

# Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour report

22 – 26 October 2013

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Boya viewpoint



Scanning for Iberian Wolves



Red Crossbill (female)

Report and images compiled by Byron Palacios



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## Day 1

Tuesday 22nd October

Stansted – Asturias Airport – Villardeciervos – Ferreras

Weather: Overcast with sunny spells

Our flight to Asturias airport arrived on time and we soon assembled in the baggage claim, and were greeted by Julian afterwards. We got our vehicles sorted and were ready to start our adventure! We hit the road heading south crossing the Cantabrian Mountains on the motorway and had a short stop for a coffee break before arriving in the province of Zamora (Castilla y Leon) and finally, to the village of Villardeciervos, where our hotel is located. We checked in and decided to go for quick look in the area in case something was around La Sierra de La Culebra, before returning to our hotel to relax with some drinks and nibbles, and to enjoy a delicious local supper!

## Day 2

Wednesday 23rd October

Boya – Valparaiso Dam – Boya

Weather: Overcast with sunny spells

After a very early start, we drove for approximately ten minutes west to the area of Boya where we started scanning the valley from a very prominent viewpoint. It was a cold morning but we did cope well and kept ourselves warm. The valley was quite lush but looked quiet and, apart from some lovely Red Deer and one solitary Roe Deer, we didn't see anything close to our wanted target. We then drove back to our hotel in order to have some breakfast and a little break before going out again for a good stroll along the tracks which surround the Valparaiso Dam. Several Cormorants were seen and there were some Red Kites and Griffon Vultures trying to get some thermals. We had some great views of Red Deer grazing very close by. Continuing onto the top of the track, the corner of my eye caught glimpses of movement in the water, it was a European Otter! We hoped she would swim back in the open waters where the views would have been brilliant for everyone in the party; but, unfortunately, she did not! In spite of our patience, it never happened.

After that we walked back to our vans in order to drive to the other shore of the dam where we had our picnic lunch. A Short-toed Treecreeper was seen on our walk back. We enjoyed our lunch time by the dam, and then we drove back to the hotel to have a break and get ready for our late afternoon wolf excursion.

We drove to the same point; the light was on our side and it was good enough to see every corner of the meadows, fields and forest edges. We were quietly and patiently scanning when a group of thirteen Wild Boar crossed the track in front of us, giving us a great show. We also spotted lots of Red Deer, including some magnificent stags adorned with fantastic antlers. We kept working hard in search of wolves but there was no sign of them; and as the daylight went and dusk was about to come, we drove back to our hotel to have dinner.

## Day 3

Thursday 24th October

Boya – drive through Ferreras – Boya

Weather: Very wet and windy

After some hot drinks, we set off to take positions at the Boya point once again. It turned into a wet morning making us find some refuge in our vans straight away. We drove through the village of Linarejos following the dirt tracks and making a loop along the Sierra de La Culebra which we enjoyed a lot, despite the weather. We arrived at our hotel and took a break until lunch time which we had indoors (in preference to a wet picnic!). We gathered together again to drive to the area of Ferreras de Arriba and made another loop of the eastern end of the Sierra de La Culebra. The rain was persistent so we drove back to the hotel for a longer break until the rain eased off. We went out again in the late afternoon; still drizzly, and drove back to Boya where it seemed the rain had gone from that side of the Sierra, and it did, but not for long! As soon as we managed to erect our tripods and telescopes, more rain came along so we had little choice but to return back to our hotel earlier and wait there for dinner time...

## Day 4

Friday 25th October

Ferreras – Villafafila – Boya

Weather: Overcast with showers

After breakfast, we kept going with our plans as the whole region was expecting more rain – though less than the previous day. The morning was not that bad weather wise as it cleared up a bit and we managed to go out to the field with no problems, this time to the area known as Ferreras. We scanned the valley finding a few beautiful Red Deer stags which were quite relaxed grazing the fields, always looking around for any threats. We also had a good bunch of birds such as Red Crossbills, Meadow Pipits, Chaffinch and European Jays flying across the pine woods. We returned to our hotel for breakfast and got ready to drive up out of Villardeciervos heading east towards the plains of Villafafila, in order to explore this important area. We crossed the old stone bridge over the River Esla, getting a quick glance at the river waters where Great Cormorant and Grey Heron were seen by the shore. The weather was overcast; and the rain resumed as we left Villardeciervos. We arrived at Villafafila finding the salty lagoons with plenty of water, which was a good thing for us as we could see a few species of waterfowl concentrated there in large numbers; Northern Lapwings and Mallards were the more numerous birds. As soon as we stopped, we found several groups of Great Bustards which we enjoyed as they were the main target of the morning.

