

# Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

22 - 26 March 2015



Great Bustards at Fuente de la Nava



Griffon Vulture



Our rural houses in Cordovilla de Aguilar.



Seeking for Iberian Wolves in the snowy hills!

Report & images compiled by Byron Palacios



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## Summary

The superb mountains and plains of northern Castilla y Leon hosted another enjoyable tour. The weather, as never before on this tour, was not particularly good with unusual cold, snow storms and winds over 40mph! This made our tour plans really difficult. Most of the activities were carried out though plans were affected at times, especially wolf watching activities. Nevertheless, we managed to cope with it by exploring different areas and moving around breathtaking remote landscapes on board our powerful 4x4 vehicles. We enjoyed our wildlife moments alongside the dramatic landscapes, local villages, native people and the local gastronomy: the fine cuisine of Rosa and drinks, especially the local wines, brandy and tasty Pacharan at our comfortable main house.

Despite the very cold weather, our major efforts paid off as some of us managed to see Iberian Wolves but others were not that lucky as they moved very quickly after they were found: this is the gamble of watching wildlife. However, and as the locals say, “Qué pena, una buena excusa para volver pronto otra vez!” (What a pity, a good excuse to come back soon again!)...so why not!

## Day 1

Sunday 22nd March

London Stansted to Asturias – Cordovilla de Aguilar – Monte Aguilar

The flight to Asturias airport arrived on time and after going through security we reassembled at the exit gate and walked out to meet Tino and Toño who were waiting for us with their 4x4 vehicles to take us to the tiny village of Cordovilla de Aguilar in the province of Palencia, north of Castilla y Leon. It was an overcast afternoon and the three-hour journey was split half way by stopping for coffee and corbatas (delicious traditional local pastry). We then continued our drive, arriving at Cordovilla in the early afternoon. After lunch we set off on our first Iberian Wolf excursion.

A 15-minute drive from Cordovilla de Aguilar took us to the point known as Monte Aguilar, overlooking Los Sestiles and La Varga mountains. We had planned to explore the mountains but with the very cold temperature and strong freezing wind we went to the opposite side of the mountain from where we carefully scanned the broom and trials. With no sightings and no help from the weather we retired to our rural houses just in time before a storm. Once there, we enjoyed our meal after a long day.

## Day 2

## Monday 23rd March

### Resoba – Cervera-Requejada Dam – El Pical Pass

We made a dawn start to visit Resoba, located one hour and fifteen minutes away from our base. The morning looked promising and dawn was beautiful with a gorgeous blue sky, however the very cold temperature didn't match the beautiful first moments of the morning. We sat quietly on top of the mountain overlooking Monte del Obispo with its tops covered in snow. From here we saw numerous groups of Red Deer grazing along the steep hillsides, and several Griffon Vultures perched on the rocks waiting for some good thermals to help them fly. Suddenly Toño spotted two Iberian Wolves walking on top of a snowy hill. The light was great and two of us managed to see one of them before they both moved out of sight; most unlucky for the rest of the group! A Red Fox came into view and we had great views in good light as it walked over the snow.

The calls of Hedge Accentor (Dunnock), Woodlark and Dartford Warbler were dominant in the area, and Cirl and Rock Buntings were seen by the track. The sun was still shining but it was very cold so we went to the small town of Cervera de Pisuerga to find a local bar for a hot drink and snack

After our very comforting coffee break we drove to the Cervera-Requejada Dam where we had great views of White-throated Dipper, Griffon Vulture, and White Wagtail. As another wind storm started we drove back to the rural houses for lunch.

In the afternoon we went to the other end of the Alto de El Pical (El Pical Pass) from where we scanned the mountains of Ujapero, Los Sestiles and La Varga. No Iberian Wolves were seen and towards the end of the afternoon another storm was brewing so we retired to our rural houses. It was frustrating but we were unable to do anything about the weather so we contented ourselves with Rosa's delicious food and tasty wine.

## Day 3

## Tuesday 24th March

### Fuentes de Nava Marshes (Tierra de Campos) – Aguilar de Campoo

It was a very cold and wet morning around Cordovilla de Aguilar and even worse at higher elevations in the mountains so we headed south and drove towards the plains where we explored the area of Fuentes de Nava and its marshes. A few raptors including Common Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Red Kite and Marsh Harrier were seen during the journey. Also just as we were about to cross the bridge over the River Carrion, two White-spotted Bluethroats were spotted feeding along the shore of the river by a small patches of reeds. We stopped to get better views of these marvelous birds and we also saw Chiffchaff, European Kingfisher, Tree Sparrow, and vocal Cetti's Warbler. We continued along the road passing vast fields of cereals and alfalfa, an ideal place for Great Bustards, and we found a nice group of fifteen males wandering over the fields. They were getting ready for the mating season in April when they display their impressive plumage to the females. The very cold wind got to our bones so we called at a local bar for some great coffee and biscuits which warmed us up enough to carry on birding the rest of the morning. We drove to different villages in search of more plains specialties finding two pairs of Lesser Kestrel, a group of Rock Sparrow, Spotless Starling, White Stork, Corn Bunting, Black Redstart and a group of 25 Great Bustards.

