

# Wolf-watching in Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

7 - 11 October 2019

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Report compiled by Byron Palacios

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Tour participants: Byron Palacios (leader), Tino Garcia & Toño Gopegui (local guides)  
With six Naturetrek clients.

## Summary

On this expedition, we were in search of the very elusive Iberian Wolf, one of the most difficult mammals to see in the world. The superb mountains of northern Palencia (Castilla y Leon) hosted another enjoyable and successful tour once again, combined with good weather (unusually hot and dry for the season!) and great wildlife throughout, whilst we explored different breath-taking and remote locations, gorgeous landscapes and superb adventure on board our powerful 4x4 vehicles. We very much enjoyed most of our wildlife moments throughout, alongside fantastic accommodation, local villages, native people and the local gastronomy, especially the fine cuisine of Rosa...endless wine and very nice company!

### Day 1

**Monday 7th October**

#### Stansted airport to Santander – Cordovilla de Aguilar

We arrived to Santander airport on the evening flight 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 (and aide Eva) who were already waiting for us on 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 under clear skies, full of stars and the moon. Once in Cordovilla de Aguilar, we settled in our comfy and cosy rooms and enjoyed a delicious dinner afterwards. We then retired to bed in order to have a restful night.

### Day 2

**Tuesday 8th October**

#### Resoba – Cervera de Pisuerga – Celada de Robledo – Peña Tejedo

We started very early today, still in the dark, in order to drive to our first hotspot located 40 minutes away from our lodge, reaching there for dawn. The morning looked promising and, although partially cloudy, we managed to get a nice hint of light, overlooking the beautiful mountains, some of them covered already with a thin layer of snow. As soon as we started scanning the ravines and hills, we saw a few Griffon Vultures trying to fly high in the skies; there were plenty of Red Deer around the hills but, unfortunately, after over two hours scanning, there were no signs of Iberian Wolves in the area. We decided to drive to the little town of Cervera de Pisuerga, where we enjoyed having some lovely hot drinks and snacks, very welcome and needed after our early start up in the cold mountains. We then continued our excursion by driving 15 minutes north-west to the area of Celada de Robledo, where we had a nice walk through ancient pristine oak woodland which produced a flock full of Great, Blue and Long-tailed Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch, Northern Ravens and European Jay, amongst others. The weather was fantastic, so we headed to the top of Peña Tejedo where we enjoyed our delicious picnic under the warm sun, having brilliant views of a male Golden Eagle afterwards.

After lunch, we continued exploring the tracks of the area and walking along the main access one which covers the whole ancient oak woodland; we took a nice walk here which produced plenty of interesting birds such as Crested Tit, Middle Spotted Woodpecker and Eurasian Nuthatch, amongst others. Happy for the results of our very first day in the field, we returned to our rural houses in order to take a break, followed by the joy of Rosa's delicious dinner, with tasty wine and scrumptious food.

## Day 3

Wednesday 9th October

### Peña Miranda – Cervera de Pisuerga – Carracedo Forest

It was a clear morning around Cordovilla de Aguilar and very misty in some of the valleys. We started again very early, heading to the lovely spot of Peña Miranda; it was a lovely sunny morning but very cold as a northerly wind set in on the previous night, making the scanning very difficult. We managed though, to see lovely Red Deer which were alarmed and cautious about the presence of the Iberian Wolves nearby, but we didn't manage to see them well. We then decided to head back to Cervera de Pisuerga for a very much-needed hot drink and snacks. Refreshed, we followed these by a short drive over the main dam of the river Pisuerga, diverting to one of the most pristine beech woodland, Carracedo forest. We took a good stroll around this area and into the woods, which produced great views of Eurasian Nuthatch, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Blackcap, Long-tailed Tits, and glimpses of the elusive Black Woodpecker. After a delicious lunch, a walk in the woods produced Great Spotted Woodpecker, Crested Tit, Blue and Great Tit and Chiffchaff, amongst others.

After this stop, we headed back to the rural houses to take a break and to get ready for another delicious dinner after a nice day.

