

# Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

7 - 11 July 2015



Purple Emperor



Iberian Wolf



European Wildcat



Wolf Watching

Report compiled by Byron Palacios  
Images courtesy of Jo Southway & Kris Catley



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Tour Participants: Byron Palacios (leader), Tino Garcia and Toño Ruiz de Gopegui (local guides) together with 11 Naturetrek clients

## Summary

The superb mountains and pristine landscape of the province of Palencia (northern Castilla y Leon) once again gave us an enjoyable expedition. The weather was particularly good, perhaps a bit too hot at times, something unusual in the mountains but very pleasant for the tour. We coped well with the terrain and the waiting whilst looking for the mighty and mysterious Iberian Wolf which we luckily found! We also enjoyed exploring different areas whilst moving through breathtaking landscapes in remote places, all on board our powerful 4x4 vehicles. We enjoyed many wildlife moments alongside the dramatic wilderness, local villages, native people and the local gastronomy, especially the fine cuisine provided by our host Rosa! All this alongside wonderful company and camaraderie at our comfy accommodation where local wines flowed at suppers, and at picnics!

Our major efforts paid off as we managed to see a beautiful male Iberian Wolf and other mammals such as Wildcat, alongside beautiful birds and lots of butterflies. At the end we were all sad to go home and hope to return to this wonderful land and awesome people one day soon! Hasta pronto amigos..!!!

## Day 1

Tuesday 7th July

London Stansted to Asturias – Cordovilla de Aguilar – Monte Aguilar

The early flight to Santander airport arrived on time, and after going through security we assembled at the exit gate and walked out to meet Toño, Tino and Rosa who were waiting for us. We drove to the tiny village of Cordovilla de Aguilar in the province of Palencia, north of Castilla y Leon. It was a beautifully sunny morning and we arrived at Cordovilla in time to enjoy our first picnic lunch in the lush garden of our rural house.

After lunch and a break enjoying the warm sunshine, we had a 15-minute drive to Monte Aguilar where fine native oak woodland covers a vast area of the northern face of the hill behind Cordovilla. We left our vehicles behind and walked through the oak forest, going through a couple of clearings carpeted in heather and Spanish broom. We found some good samples of Iberian Wolf droppings as well as those of Pine Marten and Badger. The clearings produced a good variety of butterflies which we all enjoyed watching. We also found some small flocks of birds, together with Crested Tit and Great Spotted Woodpecker. At the last clearing we overlooked the Mataporquero Valley with stunning views of the mountains.

Eventually it was time to return to our rural houses at Cordovilla. Once there, we got ready for dinner and then gathered together in the main house for our first delicious dinner cooked by Rosa.

## Day 2

Wednesday 8th July

### Fuentes Carrionas Natural Park (La Lastra – River Pisuerga basin)

After a very early start, we were in the mountains in the La Lastra area at dawn, just in time to find our places and get ready to scan a beautiful valley. The morning was pleasant and promised great sunny weather. The local cattle were surprised to see us well camouflaged on the side of the slope where we took a position to scan the valley. We scanned from side to side and at the hill tops, finding a group of four Wild Boar grazing patiently amongst the lush green grass in one of the fields, and plenty of Red Deer were also spotted. As the sun came up the light was great and with a wide angle of view over the area we found lots of groups of Red Deer on the hill tops and along the valleys; but no signs yet of their main predator. A few of us caught a glimpse of a beast not far from our position; perhaps a young wandering Iberian Wolf, who knows.

After more than three hours scanning this peaceful and gorgeous valley, it was time to go for breakfast and take a break at a local café in the little town of Cervera de Pisuerga. After this revitalizing break, we continued exploring interesting sites including the little village of Rabanal de los Caballeros, home of Toño. We saw some interesting birds such as Golden Oriole, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Red-backed Shrike and Booted Eagle just by walking around his village. We then drove to a very nice area in the hills where we enjoyed our delicious picnic lunch and the views of the River Pisuerga valley.

After lunch we found two Wildcats; firstly a female was spotted from the road allowing us great views and even the chance to photograph it before she ran to the forest edge. Later we return to the same area, this time parking our vehicles on the upper part of the road from where we had terrific views of a young male Wildcat which we watched for a long time, hunting, walking and stalking Water Voles on these recently mown meadows - just superb!

