

Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

30 April - 4 May 2013



Wolf-watching Site



Great Bustard



Red-footed Falcon



Western Bonelli's Warbler

Report & images compiled by Byron Palacios



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Day 1

Tuesday 30th April

London Stansted – Asturias – Villardeciervos

We arrived at Stansted in time to take our flight arriving in Asturias before starting our three-hour drive to Villardeciervos. It was raining on our arrival there was even snow during our crossing through the high pass along the motorway tunnels across the Cantabrian Mountains, very unusual for this time of the year, but I guess it was an unexpected spectacle! We arrived at our hotel in time to enjoy a delicious dinner, follow by a good restful sleep in our comfortable rooms and prepare ourselves for our exciting start the next day.

Day 2

Wednesday 1st May

Boya - Ferreras

We started very early this morning, and after a hot drink, we set off to visit a wolf-viewing point at Boya (Linarejos). As the sun began to rise, the air was filled with the calls of Dunnock and Dartford Warblers, Crested and Coal Tits, Red Crossbills, European Jays and Rock Bunting, flying above us occasionally and one or two were seen perched. Several groups of Roe and Red Deer were spotted looking very relaxed initially, but suddenly they seemed a bit alerted by something coming from the right area of the valley; but no wolves were seen this morning.

Back at the hotel, the area was alive with birds. Glossy and iridescent Spotless Starlings sang in the top roofs of the houses and trees nearby while one individual Black Redstart showed off his beautiful colours on the hotels tv aerial. A White Stork nesting at the village church was seen as well and two White Wagtails flew around the hotels roof.

After breakfast, we drove a short distance to the point known as Ferreras (located between the villages of Ferreras de Arriba and Villanueva de Valrojo) where we scanned very carefully in case any Iberian Wolf was present, but it was very quiet, so we moved on to Ferreras de Arriba where we took a walk nearby the village's hermitage, right across a beautiful Sweet Chestnut wood. Many interesting birds such as Western Bonelli's Warbler, Short-toed Treecreeper, Short-toed Eagle, Black Kite, Woodlark and others were spotted. We set up our lunch at a picnic table we found just by the area's natural spring, pretty handy for washing-up afterwards!

A big black cloud suddenly covered part of the valley and we had some rain after enjoying previously sunny weather, somewhat changeable weather! We then decided to go back to the hotel in order to take a break and

prepare ourselves to go out again in the late afternoon in search for Iberian Wolf. We drove back to the view point at Ferreras, scanning every single corner of the area and spotting more Red Deer and a couple of Roe Deer in the distance. As the light was getting poor, we decided to drive back to our hotel in order to enjoy some drinks followed by a superb dinner.

Day 3

Thursday 2nd May

Ferreras – Cional (Valparaiso Dam) – Boya (Linarejos track) – Ferreras

It was a very cold morning as we started our early visit to the mirador at Ferreras in order to scan once again the already familiar landscape formed with large patches of European pines and Erica spp. bushes. It was a beautiful morning and again the birds kept us distracted while scanning the whole valley, including the continuous Eurasian Cuckoo's song in the background. Although this morning we had a few fellow 'wolf watchers' there were no signs of our most-wanted canine, just more Red Deer to add to our list. Some raptors such as Red and Black Kites, and Hen Harrier were spotted around the area.

It was time to go back for breakfast to our hotel and, after a quick break, we drove a short distance heading west to the village of Cional where the Valparaiso Dam is located. We drove along part of the track and parked by the dam from where we took a walk. The local Iberian Chiffchaff was spotted here beautifully – alongside a European Cuckoo – and a very active pair of Western Bonelli's Warblers was carrying nesting material to one of the roadside oak trees. We walked by the end of the dam placing ourselves right at the end of a patch of pine wood from where we spotted many interesting birds such as Southern Grey Shrike, Black Kite, Grey Heron, a very cooperative Dartford Warbler, Woodlark and more Red Deer walking along the opposite bank of the dam. Lunch time was nearly upon us, so we walked back to the bridge by the main road and set up our nice lunch by one of the shores of the dam, spotting a few Serin, Tawny Pipit, Linnet and Rock Bunting during our walk/drive back.

