

Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

23 - 27 October 2012



Great Bustards



Wolf Watching



Wolf pack



Wolf

Report compiled by Byron Palacios
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Day 1

Tuesday 23rd October

Stansted – Valladolid – Villafafila – Villardeciervos - Boya

Sunny and dry

The group's flight to Valladolid was a bit delayed due to fog at Stansted airport; but it was all bright and sunny at our arrival to Valladolid! We set off heading west and made our very first stop at the Lagunas de Villafafila. This reserve is located in the main plateau of the plains, and it's well known to be the area with the major concentration of Great Bustards in Western Europe. We had a good encounter with these marvellous birds; there were six first and more would come later on, seeing more than 80 individuals in total!!

We had lunch in one of the local restaurants at Villafafila, and carried on afterwards exploring more of the reserve. We drove back to the point where we saw the first Great Bustards and we saw more interesting birds such as Crested Lark, Common Chiffchaff and Robin (both migratory species from Northern Europe), White Wagtail, Fan-tailed Warbler, Common Redstart, wintering Northern (Common) Starling, Spotless Starling, Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard, common Kestrel, Carrion Crow, Garden Warbler, amongst others, including large groups of flying Great Bustards, and a pond full of Northern Lapwings, Common Coot and Mallard.

As the mid afternoon went by, we drove directly to our hotel located in the village of Villardeciervos, checked in and had a little break in order to get ready for our first wolf excursion around the area of Boya. The weather was still good to us and the light very favourable too; so armed with our scopes and binoculars, we started to scan the area carefully hoping for any movement amongst the thick brooms and bushes. A nice Red Deer stag was spotted first, then a few females and also some Roe Deer. Some of us managed to see a Wild Boar female with two piglets running through the scrub, something very difficult to spot, especially if they're running as these three wild pigs were, vanishing amongst the bushes very quickly.

We kept scanning and waiting for the most wanted mammal of the trip – Iberian Wolf - but there was no sign of them. The natural light was getting poor and we realized that it was time to head back to our lodge in order to get ready for dinner and have a well deserved rest after such a long but enjoyable day...

Day 2

Wednesday 24th October

Ferreras – El Cional Dam – Boya

Weather: Raining in the morning and early afternoon. Dry in the late afternoon.

We started today still in the dark, and after a wake-up coffee (courtesy of Julian), we drove up out of Villardeciervos and went to the point known as Ferreras. A few water drops hit the vans windscreens, predicting a wet day ahead; something we ignored and continued with our pre-breakfast adventure. As soon as we arrived to the point, we parked the vans on the side of the tarmac road which crosses the heart of the valley of Ferreras. I was familiar with a pack of Iberian Wolves in this area already, so we decided to wait and with some luck hoped to see them. Of course, nothing happened...yet!! As dawn light covered the pine woods and heathland, I encouraged everyone to get out of the vans and stayed closer together behind one of the vans and extremely quiet. It was cold, and perfect conditions for wolves, - amongst the deathly silence, Julian said ...wolves...wolves!, so there they were! A female, leading four youngsters through the heather and bushes towards the tarmac road, just a few hundred metres from where we pulled up our vans! They got onto the tarmac road and instead of continuing walking they just stopped on the road and one of the youngsters played on the tarmac, so the other two did too, while the fourth youngster stayed playing amongst the heather, under the relaxed gaze of the vigilant mother. We enjoyed this exciting sighting for about fifteen minutes, watching them in detail, all their movements, funny and relaxed behaviour, their different fur and coats, patterns and colours, etc. It was absolutely brilliant, what a way to start the day!

After this fantastic encounter, the weather suddenly changed, so we decided to drive back to the hotel in order to have some breakfast. The rain was very persistent by the time we were ready to go for our excursion around Valparaiso Dam, just in the outskirts of the village of Cional. We jumped in our vans and drove there anyway, just being positive and expecting a drier day, but it got actually worse. In spite of this, we managed to see a few important species such as Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrike, Red Crossbill, Red Kite, and Mistle Thrush, amongst others. It was impossible to set up our picnic lunch out in the field, so we decided to improvise a bit in the hotel premises! We then took a little break in order to get ready to go out in the late afternoon again.