Following the main basin of the River Pisuerga, we continued our drive, making a couple of stops along the way. With the sun still hot, the wind picking up, and we had been in the field for 12 hours already, it was time to return to our accommodation for a break before another of Rosa's delicious suppers!

## Day 3

Thursday 9th July

### Fuentes Carrionas Natural Park (Resoba – Peña Tejedo)

It was another very early start for us. We left in the dark on a fresh morning and got to our watchpoint at Resoba at first light. The valley looked pristine and quiet, and the weather was promising and full of surprises. Several groups of Red Deer started to move towards the hill tops, whilst others were already there grazing quietly, but always alert from any threat - and that was exactly what we were looking for - the main threat in the valleys: Iberian Wolf. Suddenly Tino's voice broke the silence: "lobo, lobo" he said. A massive alpha male wolf was making his way to the clearings where the Red Deer were grazing, obviously with the intention of grabbing a young deer if he got the chance. We watched him as he walked towards the upper portion of the hill, going through dips, open meadows and disappearing at times in the broom. He unsuccessfully chased a couple of young deer before starting to drag remains that we thought were from a previous killing. We watched this beautiful animal for 45 minutes before it vanished into the oak woodland on top of the hill. We were all happy with this excellent sighting - what

a great animal! We made our way back to the little town of Cervera de Pisuerga for breakfast and the now famous grilled croissant...yummy! We made a quick stop on the way down the mountain track and saw Ortolan Bunting, Tree Pipit and Dartford Warbler.

After enjoying our traditional breakfast and great coffee, we headed up the mountain, entering through the village of Celada de Robledo from where we used the power of our 4x4 vehicles along tracks through pristine oak woodland. We reached the mountain top known as Peña Tejedo from where we enjoyed breathtaking views of all the Montaña Palentina and the mighty Picos de Europa in the background. It was sunny and lots of butterflies were on the wing. We had great views of beautiful alpine butterflies such as Apollo, Berger's Clouded Yellow, and lots of different types of fritillaries and blues. After enjoying this great spot, we walked down the track towards our picnic site located in a hidden area just by the tree line from where we had amazing views of cliffs and hilltops.

After enjoying our delicious lunch and a good laugh, we explored the oak forest by walking in the woods which produced very interesting birds such as Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper and Pied Flycatcher, amongst others. At the end of the walk we returned to our vehicles and back to Cordovilla de Aguilar where we had time for a break before enjoying another fantastic dinner and drinks!

## Day 4

Friday 10th July

Group 1: El Cebollar (mountains) Group 2: Tierra de Campos (plains & steppe)

Due to the success of the previous day with our target animal, the Iberian Wolf, some of the group chose to try different landscapes and habitats, heading to the plains and steppe of Tierra de Campos. The remaining group members kept exploring the mountain tops, looking for more mammals.

Both groups had a great time. The 'plains group' was rewarded with fantastic views of Great Bustard, Little Owl, Calandra Lark, Lesser Kestrel, Iberian Yellow Wagtail, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Great Reed Warbler, Western Marsh Harrier, European Bee-eater and Montagu's Harrier, amongst others. The 'mountain group' spent their time walking amongst wild places on top of the mountains and watching Red Deer, Wild Boar, and even a Beech Marten; alongside lots of birds and butterflies.

Both groups joined together at the pine woodland of Monte Royal where we did some birding and looked for flowers. Unfortunately we found that the orchids and some of the main flowers had already gone over. We then continued to the little town of Aguilar de Campoo where we had a stroll and some of us bought souvenirs and maps to take home. We also enjoyed great close views of a pair of White-throated Dipper in the river.

We returned to our accommodation in time for a break, some drinks and dinner. Rosa presented us with our last delicious meal which she had cooked for us.

## Day 5

Saturday 11th July

### Cordovilla de Aguilar – Santander airport

Today we had a later start before getting ready to leave Cordovilla de Aguilar and head towards Santander airport for our mid-morning flight. Before setting off we gave our hosts a great and thankful farewell. We then set off and drove to Santander airport, arriving in good time. Once back at London Stansted we collected our bags and then wished each other all the best before starting our journeys back to our home towns.

We all had a fantastic experience in the mountains of northern Spain where wildlife is still possible to be seen and enjoyed. It is very reassuring to know that there are still lots of pristine places in Western Europe, like these mountains, which are completely untouched. We saw lots of great wildlife, especially our main target, the great Iberian Wolf! I'm sure we'll be back to keep trying for more sometime soon; a very good excuse to come back to this marvellous and unique area!

