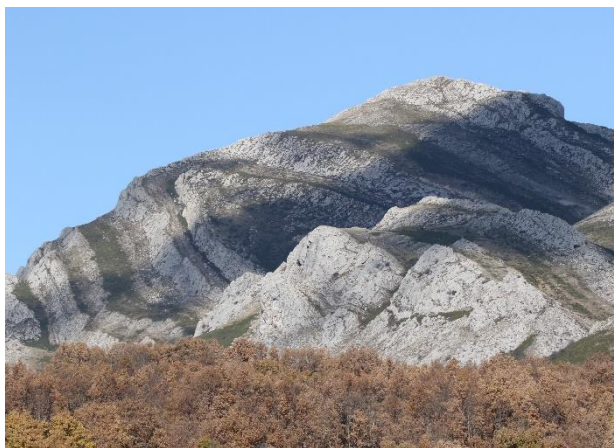


Wolf-watching in Rural Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

18th – 22nd November 2021



Red Deer



Red Kite



Clouded Yellow

Report compiled by Byron Palacios
Images courtesy by tour participant Julia Burton



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Tour participants: Byron Palacios & Tino Garcia (leaders) with eight Naturetrek clients.

Summary

The superb mountains of northern Castilla y León, Palencia province, hosted another enjoyable tour with breathtaking landscapes, exclusive locations and good weather throughout. All this in the most wonderful company and with the use of powerful 4x4 vehicles. We enjoyed the wonderful views we had of the very rare local wildlife and got to know the intimacy of the habitat of the mysterious Iberian Wolf whilst enjoying other elusive creatures such as European Wildcat, Cantabrian Chamois, Red Deer and others. We also enjoyed exploring remote areas with dramatic landscapes, local villages, native people and the local gastronomy, especially the fine cuisine of Rosa, all in the comforts of our lodge where local wines and local spirits were tasted!

Day 1

Thursday 18th November

Stansted airport to Madrid – Cordovilla de Aguilar

The group's flight to Madrid airport arrived on time and we boarded the comfy van which drove the group to Cordovilla de Aguilar in good time. Myself and Tino greeted the group at the lodge and after taking a break and some snacks, we set off for a stroll around the village where we found interesting birds such as Woodlark, Redwing, Fieldfare, Northern Raven, Eurasian Kestrel, Griffon Vulture and Iberian Grey Shrike.

We returned to base in order to discuss the plans for the days ahead, followed by a delicious supper delivered by Rosa! We then retired to our beds in order to have a restful night.

Day 2

Friday 19th November

El Cebollar – Cervera de Pisuerga – Celada de Robledo

We started very early today, still in the dark in order to drive to our first hotspot located 40 minutes away from our lodge, getting there for dawn. The morning looked promising, clear skies and full moon. We managed to get a nice hint of light overlooking the beautiful Palentina Mountains, with its tallest peak Pico Curavacas (2,545 metres) on our right. Some of the mountain tops were already covered with a thin layer of snow, and as soon as we started scanning the ravines and hills, we were surprised by the very close presence of a few Griffon Vultures perched on the crags in front of us. We managed to see them really well as well as the large amounts of Red Deer spread around the whole valley. We also spotted a nice group of Cantabrian Chamois nearby.

After three hours of dedicated scanning and enjoying the fantastic landscape and wildlife, we decided to drive to the little town of Cervera de Pisuerga, where we enjoyed having some nice hot drinks and snacks, all very welcome and needed after our early start in the cold mountains. We then continued our excursion by driving northwest towards the village of Celada de Robledo, scanning the open meadows nearby which produced our first European Wildcat. We then found a nice place to enjoy our hot lunch in the village, enjoying the wonderful views provided. After lunch, we took a short stroll followed by more scanning over the meadows and that produced another European Wildcat which only the second 4x4 managed to see.

Happy for the results of our very first day in the field, and under lovely autumn sunshine, 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 other scrumptious food she cooked for us!