## Day 4

Thursday 10th October

### Resoba – Cervera de Pisuerga – Lores

It was a lovely and pleasant morning with a slight chilly hint but clear and promising! We drove to the spot near Resoba where we carefully scanned for Iberian Wolf, finding four individuals in the first light of the early morning. They were then joined by other two bigger wolves, the alpha male and female, who were at times very elusive and hidden behind bushes. Once the sun came out, it was great to see them basking in the sun on top of the boulders and running around playing and having fun, a bonding play performed by the young adults and the young ones from of this year (born in May). All of the sudden, the alpha male and female came out in the open and they were looking for something...and that's the flash moment when a young adult Cantabrian Brown Bear emerged from the thick bushes running up the hill with the alpha wolves chasing him out their territory - what a fantastic event to witness! It looked like a hide-and-seek game...but I bet it was something a bit more serious and the wolves really wanted the Brown Bear out their hunting area...amazing!! Very happy and amazed by the events we witnessed this morning, we drove to Cervera de Pisuerga in order to enjoy a well-deserved hot drink. Next we took a good 4x4 exploration of the Valley of Lores, a fantastic glacier right at the foothills of the Curavacas Mountain (2,505 metres) which offered us breath-taking views of the whole valley, as well as the surrounding wildlife such as Red-billed Choughs, Chamois, Griffon Vultures, and others. We also found a lovely shepherd's shelter, ideal to set up our picnic lunch!

After lunch, we continued admiring this beautiful hotspot for another couple of hours, driving back towards Cordovilla afterwards. Very happy after this very productive stop, we headed back to the rural houses to take a break and to get ready for another delicious dinner after a brilliant day!

## Day 5

Friday 11th October

### Aguilar de Campoo – Las Tuerces Geological Reserve – Puente Viesgo - Santander

After a relaxing morning in our lodge, we packed our belongings and set off towards Aguilar de Campoo where we made a delicious hot-chocolate and churros stop we all enjoyed! A quick look at the little town's main plaza was made, followed by a short drive to Las Tuerces Geological Reserve, making quick stop to check out a very interesting Romanesque church in the village of Gama, followed by a nice exploration of this lovely geological reserve. We took short strolls and enjoyed the views from the very top of the reserve's highest plateau; we managed to get great views of Woodlark, Common Chiffchaff, Eurasian Kestrel, Griffon Vulture, and wonderful views of Golden Eagle! We then found a very nice spot in the higher area of the reserve where we enjoyed our picnic lunch and a very interesting walk afterwards which produced amazing views of the Picos de Europa, Montaña Palentina, and the reserve itself. After this, we set off to Puente Viesgo where we visited the El Castillo Caves in order to check out prehistoric art up to 40,000 years-old.

We then found a nice spot to enjoy our delicious dinner before heading to the Santander airport, where we arrived in time in order to catch our flight to Stansted. Once back in the UK, we all said goodbye to each other and wish ourselves all the best after a wonderful few days in the wonderful Montaña Palentina...amongst Iberian Wolves!!

This short week allowed us to learn more about the truly rural and wild Spain, the country and its natural history by visiting a well-hidden corner of this beautiful country; a corner where the magical wildlife is there for the fortunate wildlife lovers that have the fortune to see and appreciate the spectacular habitat and life of one of the most difficult species to see, the always-beautiful Iberian Wolf!

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## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			7	8	9	10	11
1	Mediterranean Pine Vole	<i>Microtus duodecimcostatus</i>			✓		
2	Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>				3	
3	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>				6	
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓	✓	✓	
5	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
6	Broom Hare	<i>Lepus castroviejoi</i>		✓	✓	✓	
7	(Cantabrian) Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos arctos</i>				1	

## Birds

1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓	✓	
2	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>			✓		
3	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>					✓
5	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓		
6	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>					✓
7	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓				✓
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓	✓	✓
9	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓			✓
11	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓			
12	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			✓		
13	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓			
14	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>				✓	✓
15	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>		h		h	
17	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		h			✓
18	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>			✓	✓	
19	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>					h
20	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	h	✓
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>		h	h		✓
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 Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				✓	✓
33	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>					h
34	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓		✓
35	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			✓		✓
36	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			✓		
37	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓		
38	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			7	8	9	10	11
39	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓		
42	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓		✓
43	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
45	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			✓	✓	
46	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>				✓	✓
47	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>					✓
49	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓			
50	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	✓
51	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓	✓	✓
53	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓		
55	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓			
57	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	✓	✓
58	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			✓	✓	✓
59	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓		
60	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>			✓	✓	