We went out to our late afternoon excursion to the site known as Boya. Despite our efforts scanning the area, we didn't see more than a few Red deer and Roe deer grazing along the meadows. We then retired to our lodge to get ready for dinner and a restful night.

Day 3

Thursday 25th October

El Cional (Valparaiso Dam) - Ferreras

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

The mist covered all the villages and valleys. As visibility was hopeless from any of the view points, we just drove around the main tracks and through some forest and open heath land in search of possible mammals.

We enjoyed very much the lovely scenery and landscape, and it was indeed a beautiful drive, despite the misty conditions! We drove back for breakfast earlier than usual. The mid morning looked great, with bright sun and blue sky, something amazing after the very murky early start! We went back to Valparaiso Dam in order to have the walk we could not do the previous day. The walk was interesting as we found very interesting birds such as Red Crossbill, Iberian Chiffchaff, Great Cormorant, Coal Tit, Nuthatch and a very elusive Short-toed Treecreeper. We got to a far end of the track from where we managed to see Iberian Green Woodpecker, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Jay and many others. We saw a few droppings of otters and other different (perhaps mink scat) but we could not see any of them.

As lunch time was around the corner, we drove to a very nice spot on the opposite side of the bridge where we enjoyed our lunch, and then drove along the dam on the dirt track in case more wildlife was around, before heading back to the hotel in Villardeciervos for a break. We went out again as usual, this time back in Ferreras to see if any luck was with us this time; we checked the area very well by scanning the possible places where wolves usually meander, but nothing was found. All was quiet with minimal activity. We drove back to the lodge in order to get ready for another delicious dinner!

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 corrals, enjoying the local food while Iberian Green Woodpeckers were calling and singing actively around out 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 in 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 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!

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Species lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; h = Heard Only)

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October				
			23	24	25	26	27
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓			✓	
2	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓	
3	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				✓	
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				✓	
6	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓	
7	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	h	✓	
8	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓			
9	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		✓	✓	✓	
10	Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓	
11	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓	
12	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>				✓	
16	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓			✓	✓
17	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓		
18	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
19	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓			✓	
20	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>				✓	
21	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	✓			✓	✓
22	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓				
23	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓			✓	
24	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>				✓	
25	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓	
26	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓			✓	
27	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				✓	
28	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓	
29	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		✓			
30	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
32	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
33	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			h	h	
34	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				✓	
35	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓	
36	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			h	✓	
37	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	h	✓		
38	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓		
39	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>				✓	
42	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
44	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>			✓		
45	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		h	h	h	
46	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	
47	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October				
			23	24	25	26	27
48	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>				✓	
49	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓			✓	
50	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			
51	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				✓	
52	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	h	✓	✓	✓	
53	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓		✓	✓	
54	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>			✓		
55	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓				
56	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	✓				
57	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓				
58	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	h	h	✓		
59	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			✓		
60	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		h	✓	h	
61	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		h	h		
62	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			h		
63	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓			✓	✓
64	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓		
67	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓			
68	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
69	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			✓	✓	
70	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	✓				
71	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
73	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
74	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>				✓	
75	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
76	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓	
77	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓			✓	
78	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	✓	✓		✓	
79	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	✓	✓	✓		
80	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>				✓	
81	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				✓	

Mammals

1	Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>		✓			
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	✓				
3	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
4	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
5	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>	✓				

Insects

1	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	✓				
2	Southern Small White	<i>Pieris mannii</i>	✓			✓	
3	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	✓			✓	
4	Speckled Wood				✓		
5	Hummingbird Hawkmoth					✓	
6	Praying Mantis			✓			
7	Hornet				✓	✓	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October				
			23	24	25	26	27
8	Blue-winged Grasshopper				✓		
9	Southern Hawker		✓				

Reptiles and Amphibians

Fire Salamander, *Salamandra salamandra*

Marbled Newt, *Triturus marmoratus*

Common Toad, *Bufo bufo*

Common Tree Frog, *Hyla arborea*

Sharp-ribbed Salamander, *Pleurodeles waltl*

Boscas Newt, *Triturus boscai*

Natterjack Toad, *Bufo calamita*

Marsh Frog, *Rana ridibunda*