It was a very sunny day and also warmer than the previous one, although a chilly wind from the north was felt at all times; anyhow, it was a truly pleasant day so far! We continued our excursion following the road from Cional into the abandoned-looking village of Linarejos from where we accessed the track which links Boya and other neighbouring villages. We made a few stops along this track in order to scan the opposite valleys and tracks, certainly a great area for Iberian Wolves but I guess the time of the day made things a bit more difficult, so we decided to drive back to our hotel for a break.

We went out again in the late afternoon and repeating the site of Ferreras once again, but this time we placed ourselves much closer to the valley and in amongst the pine trees and bushes. We started to scan the potential spots where wolves normally hang around, overlooking an area of approximately 800 metres; all of a sudden, one of us spotted something emerging from the bushes located right in front of us, and to our surprise it was a female Iberian Wolf crossing by!! It happened so fast that just a few of us managed to see the quick crossing of the animal which vanished into the bushes. It was a good quick view but very frustrating at the same time as the majority of us did not get to see it.

We were hoping to see her trotting towards the lower bit of the gully to one of the clearings, but this never happened. Instead we saw a few Red Foxes instead crossing the clearings and the fields, and even saw one of them hunting rodents or moles in the distant fields. More relaxed Red Deer were seen meandering around,

giving us some signs that wolves were not likely to be around there now or at least not visible that evening. We therefore decided to drive back to our hotel at Villardeciervos in order to enjoy some local drinks and nibbles, followed by another tasty dinner!

Day 4

Friday 3rd May

Ferreras – Villafáfila (salt lakes and plains) – River Esla – Boya (Linarejos track)

This morning, we again set off to the viewpoint of Ferreras, but this time we had a full breakfast as we planned to visit the plains afterwards. The morning was nice and sunny, although a thin mist covered some spots of the valleys making the visibility range a bit limited, but we carried on with the plan. More Red Deer were seen grazing and walking around the area, alongside more interesting local birds were Hedge Accentors (Dunnock), Dartford Warbler, Crested Tit, Coal Tit, Red Crossbills, European Siskin, Woodpigeon, Raven, Carrion Crow, Black Kite and the unmistakable Eurasian Cuckoo.

We spent enough time scanning this area with no Iberian Wolf signs, so we decided to move on and head towards the plains by driving eastwards to the area of Villafáfila where plains and salt lakes were waiting for us. Our first stop was made at the old area of La Tabla where we enjoyed watching a colony of Lesser Kestrels and Rock Sparrows; alongside Spotless Starling, Goldfinch, and Corn Bunting. The surrounding fields were ideal for the beautiful Montagu's Harrier, and we saw a lot of them along the many fields of the area. We continued into the village of Villafáfila and to the salty lakes which were full of water with a lot of birdlife in it such as Pied Avocets, Eurasian Coot, Black-winged Stilt, Northern Shelduck, and others. But we were actually looking for another interesting bird, Great Bustard, and we found a good group of at least two dozen males in one of the adjacent fields, they were after two or three females, showing off their fantastic plumage when displaying. We managed to see more of these birds a bit closer including males in display, enjoying details of their plumage and very nice looking whiskered faces.

It was the time to find a spot to have our lunch, so we found a nice place in the abandoned village of Otero de Sariegos, overlooking the main lake of Villafáfila, where we spotted a lot of interesting birds such as Whiskered, Gull-billed and Black Terns, Black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls, Common Pochard, Marsh Harrier, Shoveler, Greylag Gosse, Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey (Black-bellied) Plover, and Northern Lapwing, amongst others, plus a beautiful Short-toed Snake-Eagle soaring very nicely quite low and right above our heads!

