

Wolf-watching in Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

24 - 28 October 2016



Rabanal de los Caballeros. Oak forest



Wolf Watching. Resoba



Wildcat waiting. Church of Rabanal de los Caballeros



Valley of Pineda

Report and images by Laura Benito



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Tour participants: Laura Benito, Tino Garcia & Toño Ruiz de Gopegui (leaders)
Together with 10 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 24th October

London – Santander - Cordovilla

The flight from Stansted arrived at night into Santander. Tino and I were waiting for the group at the airport. Once we were all together we started the drive to the small village of Cordovilla, north of Palencia in Castilla y Leon, our base for the next four days.

It was very late when we arrived to the hotel, and the group was tired, so it was time to sleep and recover our energy for the next morning!

Day 2

Tuesday 25th October

Resoba(Laguna Cimera) – Milares - Valle Pineda

As usual on this trip, the day started very early. It was raining, but we continued with the main plan setting off for a Wolf territory called “Valley of Santibañez de Resoba”, just a 45-minute drive from the hotel. Once we arrived at the point, we waited a little bit in the vehicles until the rain stopped.

Finally the rain stopped, so we moved to the viewpoint and sat down to scan the valley with our scopes. At 9.30 we saw three Wolves in one of the fields; we put our scopes on them, to show them to the rest of the group. The animals were quiet, lying in the field, moving around, appearing and disappearing behind bushes We enjoyed these views for more than an hour until they all disappeared.

After this good start we decided to go for a coffee: something hot was very welcome. Once we finished our break, we moved to Celada de Roblecedo, to have a nice walk in this beautiful ancient oak forest. During our walk we saw Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper and Middle Spotted woodpecker (not easy to see at this time of the year!) Our picnic spot wasn't far away, at a point with beautiful views, and the weather allowed us to have our picnic in the field, enjoying some sunshine!

After lunch we went for a walk, while Tino and Toño were waiting for us with the vehicles at the end of the track.

We decided to move and explore a different valley, the valley of Perapertú. We stopped at one point with superb views of the valley. Scanning with the scope, we saw a Wildcat in one field, but very far away. We tried to get closer views of this Wildcat, without success; once he detected us he disappeared behind a bush.

It was time to drive back slowly to the hotel, to have some rest, enjoy a drink and a great dinner that our Chef Rosa prepared for us.

Day 3

Wednesday 26th October

Resoba - Rabanal de los Caballeros - Perapertú

We left our base very early, again going to the same spot, but this time we weren't so lucky. Only one Wolf appeared, and it was very quick so not all the group managed to see it. We spent more than three hours there. The morning was fine but a little bit chilly, so we decided that it was time for a coffee in Cervera de Pisuerga.

After a nice hot coffee we moved to Rabanal de los Caballeros, a potential place for Wildcat. From the top of a hill, where the church is, we started to scan all the fields around, but with no luck this time.

We moved to another place, not far away, but at the top of one of the hills, from where the views were spectacular. The day was clear with blue sky, and the temperature was nice, perfect to enjoy a picnic from this viewpoint. A pair of Golden Eagles flew over us while we were enjoying our food.

We went for a walk, stopping and scanning the fields occasionally, but everything was very quiet. Tino and Toño picked us up at the end of the track, and we continued driving to the valley of Perapertú, to try again the Wildcat, but there was no sign of it.

After this we headed back to the hotel where we had our meeting and as always, our delicious dinner to celebrate, despite fewer mammals, another successful day!

Day 4

Thursday 27th October

Resoba - Polentinos - Cordovilla

We made an early start, before dawn. In Cordovilla the sky was clear, full of stars and with no light pollution. We started our drive to Laguna Cimera. There were superb views of the valley with the first light of the morning. The morning was promising.

As usual we started our scanning with the scopes, when suddenly we saw two young Wolves moving through the bushes, on the hill that was in front of us. We followed them with the scopes, giving the opportunity to the entire group to see them. We all enjoyed good views of the wolves, in perfect light. We were very happy.

No coffee in Cervera this time: the morning was perfect, with sun, so we decided to go for a walk following the track to Milares, another hotspot for Wolves and a potential place for Brown Bear.

During this walk we saw Crested Tit, Coal Tit, Bullfinch ... and a big group of Griffon Vultures circling in the distance. Once we arrived in Milares, we stopped to scan the place, but there were no signs of any carnivores at all. A Golden Eagle flew above us.

From there we drove to the next valley, Polentinos, crossing part of the Pineda valley. We stopped at some points to enjoy the views of this glacial valley. We arrived at the refuge "Chozo Linares" and, because was midday, we decided was the perfect place to prepare our picnic lunch. It is a beautiful and quiet place.

After lunch we went for a walk following the main track. To our surprise, not far from the refuge we saw the footprints of a Brown Bear! Very fresh, just while we were having lunch!! That was amazing. We continued walking a little bit more, enjoying the sun and good weather. In terms of birds, it was rather quiet.

We drove to the “Arbejal Dam”, a good place to see Wallcreeper in winter, but it was still too hot for them and probably this bird was still in the mountains. However, Grey Wagtail, Black Redstart, Great Crested Grebe were all recorded.

We arrived back at the hotel with some time to relax, talk and enjoy the dinner and some wine. It was our last night.

Day 5

Friday 28th October

Rabanal de los Caballeros - Salinas de Pisuergra - Santander

Today was our last day, and we tried again for the Wildcat. We went to Rabanal de los Caballeros, and from the church we did our waiting, scanning the fields. The day was cold, with wind, a little bit unpleasant. Unfortunately, there were no signs of any Wildcat. We continued to explore the other potential places and drove to Piedrasluengas and the Valley of La Castilleria, but with no luck this time.

We went to Salinas de Pisuergra, where we had our picnic next to the river. We then took a little walk along the river Pisuergra, a good place sometimes to see the Otter. A pair of Dippers was fluttering around; also a Grey Wagtail, Grey Heron and Cetti's Warbler were noted.

We finished the day having a coffee in Aguilar de Campoo. We then had some time to change our clothes, pick up the luggage and have an early dinner with Rosa's delicious Spanish Tortilla. It was then time to start our driving to Santander, leaving the mountains behind ... with the Wolves in our minds, and thinking how important is to protect them.

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Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			24	25	26	27	28
1	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
2	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓	✓		
3	European Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris silvestris</i>		✓			
4	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>				S	

Birds

1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓		✓
2	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	✓
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				✓	✓
4	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
5	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>			✓	✓	
6	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓		
7	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
8	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>				✓	
10	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓	
13	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			H	H	
14	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>		✓			
15	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓	
16	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>			✓		
17	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			✓		
18	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			✓	✓	✓
19	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓			
20	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>			✓		✓
21	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>		✓		✓	
24	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	
26	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>			✓	✓	
27	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓		✓	
28	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>				✓	
29	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓		✓	✓
30	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓		✓	✓
31	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓	✓		✓
32	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		H		✓	
33	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	
34	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>				✓	
35	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H		H
36	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓		
37	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			✓	✓	
38	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓		
39	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓		✓	
40	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			24	25	26	27	28
41	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				✓	
42	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓			
43	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓		✓	
44	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓	✓		
47	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓		
48	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓		
49	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓		
50	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			✓	✓	✓
51	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>				✓	
52	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>					✓
53	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>			✓		
55	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	✓
56	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓	✓	
58	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				✓	
60	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓		
61	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓		
62	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
63	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓		
64	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>			✓		



Requejada- reservoir