We also had lovely views of other birds such as Crested Larks, Meadow Pipits, Corn Buntings, White Wagtail, Linnets, Northern Wheatear, Eurasian Kestrel, Spotless Starling, Rock Sparrow, and White Storks, amongst others. A few drops of water started to fall on us so we found shelter at the bird watching hide just by the track, from where we enjoyed watching more Great Bustards and other birds while enjoying our picnic lunch!

After lunch, we drove along the tracks and found two Western Marsh Harriers soaring by, two White Storks and a closer male Great Bustard. It made our way back to Villardeciervos where we took a quick coffee break in our hotel before going out for another late afternoon excursion to the area of Boya. We arrived there and the weather was dry, we even had a bit of sun try to break through the clouds. We enjoyed fantastic sightings here, not just of lovely Red Deer but cracking views of another family group of Wild Boar which we watched playing and running along the meadows and muddy tracks. We also found a pair of jumpy Roe Deer hopping along the fields. But the most wanted carnivore was not wanting to show itself to us! Soon the hours of light went and it was time for us to pack up and drive back to our hotel in Villardeciervos in order to get ready for our final dinner.

## Day 5

**Saturday 26th October**

Boya – Villardeciervos to Asturias airport – Stansted airport

Weather: Misty and sunny

It was an early start for all of us as we decided to have breakfast first thing in the morning and quickly drive to Boya again. The view point was covered in heavy mist which was disappointing. We waited patiently for the fog to go but after one hour it did not, so we quickly moved to another point known as Camino Romano to give it a good go. Although the weather conditions looked perfect here, it was quiet, so off we drove, back again to Boya where the heavy mist had gone by now; but once again, another biting-nail morning with no signs of Iberian Wolves. As noon approached, a few of us had to say “Adios!” at this point as they were flying from Madrid and a long drive was ahead for them... We then continued scanning the valleys for the wolves with no success. Lunch was served at the view point to enhance our chances even more but nothing was seen.

After all that, we left La Sierra de La Culebra area and began the 280 km drive to Asturias airport, We got to the airport in time to catch our flight back to the UK before heading our separate ways. Despite missing out on the mysterious Iberian Wolf, it had been a wonderful experience in rural Spain!

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## Species Lists

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

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October				
			22	23	24	25	26
1	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		13	✓	✓	
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
3	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓		✓	
4	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓				
5	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>	✓				

## 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	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				✓	
7	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	
8	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>				✓	
9	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓			✓	
10	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓		✓	
11	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓		✓	
13	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓	
14	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>				✓	
15	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓		✓	
16	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓			✓	
17	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				✓	
18	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				✓	
19	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓	
20	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				✓	
21	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>				✓	
22	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>				✓	
23	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓		✓	
24	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓	
25	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	✓				
26	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>				✓	
27	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓		✓	
28	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	
29	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓		✓	
30	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
31	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	
32	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		h		h	
33	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		h		h	
34	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>				h	
35	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>				✓	
36	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				h	
37	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				h	
38	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>				✓	
39	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	
40	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				h	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October				
			22	23	24	25	26
41	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓		
42	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		h	h	h	
43	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓	✓	✓	
44	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		h	h	h	
45	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓			
46	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		h		h	
47	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓			
48	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	
49	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
50	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	
51	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓		✓	
52	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	
53	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>				✓	
54	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓		✓	
55	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓	
56	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓			
58	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓		✓	
59	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>				✓	
60	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓		✓	
61	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			✓		
62	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓			
63	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				✓	
64	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		h		✓	
65	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓		✓	
66	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>				✓	
67	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		✓			
68	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				✓	

## Other Taxa

1	Praying Mantis			✓			
2	Hornet				✓	✓	
3	Blue-wing Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulea</i>			✓		
4	Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	✓				