24	25
41	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>		✓		✓	
42	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
43	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓		
44	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>		✓	✓	✓	
45	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		H	✓	✓	
46	Cettis Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				H	
47	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓			
48	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓		✓	
49	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		✓		✓	
50	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓	H	✓	✓
51	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
52	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	
53	Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
54	Long tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
55	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓		
56	Short toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		H	H		
57	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓			
58	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓		✓	
59	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		H	✓	✓	
61	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	
62	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		✓			
63	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓		H	
64	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓		✓	
65	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓			
66	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
67	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		✓	✓	✓	
68	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓	✓	H	
70	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓	✓		
71	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓			
72	Gold finch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
73	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		H		H	
74	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓		✓	
76	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	✓	✓		✓	
77	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					
78	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>					

## Amphibians

1	Fire Salamander	<i>Salamandra salamandra</i>			5		
2	Marbled Newt	<i>Triturus marmoratus</i>			✓		
3	Boscas Newt	<i>Triturus boscai</i>			✓		
4	Natterjack Toad	<i>Bufo calamita</i>			✓		
5	Marsh Frog	<i>Rana ridibunda</i>		✓	✓	✓	