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## Species Lists

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

	Common Name	Scientific Name	July				
			7	8	9	10	11
1	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓	
2	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				✓	
3	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</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	European Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	h	h			
9	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				✓	
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>				✓	
12	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
15	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			✓		
16	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓	
17	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				✓	
18	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓			
22	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				✓	
23	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				h	
24	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓		✓	
25	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				✓	
26	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				✓	
27	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓	
28	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>					✓
29	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>				✓	
30	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
31	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓	
32	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		h			
33	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				✓	
34	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>				✓	
35	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓		✓		
36	Middle-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>			✓		
37	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpie</i>				✓	
38	Black Woodpecker	<i>Drycopus martius</i>	✓				
39	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				✓	
40	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
41	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓			
42	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
43	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>				✓	
44	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	✓		✓	✓	
45	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
47	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>			✓		

	Common Name	Scientific Name	July				
			7	8	9	10	11
48	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>				✓	
49	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
50	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
51	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓		✓	
52	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		✓			
53	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>			✓	✓	
54	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	✓			✓	
55	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓	✓	
56	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓		✓	✓	
57	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			
58	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
59	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>				✓	
60	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>				✓	
61	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
62	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓		✓	
63	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
64	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓			
65	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>				✓	
66	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓		✓	✓	
67	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		✓			h
68	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>				✓	
69	European Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓	
70	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>				✓	
71	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓	
72	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>				✓	
73	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	h	✓	h	✓	
74	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		h	✓	✓	
75	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		✓		✓	
76	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			✓	✓	
77	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	✓		✓		
78	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓		✓	
79	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>			✓		
80	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			h	✓	
81	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	h		✓	✓	
82	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			✓		
83	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	
84	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>				✓	
85	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
86	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓				
87	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
88	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓		✓	✓	
89	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
90	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			✓		
91	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
92	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
93	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		✓		✓	
94	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓		
95	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
96	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
97	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>		✓		✓	
98	Iberian Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>				✓	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	July				
			7	8	9	10	11
99	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			✓	✓	
100	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>		✓	✓		
101	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
102	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓			
103	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
104	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>				h	
105	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓		✓	
106	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
107	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		h	✓	✓	
108	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citronella</i>	✓	✓	✓		
109	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>			✓	✓	
110	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	✓				
111	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓	
112	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>			✓		

### Mammals

1	Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>			1		
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		4		4	
3	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
4	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		2			
5	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓		✓	
6	Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris</i>		2			
7	Beech Martin	<i>Martes foina</i>				1	

### Amphibians

1	Iberian Ribbed Newt	<i>Pleurodeles waltl</i>				✓	
2	Palmate Newt	<i>Lissotriton helveticus</i>				✓	
3	Alpine Newt	<i>Ichthyosaura alpestris</i>				✓	
4	Iberian Water Frog	<i>Rana iberica</i>		✓			

### Butterflies & Moths

Camberwell Beauty, *Nymphallis antiopa*

Small Skipper, *Thymelicus sylvestris*

Black-veined White, *Aporia crataegi*

Piedmont Ringlet, *Erebia meolans*

Chapman's Ringlet, *Erebia palarica*

Clouded Yellow, *Colias crocea*

Long tailed Blue, *Lampides boeticus*

Queen of Spain Fritillary, *Issoria lathonia*

Apollo, *Parnassius apollo*

Marsh Fritillary, *Euphydryas aurinia*

Silver-washed Fritillary, *Argynnis paphia*

Cardinal, *Argynnis pandora*

Scarce Copper, *Lycaena virgaureae*

Common Blue, *Polyommatus icarus*

Hummingbird Hawk-moth, *Macroglossum stellaratum*

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*

Large Skipper, *Ochlodes sylvanus*

Western Marbled White, *Melanargia galathea*

De Prunner's Ringlet, *Erebia triarius*

Comma Butterfly, *Polygonia c-album*

Southern Small White, *Pieris mannii*

Peacock, *Inachis io*

Wall Brown, *Lasiommata megera*

Berger's Clouded Yellow, *Colias sareptensis*

Provencal Fritillary, *Melitaea deione*

Marbled Fritillary, *Brenthis daphne*

Brown Argus, *Aricia agestis*

Small Heath, *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Painted Lady, *Cynthia*

Five-spotted Burnet, *Zygaena trifolii*