

Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour report

27 – 31 October 2014



European Wolf



The moon from the wolf country!



Watching the wolves at Linarejos!

Report & images compiled by Byron Palacios



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ 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
Co-leader	Laura Benito
Participants:	Jackie Dennis
	Alan Yarker
	Dianne Yarker
	Luke O'Brien
	Louise Worrall
	Stephen Debenham
	Jane Towler
	Pam Henderson
	James Richardson
	Brian Austin
	Sue Austin

Day 1

Monday 27th October

Stansted – Asturias Airport – Villardeciervos – Boya – Cional – Ferreras

We left a very mild autumn morning in the UK and boarded our very early flight to Asturias airport, which arrived on time; and we soon assembled in the baggage claim area, being greeted by Laura afterwards. We got our vehicles sorted, and soon we were ready to start our journey to Iberian Wolf country! We headed south, crossing the Cantabrian Mountains on the motorway, and enjoying the contrasting landscapes, which gradually changed from the Atlantic slope to the Mediterranean slope. We had a stop along the way in order to split the journey and have a snack, before continuing our journey, back on the motorway, and eventually entering the province of Zamora (Castilla y Leon) and finally the village of Villardeciervos, where our hotel is located. We checked in, and decided to go for a quick exploration of the area, in case something was around La Sierra de La Culebra, touching base with the terrific habitat where the mystic Iberian Wolf lives!

We returned to our hotel in order to have a relaxed evening with some drinks and nibbles, followed by a delicious local supper.

Day 2

Tuesday 28th October

Ferreras – Valparaiso Dam (Cional) – Boya – Ferreras

An early start was planned today, in order to enhance our chances of seeing wolves, as our second day of the three in wolf country had already started. We had hot drinks before we set off at dawn to the site of Ferreras, once again. It was very cold when we got to the view point, from where we scanned the valley, with the early morning autumn mist fading away as soon as the sun rose over the horizon. Plenty of Red Deer were uncovered by the very first sun beams, and the resident birds soon began their morning calls

and songs nearby. The landscape soon became a sort of portrait picture that you could easily hang out the wall of your main sitting room at home, so wild, so mysterious; we just needed a prime carnivore to master the beautiful landscape. And that was exactly happened, when a female Iberian Wolf was spotted in the distance but, unfortunately, she was not long enough in the open for all of us to spot, only giving us very brief views, which frustrated our wishes of seeing the mighty canine. After a waiting for a while, and scanning other potential areas non-stop, we decided to drive back to our lodge in order to take our breakfast and a short break before continuing with our busy day.

In the mid morning, we took a short drive to the Valparaiso Dam, entering though the village of Cional, where we parked our vans and followed a track that surrounds the southern end of the dam, expecting to see some 'big things'. In addition to some species of tits and Dartford Warblers, we managed to find an active European Otter being very conspicuous across the river shore. We all enjoyed watching this beautiful animal, as well as the walk along the track. This produced wolf tracks and droppings clearly marked on the wet dirt, especially a very fresh one made by a young Iberian Wolf very recently, perhaps minutes before we passed that portion of the track; a good thought that they were right amongst us! Lunch time was around the corner, and we decided to have our picnic lunch in this beautiful spot, so we drove to the opposite shore where a quiet corner of the dam provided lovely picnic tables amongst a patch of poplars and Holm Oaks. We enjoyed eating the local cheeses, wine, hams, bread, and the salad made from lovely allotment tomatoes, alongside the unique local olives! After lunch, we continued our excursion by exploring other corners of the Valparaiso Dam which produced a few interesting birds such as Iberian (Southern) Grey Shrike, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Northern Raven and Great Spotted Woodpecker, amongst others. We then decided to drive back to our hotel in order to take a short break before going out again in the late afternoon.

The afternoon was cooling down, from the very pleasant 20° C we had at lunch time to a chilly 10°C, and we felt it, especially when standing still whilst scanning with our binoculars the vast meadows and fields, in search for mammals. We ended up in the site of Ferreras once again, with great views of both Red and Roe Deer, but no signs of the wanted wolf. Once again, we had to return empty handed to our lodge, as soon as the dark evening took over the area. We retired to our hotel in order to get ready for dinner and a very well-deserved drink beforehand.

