

Wolf-watching in Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

27 September - 1 October 2018

Report compiled by Byron Palacios



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Tour participants: Byron Palacios, Tino Garcia & Toño Gopegui (leaders) with 11 Naturetrek clients.

Summary

The superb mountains of northern Castilla y Leon hosted another enjoyable Iberian Wolf trip once again. The weather was at times great, and at others a bit adverse, yet it was great to see some good quality wildlife whilst exploring different areas as we moved through breathtaking remote landscapes in our powerful 4x4 vehicles. We very much enjoyed our wildlife moments throughout the trip, alongside the dramatic landscapes, local villages, native people and the local gastronomy, especially the fine cuisine of Rosa, plus the drinks, especially at our comfy main house where local wines and beer were tasted!

Day 1

Thursday 27th September

Stansted airport to Santander – Cordovilla de Aguilar

The group's flight to Asturias airport arrived on time and, after going through security, we reassembled the group at the exit gate from where we walked out to meet up with Tino and Toño who were already waiting for us in their 4x4 in order to take us to the tiny village of Cordovilla de Aguilar in the province of Palencia, north of Castilla y Leon. The driving was done on a clear and full-of-stars evening. Once in Cordovilla de Aguilar, we settled in our comfy and cosy rooms in order to have a restful night.

Day 2

Friday 28th September

Resoba – Cervera de Pisuerga – Rabanal – Perapertu

A dawn start was made to visit our first hotspot known as El Cebollar, right above the village of Resoba, in the park of Montaña Palentina Natural Park. The morning looked promising and the dawn was beautiful, with a gorgeous blue sky; it was a bit chilly but not as cold as we were expecting. We sat quietly on top of the mountain overlooking the mountain of Monte del Obispo, its tops catching the first sunbeams of the very early morning. Numerous groups of Red Deer were spotted grazing along the steep hillsides; some handsome stags were still rutting. A few Griffon Vultures were seen perched on the rocks waiting for some good thermals to help them fly; the calls of Dunnocks, Woodlarks and Dartford Warblers were dominant in the area. They reminded us that a comfort break was needed after the effort of the early cold morning, so we drove to the little town of Cervera de Pisuerga in order to enjoy of a very nice coffee break.

After this, we hit the road again towards the upper basin of the river Pisuerga, towards the hamlet of Rabanal. Here we were scanning for Wildcats, finding Iberian Grey Shrike, Red-backed Shrike and Stonechat, amongst others, instead. We continued ups the track where we found fresh Iberian Wolf tracks and droppings. We eventually found a lovely lunch spot right above of the village of Redondo where we enjoyed our first picnic lunch.

After lunch, we took a stroll along the tracks, before starting our drive towards Cordovilla de Aguilar. We followed the track through Herrerueta de Castilleria, where we found the first female European Wildcat hunting in one of the meadows nearby. We had great views of the feline from our vehicles, enough time to look though the stunning details of this lovely species. Further along the road and driving into the hamlet of San Felices, a second European Wildcat, male, was found, and we had great views of this individual too!

Happy with the results of our very first day in the field, we returned to our accommodation in order to take a break, followed by the joy of Rosa's delicious dinner together with tasty wine.

Day 3

Saturday 29th September

Cortes Valle

It was a chilly but clear morning, with a gorgeous sky, full of stars! We drove for around 50 minutes in order to get to the valley of Cortes where we quietly found a spot in order to scan the valley in front of us. We had great views of Red Deer rooting and a very helpful Red Fox that was keen on getting rid of a cow's placenta. All of a sudden, a young Cantabrian Brown Bear turned up in one of the ravines, giving us great views through the telescope but, sadly, not for long. The morning was going by and there was no sign of Iberian Wolves, although we had been scanning for them very patiently. We made a move afterwards by following the track of the valley on foot, where we saw interesting birdlife such as Common Kestrel, Rock Bunting, Griffon Vultures, Northern Wheatear, European Stonechat and Mistle Thrush, amongst others.

We then drove further afield, right to the top of the valley which gave us amazing and breathtaking views of the north-eastern slope of the Cantabrian Mountains including the mighty Picos de Europa! We were astonished by the gorgeous landscape, so we decided to have lunch in the spot to enhance the enjoyment. A pair of Golden Eagles turned up too! After lunch, a walk was taken down the track which produced amazing views of a Short-toed Snake Eagle hovering above us, an ideal spot to see details of its amazing head size and eyes!

We then continued driving onto the main road finding another male European Wildcat hunting in one of the meadows. We carefully stop quietly to avoid disturbance and we had amazing footage of this wonderful feline hunting, probably rodents, which he did accurately and very effectively, allowing us to witness this great event of wildlife skill!

Very happy after this very productive stop, we headed back to the 'casas rurales' to take a break and to get ready for another delicious dinner after a brilliant day!

