

Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 – 21 October 2015



Rabanal de los Caballeros (Valle de Perapertú)



Perapertú (Scanning the landscape looking for Wildcat)



Valle de Perapertú



Picnic in the garden of the Hotel Rural El Mayorazgo

Tour report and images by Laura Benito



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Tour participants: Laura Benito, Tino García and Toño Ruiz de Gopegui (leaders) with 13 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Saturday 17th October

London Stansted – Santander - Cordovilla (Montaña Palentina)

The early flight to Santander airport arrived on time. Tino and Laura were waiting for the group, and once we were all together and the cars loaded, we had an hour's drive to the village of Cordovilla de Aguilar in the province of Palencia (North Spain).

It was a sunny day and we arrive at our rural hotel in the small village at lunch time. We had our picnic lunch in the garden, which was a great thing to do in October! Just after lunch we were joined by Toño.

After we had enjoyed our delicious picnic, and the sun, we left the hotel and headed to Monte Aguilar, a ten minute drive away. We parked our vehicles and set off on a walk through the Oak forest (*Quercus pyrenaica* and *Quercus petraea*). Along the track we found some Badger droppings as well as Stone Martin and Fox. We arrive at an old stone building in the middle of the forest. It was a refuge surrounded by a wall, where shepherds used to keep livestock to protect it from the wolves! We then walked back to the cars and returned to our rural house.

After a break, we gathered together in the main house. Plans for the rest of the tour were discussed before we enjoyed a delicious dinner cooked by Rosa.

Day 2

Sunday 18th October

La lastra - Valle de Pineda

Today we had an early start, and it was still dark outside! After a quick breakfast we had a 50-minute drive to la Lastra area. We arrived just before the sunrise, to be ready to scan the beautiful valley.

Was a little bit chilly, but clear with no clouds. We scanned every single patch, field and the edge of the pine forest. As the light got better our eyes adapted and we saw more animals. We watched some Red Deer grazing in a field, and suddenly Tino broke the silence – he had spotted a Lobo (Wolf)! A couple of cubs were playing in a forest clearing, appearing and disappearing behind the trees. As we were watching them an adult appeared in the same area. What a great start!

After more than two hours in this beautiful place it was time for coffee, so we went to a local bar in Vidrieros. Once we had enjoyed our coffee and some other local food such as torresnos (bacon), we drove to the Valley of Pineda, a beautiful and isolated glacial valley that connects Montaña Palentina with Cantabria.

We parked the cars and went for a walk to explore the area. We saw some raptors including Common Buzzard and Griffon Vulture. It was amazing to walk in this valley, and we talked about the wolves that also live there and imagined all the things that can happen there.

Soon it was time for lunch, and we enjoyed our delicious picnic in an old refuge with views of the valley. After lunch we move to another area, crossing part of the valley. We pass through pine forest where we saw a tree with Brown Bear marks on it. Toño explain about this animal and the population in the Cordillera Cantabrica.

Continuing our excursion, we stopped for a walk along a track with good views of the Valley of Vallestrecho. A group of Griffon Vultures were actively soaring around, and a pair of Golden Eagles appeared and we enjoyed watching them flying in the distance.

After this pleasant stroll we drove back to Cordovilla and our hotel, where we enjoyed another nice dinner and completed the daily log.

Day 3

Monday 19th October

Cordovilla - Fuentes de Nava - Laguna de la Nava

The day promised rain and cold around Cordovilla de Aguilar, so we headed south towards the plains of the Meseta. We drove to the area of Fuentes de Nava and its marshes. We stopped at the top of a hill to scan the vast fields of alfalfa and cereals. Finally we found a group of 20 Great Bustards in the distance, so we drove closer to get better views of them. We also saw Little Owl, Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting. It was now raining and cold so we headed to a local bar for hot coffee or chocolate and to warm up. On the way we saw Red Kite, Common Buzzard, Marsh Harrier, lots of Goldfinches and Greenfinches, and a Black-eared Wheatear.

Next we drove to the marshes in search of more species, finding a group of 40 Common Cranes, Great Bustard, White Stork and Greylag Goose. We moved to the marsh visitor centre where we had lunch with fantastic views of the marshland. The surprise of the day was to see a Yellow-browed Warbler fluttering in a bush next to the centre. We also had great views of other birds from here including Pied Avocet, Ruff and Gadwall.

After lunch we went for a walk before headed back to the rural houses where we had a well deserved rest before enjoying another delicious dinner

Day 4

Tuesday 20th October

La Lastra - Rabanal de los Caballeros – Perapertú - Cordovilla

We had another very early start, and again drove in the dark to the valley of La Lastra. It was a fresh morning, and the ground was wet because of yesterday's rain. Cold and wet with a cloudy sky - a perfect combination for a wolf day.

Suddenly we detected some movement along the valley; it was a group of eight Iberian Wolf cubs moving rapidly. We all enjoyed watching these beautiful animals. We watched them for an hour, going through dips, open meadows and disappearing at times in the broom. They were playing all the time. We saw an adult too, but very briefly. Finally they vanished into the pine forest, so we decided to go to the local bar for coffee and to celebrate our success!

Next we moved to the valley of La Castillería where we had our picnic in a lovely spot in the middle of an old Oak forest. Everybody was happy and relaxed; enjoying the sun.

In the afternoon we tried our luck at Wildcat spotting. We drove through the fields where they used to be, and finally, at the end of the day, we saw one crossing a field quite fast. What a good end of the holiday!

We arrived back in time for our late and last dinner in Cordovilla. Afterwards we said goodbye to Rosa and thanked her for all her hard work during our stay.

Day 5

Wednesday 21st October

Cordovilla - Santander airport - London

We had an early start and left Cordovilla in the dark. We headed to Santander airport for our early flight back to London, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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Species Lists

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

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October			
			17	18	19	20
1	Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>		3		9
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓		✓
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓		
4	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>		✓		
5	Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris</i>				1

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	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			✓	
6	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓		
7	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		✓	✓	
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓		✓
9	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		✓	✓
10	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓		✓
12	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			✓	
13	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓			
14	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓		
16	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓	✓
17	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>			✓	
18	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			H	
19	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>			✓	
20	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓	
21	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓	
22	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓	
23	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			✓	
24	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓	
25	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>			✓	
26	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓	
27	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓	
28	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓	
30	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			✓	
31	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓	
32	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓	✓	
33	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓		✓
34	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	✓	✓		✓
36	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>				✓
39	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	H	✓		
40	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓		✓

	Common Name	Scientific Name	October			
			17	18	19	20
41	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	
43	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓	
44	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓
45	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	
46	Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>			✓	
47	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓	
48	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				✓
49	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓	
50	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			H	
51	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓		
52	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓		
53	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>				
54	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		✓	✓	✓
55	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓
56	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓		✓
57	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	
58	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			✓	
59	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓
60	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			✓	
61	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓
62	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓		
63	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓
64	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓		✓
65	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓		✓
66	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓	
67	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	✓
68	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓	✓
69	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>			✓	
70	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓		
71	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				✓
72	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		✓		
73	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>			✓	