Day 3

Wednesday 29th October

Linarejos track – Ferreras de Arriba – Boya/Cional track – Linarejos track

After a very early breakfast, we hit the road in order to go to a different spot, after the poor results during the last two days at Ferreras. The morning was once again very chilly but lovely, with the sun rising over the horizon, as we started our intense scan over a more complex valley. We saw more beautiful Red Deer and a few Roe Deer, all grazing and walking through beautiful fields and shrubby areas, a gorgeous contrast to our eyes! It was not that long before Laura and I suddenly spotted a female Iberian Wolf walking along one of the fields, but it was so brief that we didn't have enough time to put the rest of the group on it, as the wolf vanished in the thick hedges. We kept scanning and waiting but no wolves were seen, so we decided to drive a bit further along the track to scan a different portion of the valley. Plenty of Red and Roe Deer were spotted here, and also a nice group of birds including Crested Tit, Firecrest and Long-tailed Tits, amongst others. It was nearly noon when we decided to drive towards our lunch spot,

making a stop in our hotel in order to take a coffee break. We continued towards our picnic spot in the village of Ferreras de Arriba, located a good 10km from our hotel in Villardeciervos. We got there in time to have a stroll and enjoy the surroundings, admiring the local old-fashioned church and the sheep corrals used by the shepherds in order to keep their sheep safe from the wolves at night. We had our lunch under autumn-looking Sweet Chestnut trees, and some of us tried some of the nuts, of course!

After lunch, the sun was hitting the area in a very pleasant way; actually, in a very unusual way as this was not typical end-of-October weather. We took advantage of this by walking along a firebreak between the villages of Boya and Cional, a lovely walk which produced Dartford Warblers, Red Crossbill, Rock Bunting, and other forms of wildlife. It was then time to return to our vans, and drive back to the Linarejos track, to keep our wolf quest during the rest of the afternoon until dusk. The area, once again, looked pristine and beautiful with great sunlight hitting the whole valley, something very important to see the animals better. It was not very long before some of our scopes found some movement amongst the rock boulders in one of the distant fields, and there it was: a lovely, stocky Iberian Wolf, standing right on top of the boulder and looking around him...fantastic! He went down the boulder and carried on walking amongst the fields, being joined by now by other two wolves which continued their way towards the lower portion of the valley, passing by some unaware Red Deer on their way. The light was rapidly fading away but we still had one of the wolves very visible and moving along the fields. We had enough time to see them well through the scopes, and to enjoy this beautiful animal we worked so hard to see. So our efforts in the end were hugely paid off!

It was finally dark when we drove our vans in order to drive back to our hotel, very happy and satisfied with the superb end of the day, so drinks waited in celebration! We had some good ones, followed by a delicious dinner!

Day 4

Thursday 30th October

Villafáfila – River Esla – Linarejos track

After working hard and enjoying the landscape of La Sierra de La Culebra in the last three days with positive results, it was time to move on to the plains in search for different target species in a completely different habitat. And after a very early breakfast, we set off to this new adventure, heading east from Villardeciervos towards the plains or steppes. We made a very quick stop over the bridge of the river Esla, which produced a few interesting birds such as Common Pochard, Grey Heron, Great Cormorant, Mallard, Eurasian Coot and European Kingfisher, amongst others. It was a gorgeous sunny morning but still chilly, when we drove into the plains, past the abandoned hamlet of La Tabla, taking farm roads into Villafáfila.

It was then where two male Great Bustards caught our eyes, as they looked beautiful in the field, in the early morning sunshine. A few metres left and on the ground, a female Peregrine Falcon was enjoying her early catch, completely unaware of a male Hen Harrier which was heading straight for her; it mobbed her while she was still down on the ground feeding. We watch them both, and the pair of Great Bustards, in one frame through our scopes and binoculars: fantastic! But this wasn't going to be it: all of a sudden and emerging from nowhere, three Iberian Wolves crossed in front of our vans, trotting into the fields the Great Bustards and the raptors were! They were young wolves of around three-years-old, healthy looking

animals with their beautiful brownish and yellow-creamy summer coat still on. They eventually stopped to take a quick gaze at us but, maybe knowing we were no threat any more, slowed down their pace, and looked a bit more relaxed as they walked through the fields and the adjacent plains till they vanished, lost on the horizon. What a sighting we had, how great being there at the right moment and in the right place, what an unexpected great surprise!!

After this colossal wildlife moment, we arrived soon to the wetlands of Villafáfila, making a stop in the abandoned village of Otero de Sarriegos, from where we overlooked the main, naturally salty, lagoons. There were a few distant patches of water, product of the last days' heavy rain in the area: something really good as we could see a few species of waterfowl concentrated there in large numbers. Northern Lapwings and Mallards were the more numerous birds, alongside Black-winged Stilts, Pied Avocets, Greylag Geese, Ruff, Black-headed Gulls and others. As soon as we stopped there, we found Little Owls, several groups of Great Bustards, Eurasian Kestrels and Black Redstart, together with Common Cranes in flight, especially a group of eight flying right in front of us in great light! We also had a Short-eared Owl, spotted by the edge of the lake. We then moved to another view point, which produced more groups of Great Bustards, Common Cranes and Greylag Geese, all down on the ground. More Short-eared Owls were spotted, and also Zitting Cisticola, Crested, Greater Short-toed and Sky Larks, and Western Marsh Harrier, amongst others. After a superb morning, it was time for a coffee break, so we drove back to Villafáfila. Here we called in at a very local bar-restaurant where we all enjoyed a hot drink, and bought local products and souvenirs.

