

Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

23 – 27 December 2015



Espigüete



In la Nava



Brown Bear foot prints



Presa arbejal

Tour report and images by Laura Benito



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Tour Participants: Laura Benito, Tino Garcia and Toño Ruiz de Gopegui (leaders) with a group of nine Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Wednesday 23rd December

London – Santander - San Martín de Perapertú

Group members flew from Stansted to Santander, where Laura and Tino were waiting for us at the airport. Once we were all together, we drove to Hotel Piedraabierta in the small village of San Martín de Perapertú, north of Palencia in Castilla y León.

We arrived at midday, just in time for a delicious ‘winter picnic’ comprising hot food cooked by our chef Rosa (Tino’s wife); good to fight against the cold weather! Our third guide, Toño was waiting for us at the hotel, as always full of energy and a sense of humour!

After lunch we set off on our first excursion, not far from the hotel, in the forest of Perapertú. We enjoyed a nice, relaxed walk but the temperature was cold. We saw a number of birds including Short-toed Treecreeper and Nuthatch while we talked about the behaviour, ecology and conservation of the wolf in Montaña Palentina.

Once back at the hotel, we had time to relax and talk about plans for the rest of the week. We then enjoyed a delicious dinner cooked by Karmah and Jose, the young owners of the Hotel.

Day 2

Thursday 24th December

San Martín de Perapertú - La lastra – Milares - Ruesga Dam

Today we had a very early start and drove to La Lastra, an area containing a Wolf territory, and just a 45-minute drive from the hotel.

Once at our lookout spot we spent an hour scanning the valley, but without success. It was chilly and the sky was completely covered by clouds. We then moved to another place not far away, but the rain, wind and cold made viewing uncomfortable, so we gave up our search and headed for a hot drink in the town of Vidrieros.

After our very comforting coffee (and Chocolate!) break we went for a walk in the town, following the River Carrion, and we had great views of White-throated Dipper.

Next we drove across the glacial valley of Pineda, with superb views of this magnify valley. We stopped in the refuge of ‘Las Tenadas’ where we prepared our picnic. The hot food was very welcome!

The weather was unpleasant so we moved to the Ruesga Dam and spent the rest of the afternoon exploring this area. As it was surprisingly quiet on the wildlife front we returned to our hotel where we later enjoyed a great dinner that included delicious vegetarian meals, prepared by chef Karmah.

Day 3

Friday 25th December

San Martín de Perapertú – Cadalcio – Milares – Polentinos

We left our base very early again. We returned to the same valley as yesterday, but tried a different spot on the hill of 'Cadalcio'. The views were absolutely fantastic with a beautiful sunrise. We spent two hours here, and although we had no success with wolves, we did see a pair of Golden Eagles circling the top of the crags.

As the wind was cold and strong, we moved to another location. We drove to the next valley, the valley of Polentinos, stopping at some interesting places to scan the landscape and the hills. One stop was at a refuge where we had our lunch. We also made a fire to warm us up while we enjoyed our meal.

After lunch we went for a walk and we found the footprints of a female Brown Bear and her cub. We also found the footprint of a young male on the same path. Having seen the footprints, we found a nice spot to wait and watch. Our luck was in as we spent an hour watching a young male Brown Bear playing, eating and running! We all enjoyed this magical moment; a real Christmas present!

After this we headed back to the hotel where Karmah and Jose were waiting for us with a delicious special Christmas dinner. An unforgettable Christmas day!

Day 4

Saturday 26th December

San Martín de Perapertú - Fuentes de Nava Marshes

After a great breakfast we headed south and drove towards the plains. It was an easy trip; using the motorway and with a midway stop for coffee and to use the facilities.

Once at La Nava, our first stop was at the top of a hill to scan the vast fields of cereal and alfalfa in search of Great Bustards. We spotted a big group in the distance, but too far away. We also saw Iberian Green Woodpecker, Corn Bunting and Tree Sparrow here. We drove nearer to try to get closer views of the group of at least thirty Great Bustards wandering over the fields. Eventually we got great views of these beautiful birds. It was a mix group of females and young males, and to our surprise some of them were displaying their impressive plumage to the females - in December!

Next we continued to Fuente de Nava, and on the way had great views of interesting birds such as Little Owl, White Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail and Sparrowhawk. After a nice coffee in the village we drove to the marshes visitor centre. We had lunch here with fantastic views of the main marshland, full of Greylag Geese, and also Lapwing, Pied Avocet and Ruff, and in the fields nearby we saw Marsh Harrier, Great Egret and White Stork.

After a walk around the visitor centre we started the journey back to our Hotel. Once back we had time to relax and talk before enjoying dinner with wine; celebrating that it had been another nice day in the field.

Day 5

Sunday 27th December

San Martin de Perapertú - Alto de la Varga – Santander – London

It was our final morning and we had another early start as it was our last chance to find a wolf. We drove to the mountains, this time to 'El alto de la Varga', getting to the top of the mountain to scan the valley.

We were at a nice spot, scanning the landscape, when suddenly Tino saw a lone Wolf moving through the valley. It was moving rapidly so only two of us saw him - quite frustrating. We continued scanning the landscape and finally found a dead animal at the top of a hill, with a group of five adult and young Iberian Wolves feeding on it. Griffon Vultures were sitting around waiting their turn. It was incredible to see the interaction between the wolves and also with the vultures and ravens. We enjoyed watching these lovely animals for nearly two hours before they disappeared. It was a superb sighting! Very happy, we retired for a coffee break.

The rest of the day was very relaxed. We had lunch in the shelter of San Martin, the los Herreros. It was a lovely spot and we also enjoyed the sun whilst sitting outside the refuge. In the afternoon we went for a walk to the dam of Requejada.

All too soon it was time to return to the hotel to pick up our luggage and drive to Santander. We had a final surprise as a Wildcat crossed in front of our cars and we had good views of this gorgeous animal! We were very happy and satisfied with our five days experience in the impressive Montaña Palentina.

We finally arrived at the airport in time for our late flight back to England where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end. We had experienced a very enjoyable and unforgettable time during this Christmas trip!

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Vidireros

Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	December				
			23	24	25	26	27
1	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>					✓
2	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			✓		✓
3	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>				✓	
4	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓		✓
5	Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>			✓		

Birds

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				✓	
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓		✓	✓
3	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				✓	
4	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓		✓	
5	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	
6	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓		✓	✓
7	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓			✓
8	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>				✓	
9	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>					
10	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓		✓	✓
11	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓	
12	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>			✓		
13	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
14	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				✓	
15	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓	
16	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
17	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				✓	
19	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓			
20	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓	
21	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				✓	
22	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				✓	
23	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓				
24	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			✓	✓	
25	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓	✓	
26	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				✓	
27	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	H				
28	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>		H		✓	
29	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓		✓	✓
30	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>				✓	
31	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
32	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	✓	✓	✓		
34	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	H				
37	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓		
38	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓		✓	
39	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>				✓	
40	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	December				
			23	24	25	26	27
41	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓			
42	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓	
43	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>				✓	
44	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓		
45	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓				
46	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓				
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	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		✓			
54	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓		✓	✓
55	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>				✓	
56	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓	
57	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓		✓	✓
58	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>				✓	
59	Spanish Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>				✓	
60	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓		✓	
61	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			✓	✓	
62	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓	
63	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>				✓	
64	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				✓	
65	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>				✓	
66	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>				✓	



Christmas Dinner