Day 3

Saturday 20th November

Valdecebollas – Cervera de Pisuerga – Lores

We left our based very early again to the point known as Valdecebollas once again. Once again, we had clear skies and the promise of sunshine to come. After just an hour of, and with the sun already hitting on some ravines of the valley, we noticed a group of Red Deer looking alarmed and constantly staring at a clearing opposite them. Then, in the blink of an eye, a big male Iberian Wolf (Alfa male) emerged from the scrub walking freely in the open clearing. He was trotting rather than walking and only gave us little more than half of a minute to see him right in the open before he disappeared behind some bushes. We kept searching but did not see him again...he basically vanished!

The group were happy if a little intrigued about his quick departure, we decided that it was time to take a break and went again to the village of Cervera de Pisuerga for the usual coffee break, very well needed and deserved! We then continued to the Valley of Lores where we took a good stroll finding more Chamois and followed by a delicious hot lunch provided once again by Tino. After lunch, we took a walk to the top of the hill which produced stunning views and interesting birds such as, Griffon Vultures, Red Kites, Red-billed Choughs, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, amongst others

After this, we drove back towards the main road finding a quick European Wildcat and Red Fox in one of the fields. 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 us a delicious local paella she cooked with local products from her family allotment. Simply great!!

Day 4

Sunday 21st November

Valdecebollas – Cervera de Pisuerga – Rabanal de las Llantas

It was another chilly but clean early morning. We drove back to the usual spot where we carefully scanned for Iberian Wolf and finding only signs of their presence judging by the behaviour of the Red Deer and Griffon Vultures. We also had terrific views of a young and adult Golden Eagle, Dartford Warblers, Red-billed Choughs, European Jays, Northern Ravens and others. We spent quite some time in the area scanning, but the wolves were proving elusive once again. We drove to Cervera de Pisuerga in order to enjoyed a well deserved hot drink, followed by a good exploration of the Valley of La Espina, right above the village of Rabanal de las Llantas where the powerful 4x4s came into their own and were ideal to reach the tops at nearly 1,800 metres of altitude. This breathtaking valley produced the most stunning views, probably the best of the tour, and being surrounded by herds of Red Deer and Cantabrian Chamois, made it even better! We also enjoyed of our delicious hot lunch here while enjoying all this wonderful setting!

After lunch, we continued taking a stroll and admiring this beautiful hotspot for another couple of hours, driving back towards Cordovilla afterwards. An European Wildcat was spotted once again and after having seen him

well, 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

Monday 22nd November

Cordovilla de Aguilar – Santander airport

After a more relaxing start, we packed up our belongings and sadly left the cosy and lovely cottages in order to make our way to Santander airport. We said goodbye to our lovely host Rosa for looking after and for spoiling us with such delicious cuisine! We then hit the road and started our drive to the airport in rather harsh weather conditions. Despite that, 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 wished everyone all the best after a wonderful few days in the wonderful Montaña Palentina...amongst the elusive Iberian Wolves!

Checklists

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	18th	19th	20th	21st	22nd
Cantabrian Chamois	<i>Rupicapra pyrenaica parva</i>		9	12	24+	
Wolf	<i>Canis lupus lupus</i>			1		
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		1	1	1	
European Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris silvestris</i>		1	1	1	
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		1			
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
OTHER WILDLIFE:						
Viviparous Lizard						
Clouded Yellow						
Speckled Wood						
Red Admiral						

Birds

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Date:				
			18th	19th	20th	21st	22nd
1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	h				
2	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>					✓
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓	✓	✓
4	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓			
6	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓		✓
7	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	
8	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓	
9	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>					✓
10	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				✓	
11	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				✓	
13	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓		✓		

			Date:				
	Common Name	Scientific Name	18th	19th	20th	21st	22nd
14	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	
16	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>		H			
17	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	H	H	✓	✓	
18	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>			✓		
19	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Iberian 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	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓		
25	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓	✓	✓		
28	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			h		
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	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H				
34	Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	✓				
35	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓	✓	✓	
36	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H	✓	✓		
37	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	H	H	✓		
38	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	✓				
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	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
44	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓			
45	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
47	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓			
48	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>				✓	
49	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
50	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
51	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	H				
52	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓		
54	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓			
55	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
56	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				✓	
57	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓		
58	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓	
59	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓		
60	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓				
61	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓				
62	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓		✓	✓	

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