

# Wolves & Bustards in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

21 - 25 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 nine Naturetrek clients.

## Summary

We had another Iberian Wolf expedition with great success! The superb mountains of northern Castilla y Leon hosted another enjoyable tour with reasonably good weather throughout; it was great to see some good quality wildlife whilst exploring different areas at the same time and moving around breath-taking remote landscapes on board our powerful 4x4 vehicles. We very much enjoyed the wonderful views we had of the very rare Iberian Wolf, we were blessed to see them playing and moving along the hills with the misty landscape, appearing and disappearing like ghosts! We also enjoyed exploring remote areas with dramatic landscapes, local villages, native people and the local gastronomy, especially the fine cuisine of Rosa; and drinks, particularly at our comfy main house where local wines and local spirits were tasted!

### Day 1

**Monday 21st October**

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

The group's flight to Santander airport arrived on time and after going through security we reassembled at the exit gate from where we walked out to meet up with Tino and Toño 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. We enjoyed the picturesque landscape throughout the drive, getting to Cordovilla de Aguilar in good time to settle in our comfy and cosy rooms, followed by a delicious supper delivered by Rosa! We then retired to our beds in order to have a restful night.

### Day 2

**Tuesday 22nd October**

#### El Cebollar – Cervera de Pisuerga – Celada de Roblecedo - Perapertú

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 were surprised by the very close presence of two Griffon Vultures, one of them perched on a boulder nearby. Then all of a sudden, the loud howling of Iberian Wolves broke through the quiet morning and making our ears tremor with the loud and impressive orchestra of sounds...it was simply amazing! And they continued repetitively, the different tones of the mixed howling coming from the adults and replied to by the youngsters simultaneously...what treat to hear them doing this! Soon after this, the first Iberian Wolf was spotted drifting down the hill and through the bushes, getting joined by young individuals at times. They remained really alert as if there was something important going on in one of the ravines nearby; maybe they were going to start to enjoy a feast from the killing they got earlier on in the morning. They were out in the open at times going in and out from the bushes, but we managed to get great views through our telescopes of at least seven different individuals - it was superb!

After over two hours scanning and enjoying the fantastic experience with Iberian Wolves, 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, Marsh and Long-tailed Tits and Eurasian Nuthatch, plus Northern Ravens and European Jay, amongst others. A light rain covered the area, so we managed to find a nice and comfortable shelter in the village of Celada where we enjoyed our picnic lunch!

After lunch, we continued exploring the tracks of the area, but the rain was very persistent; nevertheless, we managed to see three Griffon Vultures by the roadside, getting fantastic views of these lovely birds! 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 over tasty wine and scrumptious food she cooked for us!

## Day 3

Wednesday 23rd October

### Resoba – Cervera de Pisuerga – Salinas de Pisuerga

We left our base very early again, to go to the point known as Resoba. However, we couldn't really check the area as we had on the previous day, because of the rain and fog. We waited in the vehicles but there was no improvement with the heavy rain and fog, so we headed back to the village of Cervera de Pisuerga for the usual coffee break, very well needed on a wet and cold day like today. After the coffee break, we drove along the river Pisuerga basin, making a couple of interesting stops being the second one our lunch stop.

After lunch, we drove to the village of Salinas de Pisuerga where we took a nice walk, which produced great views of White-throated Dipper feeding along the river very actively, alongside great views of Crag Martins, Grey and White Wagtails, Northern Goshawk and Woodlarks, amongst others. The rain was on and off as it had been for the entire day, yet a very productive one. We drove back 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 latest delicious menu cooked with local products from her family allotment, simply great!!

## Day 4

Thursday 24th October

### Resoba – Cervera de Pisuerga – Lores

It was a chilly but clear morning with no rain. We drove back to the spot near Resoba where we carefully scanned for Iberian Wolf finding four individuals amongst the first hours of light of the early morning. A thick layer of fog suddenly covered the hill where the animals were, but after 20 minutes five Iberian Wolves turned up on the top of the hill where these lovely animals were highlighted by the lines of the lush background of the Montaña Palentina Natural Park. It was a truly great moment in nature for all of us, watching these gorgeous animals running around their habitat, playing with each other and running around happy and showing an obvious power as a predator. After this wonderful moment, a beautiful Golden Eagle turned up soaring above us and over the valley, just to master the very successful morning we have had! Very happy and amazed, we drove to Cervera de Pisuerga in order to enjoy a well-deserved hot drink, followed by a good 4x4 exploration of the Valley of Lores, a fantastic glacier right at the foothill of the Curavacas Mountain (2,505 metres) which offered us breathtaking 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 25th October

### Monte Royale – 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 and made our first stop in the pine woodland of Monte Royale where we enjoy watching the dam and some birds around such as Great Crested Grebe, White Wagtails, Coal Tits, amongst others. We then took a little walk in the pine woods which produced Red Crossbills and several mushrooms of very interesting colours, textures and uses. After this, we drove southwards to the area of Las Tuerces Geological Reserve, where we made a few stops which produced Red Fox, Roe Deer, Common Chiffchaff, Eurasian Kestrel, Griffon Vulture, and wonderful views of these fantastic habitats. 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 made a comfort stop in Aguilar De Campoo, setting off to Puente Viesgo afterwards 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!!

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## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			21	22	23	24	25
1	Mediterranean Pine Vole	<i>Microtus duodecimcostatus</i>		✓			
2	Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>				4	
3	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>		7		9	
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>					1
5	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		1			1
6	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Broom Hare	<i>Lepus castroviejo</i>		1		1	

### Birds

1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓		
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</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	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>					✓
8	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>					✓
9	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				✓	
12	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
13	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			✓		
14	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>		✓		✓	
17	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		✓			
18	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>		h			
19	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓		✓	
20	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>		✓		✓	
21	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				✓	
23	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓		✓	✓
24	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>				✓	
26	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>					✓
27	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓
29	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>				✓	✓
30	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓			
31	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			✓	✓	✓
34	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>					✓
35	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			✓		✓
36	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>					✓
38	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	✓		✓

	Common name	Scientific name	October				
			21	22	23	24	25
39	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				h	h
40	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓		✓	
41	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</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	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>			✓		
47	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		✓		✓	✓
49	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	✓
50	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓		✓	✓
52	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>					✓
54	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>					✓
55	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
56	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
57	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓		✓	✓

## Butterflies

Clouded Yellow, *Colias crocea*

Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*