

Wolf-watching in Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

22 - 26 October 2018



On watch at dawn



Wolf prints



Scanning the hillside



Typical Spanish picnic

Report & Images compiled by Laura Benito



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Tour participants: Laura Benito (leader) with nine Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 22nd October

London- Santander-Cordovilla

The flight from Stansted to Santander arrived at midday and Tino, Toño and I were waiting for the group at the airport. Once we were all together we started to drive to the small village of Cordovilla, north of Palencia in Castilla y Leon, our base for the next 4 days.

After some time to relax we were ready to enjoy the first of Rosa's superb homemade dinners!

Day 2

Tuesday 23rd October

Cordovilla-Somahoz-Brañosera

We started very early this morning setting off to a Wolf territory called Somahoz (Brañosera). After just 45min driving from the hotel it was still dark when we arrived at Somahoz and we left the main road and started to drive on a dirt track just as dawn broke.

Once we arrived at our chosen spot, we sat down and started to scan the valley. It was a nice morning, a little chilly and windy, but very clear and quiet. After some time waiting and scanning the landscape, we decided that it was time for coffee. We weren't lucky with the wolves this morning, but we would keep trying.

We went for a walk to the forest of Peñalba, a fantastic ancient Oak and Beech forest with autumn colours. Some Griffon Vultures were flying above our heads and Coal Tits, Crested Tits and Short-toed Treecreepers were quite active, calling and moving around.

We had our picnic in a sunny place, the food being very welcome. After lunch we went for another short walk exploring a new area, and we got some good views of Nuthatch, Red Kite...and learned about new species of caterpillars and moths!

After this nice walk, we decided 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 24th October

Somahoz- Valle Castillería-Cordovilla

We left our base very early and went again to the same spot, Somahoz.

The sunrise was absolutely fantastic. We spend some time scanning, and eventually found one wolf which was difficult to see at first, but finally all the group saw it. Another two appeared and joined it and we had fantastic views of them playing, and running around continuously!! We enjoyed watching them for more than 20 minutes before we decided that it was time for a coffee in Barruelo.

After a nice hot coffee, we moved to the valley of La Castilleria, crossing the valley of Perapertú, a potential place for Wildcat, but we weren't lucky this time. We went into an ancient oak forest in Celada de Robledo where we had our picnic in a nice spot with fantastic views. The sun was shining, and the temperature was perfect to enjoy our delicious meal in the field.

After lunch we went for a nice walk in this beautiful ancient oak forest. During our walk we saw Nuthatch, Coal Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper and Middle Spotted Woodpecker. We found some fresh evidence of Brown Bear which at this time of the year spend more time in the forest eating acorns.

We started our way back to the hotel, going the same way that we came, scanning the fields looking for Wildcat, but found no evidence of them

Day 4

Thursday 25th October

Somahoz- Las Tuerces- Cordovilla

Today we decided to try the same spot again. We were very lucky, this time enjoying views of three or four wolves, again playing and running, for a long time. It was a great experience to see these wild animals, near a town sharing the landscape with humans and some domestic animals.

After a very welcome coffee, we drove south to a place called Las Tuerces, which is in an amazing UNESCO Geopark. The peculiar landscape here was created by the active dissolving of Upper Cretaceous limestone by Karstic erosion. Karstic erosion has moulded a spectacular and charming relief in the limestone materials at this junction between the Cordillera Cantábrica and the Cuenca del Duero. It is a Good place for birds, and also for plants in spring with a lot of endemic species.

In our walk we enjoyed Lesser Kestrel, Crag Martin, Western Jackdaw, and amazing views of Griffon Vultures flying quite close from us. Down the canyon we set up our picnic near to the River Pisuerga where we saw Grey Wagtail, White Wagtail, Dipper and to our surprise a Bat (*Myotis* family) flying over the river, very active in the daylight.

We spend the rest of the afternoon exploring the Geopark, looking for Golden Eagle and other raptors. We finally saw a couple of Golden Eagles flying in the distance, showing us their elegant silhouettes.

After this productive day we started to drive back to the hotel, to have some time and relax before the delicious dinner celebrating a superb day in the field.

Day 5

Friday 26th October

Pernía- Santullán Valley - Santander

Our last day, and we decided to have a more relaxed day because it promised to be a very long day. We started at 8 o'clock and it was cloudy and windy. We drove to the valley of la Pernía, a potential place for Wildcat and although we searched all the fields, we couldn't find any evidence of this animal. It has been a very dry autumn

and the fields are still dry, so the Water Voles aren't active and maybe the cats are spending more time in the forest than in the fields.

We stopped at the Mirador of Piedrasluengas, with a fantastic view of The Picos de Europa, and suddenly a Black Woodpecker appeared and flew in front of us. That was great as this species has been disappearing from our forest over the last few years.

We drove to Lores, where we stopped at a magnificent viewpoint to prepare our picnic and had fantastic views of the valley; a superb landscape with glorious autumn colours.

After lunch we continued searching for Wildcat, but without any luck this time. Finally, we arrived at the hotel, with some time to pack and enjoy the delicious last dinner with the best Tortilla we have ever tasted!

We started our journey to the airport of Santander very happy and satisfied with our five days experience in the impressive Montaña Palentina, arriving at the airport in time for our late flight back to England. We had a very enjoyable and memorable time during this holiday in the stunning landscape of this part of rural Spain!

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Species Lists

Mammals (✓=recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			22	23	24	25	26
1	Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>			✓		
2	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>			✓	✓	
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			✓		
4	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>			✓		
5	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	

Birds

1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				✓	
2	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓		
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>					✓
4	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				✓	
6	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>					✓
7	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia "feral"</i>				✓	✓
10	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>				✓	✓
11	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>			✓		
12	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓	✓	✓
13	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>					✓
14	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>				✓	
15	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				✓	
16	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>					✓
18	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>				✓	
19	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		H	✓	✓	✓
20	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>				✓	✓
23	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓			
26	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓			
27	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓				
30	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓	✓	✓
31	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			✓	✓	✓
32	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				✓	
33	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
34	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓	✓	
36	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓		
37	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓	✓		
38	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>			✓	✓	✓
39	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓		✓

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			22	23	24	25	26
41	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	✓
42	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				✓	✓
43	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓		✓	
44	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>				✓	
45	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓			
46	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>				✓	✓
47	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓	✓
49	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
50	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	
51	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓	✓	✓
54	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓			✓
55	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>				✓	
56	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>				✓	
57	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>			✓	✓	
58	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				✓	