We drove to the marshes' visitor centre where we had lunch at the second floor which gave fantastic views of the main marshland, an ideal place to do some birding while having lunch, especially on a windy and cold day. Great

birds were seen from here including Marsh Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Purple Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill, Pied Avocet, Bar-tailed Godwit and Ruff. After enjoying lunch and great birding from this shelter, we started to head back towards the mountains via the motorway. After an hour we got to Aguilar de Campo where we stopped to do some leisure birding while visiting this lovely little town: enjoying a drink, the church and buying some souvenirs and maps of the Montana Palentina area.

After this we headed back to the rural houses where we enjoyed another delicious dinner after a brilliant day in the plains.

## Day 4

## Wednesday 25th March

### La Lastra – Cervera-Requejada Dam – Camporeddondo Dam

We left our base very early, again shocked by the amount of snow which had fallen overnight and was still falling. We continued to the mountains near the little village of La Lastra and then over the Camporeddondo Dam, getting to the top of the mountains at dawn and to a position to scan the area. By now it was nice and sunny, and Griffon Vultures and a pair of Golden Eagles were already circling the top of the crags. The strong wind made things difficult for us as the snow dust blew towards our faces and optics, together with the very cold wind it brought, but we continued for a while before moving to a more sheltered spot towards the Camporeddondo Dam. We found a good spot to scan around but the wind was still blowing. Then one of us spotted a movement along the hills; it was a lovely male Iberian Wolf moving rapidly amongst the boulders and brooms. It was moving too quickly to put him in the scope and two of us saw him before he went behind the largest boulder and out of view. A bit frustrating but at least we knew he was there and we planned to return to the same spot later on.

We had lunch at our favorite bar-café in Cervera de Pisuerga then drove to the Cervera-Requejada Dam. Here we checked the bridge and the nearby pine and oak forest by walking along the track which links the dam and the woods. Here we found Goldcrest, Short-toed Treecreeper and Crested Tit. We walked back to the vehicles and set off to the Camporeddondo Dam to keep searching for the Iberian Wolf we had seen earlier at this point. We searched, scanning all over the hills for a few hours and found lots of Red Deer, and two Red Foxes at times feeding on the many animal carcasses found along the fields and hills; animals that had not survived the harsh late winter weather that had affected the mountains in early weeks. As the sun set over the horizon the light became poor and the cold started to hit so it was time to give up our search and retire to our rural houses located an hour away.

We arrived in time for our late and last dinner, delicious as usual as Rosa set the table and presented us with her last delicious menu. We said goodbye and thanked her for all her kindness and for looking after us very well during our stay.

## Day 5

## Thursday 26th March

### Cordovilla de Aguilar – Santander airport

We left Cordovilla de Aguilar and headed towards Santander for our flight to London Stansted. We made a quick stop at the village of Villaescusa del Bardal to take photos of White Stork nests which looked really nice, then we

took the motorway and continued to Santander where we arrived in time for our flight. We said goodbye and thanks to our guides before flying back to the UK and the end of the tour.

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## Species lists

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

	Common Name	Scientific Name	March				
			22	23	24	25	26
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	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			✓		
7	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			✓		
8	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓		
9	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓		
10	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓	✓	
11	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			✓		
13	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>			✓		✓
14	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓	✓	
15	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				✓	
18	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			✓		
19	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	✓	✓	✓		
20	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓		✓	✓	
21	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>		✓	✓	✓	
22	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
23	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>			✓		
24	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓		
25	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓		✓		✓
26	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			✓		
27	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓		
28	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓		
29	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			✓		
30	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓		
31	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓		
32	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>			✓		
33	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓		
34	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>			✓		
35	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
37	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
38	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			✓		
39	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		h	h		
40	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>		h		h	
41	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			✓		
42	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
43	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓		
44	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓		✓	
45	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>				✓	
47	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
49	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>				✓	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	March				
			22	23	24	25	26
50	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				✓	
51	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
52	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓		✓	✓	
53	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	h	h	h	h	
54	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓	✓	
55	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>			✓		
56	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓	✓	
57	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			✓	✓	
58	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			✓		
59	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓		✓	
60	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	✓	✓	
62	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		h			
63	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			✓		
64	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				✓	
65	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	✓	
66	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				h	
67	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			✓	✓	
68	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
71	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓	✓	
72	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>				✓	
75	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			✓		
78	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>			✓		
79	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓		✓	
80	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	
81	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
83	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
84	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓	✓	
85	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓		
86	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>				✓	
87	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	✓	
88	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	
89	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓	✓	
90	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		✓		✓	
91	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		✓			

## Mammals

1	Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>		2		1	
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓		✓	✓
4	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		1			
5	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓		
6	American Mink	<i>Neovison vison</i>			✓		