After lunch, we checked the old buildings around the village finding the always handsome Eurasian Hoopoe, many more Rock Sparrows and nesting White Storks, Lesser Kestrels, Black Kite and Common Buzzard, then some Eurasian Kestrels were spotted while driving towards the main road, and we also found an usual vagrant for Spain, a handsome Red-footed Falcon. We took a break in one of the very traditional bar-restaurants of Villafáfila for a drink and facilities, always enjoying the local decorations - the hanging Iberian smoked hams! After our break, we started to make our way home, making a stop over the beautiful River Esla, at the Roman-style bridge which links the two banks of this wide river. We enjoyed watching a few birds such as European Kingfisher, Griffon Vultures, Booted Eagle, Serin, Goldfinch, amongst others.

Later on, we arrived at Villardeciervos in order to take a quick break before going out again to our usual late afternoon/early evening wolf watching, this time to the point at Boya (Linarejos) but we just had plenty of Red Deer and Roe Deer, but no signs of Iberian Wolf. The light conditions were getting poor and regrettably we returned to our lodge to have our final dinner.

Day 5

Saturday 4th May

Ferreras – Villardeciervos – Asturias airport.

Another morning and this time we were determined to find our wolf! We went to the view point of Ferreras early this morning to give our wolf 'hunting' a very last go. With great regret we decided to give up and returned to our hotel to have a late breakfast, but then back again to Ferreras to keep trying...until our patience and perseverance were paid off!!! A nice female came out in the open field showing herself really well, and we all had fantastic scope views of her! We even got one or two distant photos for the record and immortalized this fantastic moment...finally sighting the very elusive Iberian Wolf!!

Very happy and satisfied with our encounter, we drove back to our hotel in Villardeciervos to have a special celebration lunch, followed by packing up and driving to Asturias airport in order to catch our flight back to the UK. After a few stops to admire the beautiful landscape produced by the impressive Cantabrian Mountains, we got to the airport to take our flight back to the UK. Once back in Stansted, we collected our luggage and wished each other all the best and hoped to bump across each other in another adventure sometime in the future!

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Species Lists

Mammals

	Common Name	Scientific Name	April/May				
			30	1	2	3	4
1	Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>			1		✓
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		12	30	26	5
3	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		6	2	2	2
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			3		

Birds

1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓			✓	
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				✓	
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓	
4	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				✓	
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				✓	
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				✓	
7	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓	
8	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	
9	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓	✓	
11	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
12	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>				✓	
14	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓	
15	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				✓	
17	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			✓		
18	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓			
20	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>				✓	✓
21	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓		✓	
22	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				✓	
23	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				✓	✓
24	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				✓	
25	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				✓	
26	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				✓	
27	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓	
28	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				✓	
29	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓	
30	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				✓	
31	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓	
32	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				✓	
33	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				✓	
34	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>				✓	
35	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓		
36	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓	
37	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓	
38	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>				✓	
39	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>				✓	
40	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>				✓	
41	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>				✓	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	April/May				
			30	1	2	3	4
42	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
43	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
46	European Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			✓	✓	✓
47	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓	
48	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		h	h	✓	✓
49	European Bee-Eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>)			✓	✓	✓
50	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		h	✓		
51	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		h	✓		
52	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>			✓		✓
53	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>					
56	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓			✓	✓
57	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		h	✓	✓	✓
60	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓	h	✓	h
61	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	h
62	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>				✓	
64	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>				✓	
65	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓	✓	h	✓
66	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		h	h	✓	✓
67	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓		✓
68	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			✓		
69	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓		✓
70	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>			✓		
71	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>			✓		
72	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			h		h
74	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓	✓	✓	h
75	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>			✓		✓
76	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		✓	h	h	h
77	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		h	✓	h	h
78	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓			
79	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		h	h		
82	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			h		
83	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	h	h	h
84	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		h	h	h	h
85	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	h
86	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓		✓	
88	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓	
90	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	
92	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common Name	Scientific Name	April/May				
			30	1	2	3	4
93	Iberian Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>				✓	
94	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			h		
95	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>			✓		✓
96	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
97	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
98	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	h	h	h
99	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>				✓	✓
100	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
101	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		✓		✓	✓
102	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>				✓	
104	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		✓	✓		