Day 4

Sunday 30th September

Salcedillo – Brañosera woods

We left our base very early again to head to the point known as Salcedillo, where we scanned an area ruled by an eight-wolf pack. We scanned for a good couple of hours with no results other than Red Fox, Roe and Red Deer. After the scan, we drove to the village of Brañosera in order to have a coffee break followed by an exploration of its woodland, which produced more Red Deer, Crested, Long-tailed, Coal, Willow, Great and Blue Tits, Iberian Chiffchaff, Eurasian Nuthatch and Short-toed Treecreeper, amongst others. We eventually got to our lovely picnic spot where we enjoyed our food under a beautiful and pleasant sunshine while watching lots of Griffon Vultures flying nearby. After lunch, we continued exploring the upper area of the woodland which took us to walk amongst ancient oaks and hollies, a gorgeous woodland we all found fascinating walking through.

By the late afternoon, we arrived in time to Cordovilla de Aguilar for the usual break and to enjoy our dinner which was delicious as usual! Rosa set the table and presented to us her last delicious menu cooked with local products from her family allotment, simply great!!

Day 5

Monday 1st October

Salcedillo – Barruelo de Santullán – Cordovilla de Aguilar – Santander airport

We left Cordovilla de Aguilar very early and headed towards Salcedillo. The weather wasn't on our side, with dark clouds, windy, cold and at times, drizzle. We tried hard, but no results were achieved with Iberian Wolves, unfortunately. We then drove to the village of Barruelo de Santullán in order to have some coffee/brunch before heading back to our lodge in Cordovilla de Aguilar where we had a good hour to pack up our belongings and set off to Santander airport where we arrived in time to catch our flight back to the UK. We then said a massive "Hasta pronto" to Tino, Toño and Eva, wishing them all the best and thanking them for looking after us for these few days at Montaña Palentina.

This short break allowed us to learn more about the truly rural and wild Spain, visiting a well-hidden corner of this beautiful country; it is a corner where the magical wildlife is there for wildlife lovers who may have the fortune to see and appreciate the spectacular habitat and life of one of rare and difficult species of mammals; nevertheless, the most difficult species proved to be elusive to us this time: the always mysterious and yet beautiful Iberian Wolf!

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Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	September - October				
			27	28	29	30	1
1	Mediterranean Pine Vole	<i>Microtus duodecimcostatus</i>				✓	
2	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			1		
3	European Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris silvestris</i>		2	1		
4	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>				1	
5	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓				
6	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>			✓		
8	Cantabrian Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos arctos</i>			✓		

Birds

1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>					✓
2	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓	h	
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>					✓
4	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			✓	✓	
6	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>			✓		
7	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
8	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			✓		
9	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>				✓	
10	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					✓
12	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>					✓
13	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓		
14	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓		
16	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>		h		h	
17	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓		✓	
18	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>		✓			
19	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		✓			
21	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓			
22	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓			
23	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓			✓
24	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>		✓	✓	✓	
25	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓	h	✓
26	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	
27	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>				✓	
28	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				✓	
29	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>				✓	
30	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>				✓	
31	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>				✓	
32	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			
33	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓			
34	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			✓	✓	
35	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	
36	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>				✓	
37	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			✓	h	

	Common name	Scientific name	September - October				
			27	28	29	30	1
38	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				✓	
39	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		h	h		
40	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓		✓	
41	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				✓	
42	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	
43	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
44	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓	
45	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		✓			
47	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	
48	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			✓		
49	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
51	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>		✓	✓		
53	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓		
54	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓		✓	
55	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓		
56	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				✓	
57	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓			
58	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓			
59	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>			✓		

Butterflies

Large White, *Pieris brassicae*

Clouded Yellow, *Colias crocea*

Brimstone, *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Wood White, *Leptidea sinapis*

Green-underside Blue, *Glaucopsyche alexis*

Queen-of-Spain Fritillary, *Issoria lathonia*

Chapman's Ringlet, *Erebia palarica*

Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria*

Mountain Dappled White, *Euchloe simplonia*

Berger's Clouded Yellow, *Colias sareptensis*

Cleopatra, *Gonepteryx cleopatra*

Common Blue, *Polyommatus icarus*

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*

Comma, *Polygonia c-album*

Southern Gatekeeper, *Pyronia cecilia*

Wall Brown, *Lasiommata megera*

Other Taxa

Common Wall Lizard, *Podarcis muralis*

Skink sp.,

Common Frog, *Rana temporaria*

Blue-winged Grasshopper, *Oedipoda caerulescens*

Great Green Bush cricket, *Tettigonia viridissima*

Red-underwing Moth, *Catocala nupta*

Viviparous Lizard, *Zootoca vivipara*

Ladybird Spider, *Eresus sandaliatus*

Hummingbird Hawk-moth, *Macroglossum stellatarum*

Red-winged Grasshopper, *Oedipoda germanica*

Common Green Grasshopper, *Omocestus viridulus*