After the break, we left the plains of Villafáfila behind, heading back west towards the river Esla, where we drove through the dirt tracks along the dehesa, right to the shore of the river. Once here, our lunch was set out, while we were enjoying the beautiful landscape which produced interesting wildlife such as European Kingfisher, Griffon Vulture, Common Buzzard, Iberian Chiffchaff, House and Crag Martins and Spotless Starlings. There was also a very cheeky and active pair of American Mink, moving along the shore, water and on top of the rocks where we thought their den was. After enjoying our lunch, we continued our drive to Villardeciervos, where we took a break before going out again on our usual late afternoon wolf watch.

We set off from our hotel in Villardeciervos to the Linarejos track. As the place had produced good wolf sightings during the week, we gave it another go there to see what would happen. Plenty of Red and Roe Deer were spotted, as well as Crested Tits, Dartford Warblers, Red Crossbill, and others. The beautiful late afternoon/early evening looked calm and tranquil, with some Roe Deer barking at times, but no wolves were spotted in spite of these alarm calls. Tired and extremely happy with the results of our day, we retired to our hotel in order to pack our last belongings, and then to celebrate our success over a delicious local dinner and plenty of drinks!

Day 5

Friday 31st October

Villardecievros to Asturias airport – Stansted airport

It was an unusually early start for all of us as, in order to be in time for our mid morning flight from Asturias airport to Stansted: we left Villardecievros in the dark, and enjoyed the sunrise along the motorway. We got to the airport in plenty of time to have breakfast and check in our bags. Our flight was on-time, arriving at Stansted airport safely and earlier than scheduled.

We had a wonderful experience of the real rural Spain, its villages, people and countryside. Enjoying our days under the sunshine of an extended summer, walking amongst the land of the mysterious Iberian Wolf, a mystic predator, we all had the great luck to watch and live the experience of getting to see one of the most wonderful and most-wanted carnivores of Europe. It was a real treat, being lucky enough to enjoy wonderful wildlife moments which will stay in our minds forever, and perhaps, one day, we would love to come back to live these wonderful moments once again, in the land of Great Bustards and Iberian Wolves of Rural Spain. ¡¡Hasta pronto...!!

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

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

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October				
			27	28	29	30	31
1	Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>		1	3	3	
3	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>				✓	
6	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓		
7	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>				✓	
8	American Mink	<i>Neovison vison</i>				✓	
9	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>		✓			

Birds

1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓		✓	
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				✓	
3	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				✓	
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓		✓	
5	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓	
6	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓		
7	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓			
8	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓	
9	Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓			
10	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				✓	
11	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓	
12	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
13	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓	
15	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>				✓	
16	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓			✓	
17	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				✓	
20	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				✓	
21	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓	
22	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>				✓	
23	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				✓	
24	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓	
25	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				✓	
26	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>				✓	
27	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓	
28	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
30	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓	
31	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				✓	
32	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>				✓	
33	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		h		✓	
34	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓		
35	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis sharpei</i>		✓	✓		
36	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	✓	✓		✓	
37	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October				
			27	28	29	30	31
38	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>				✓	
40	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
42	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		h	✓	h	
43	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	h	✓	✓	h	
44	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
45	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>				✓	
47	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>				✓	
48	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>				✓	
49	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				✓	
50	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				✓	
51	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	
52	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>				✓	
53	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓		
54	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>				✓	
55	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>				✓	
56	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	h	✓	✓	h	
57	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			✓		
58	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	h	h	h	✓	
59	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		h			
60	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓		
63	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓			
64	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
65	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓			✓	
66	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
67	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>				✓	
68	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>				✓	
70	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
71	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	
72	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	
74	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓			✓	
76	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			✓	✓	
77	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>				✓	
78	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>			✓		

Reptiles & amphibians

1	Common Tree Frog	<i>Hyla arborea</i>	h	h			
2	Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanica</i>		✓			
3	Iberian Water Frog	<i>Rana perezi</i>			✓		

Invertebrates

1	Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>			✓		
2	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>			✓		
3	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		✓	✓		

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October				
			27	28	29	30	31
4	Southern Small White	<i>Pieris mannii</i>		✓	✓		
5	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓	✓		
6	Red-winged Grasshopper	<i>Arphia pseudonietana</i>		✓	✓		
7	European Hornet	<i>Vespa crabro</i>		✓			
8	Praying Mantis	<i>Mantodea sp.</i>			✓		
9	Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulea</i>			✓		
10	Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>			✓		
11	Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>			✓		
12	Common Cricket sp.				✓		
13	Emerald Damselfly	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>				✓	