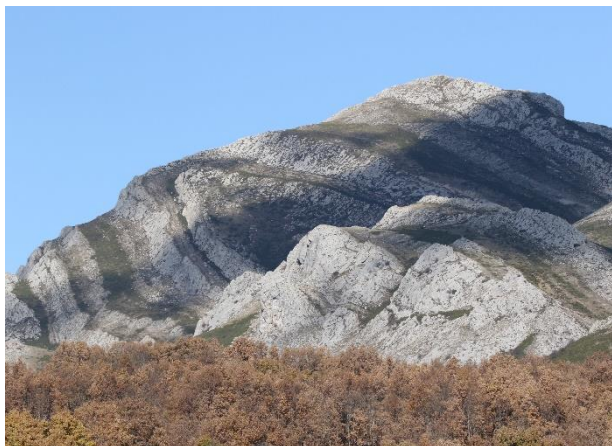


Wolf-watching in Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

24th – 28th October 2022



Red Deer



Griffon Vultures

Report and images compiled by Taea Romagnuolo



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Tour participants: Taea Romagnuolo & Tino Garcia (leaders) with nine Naturetrek clients.

Summary

The spectacular mountains of northern Castilla y León, Palencia province, hosted another memorable tour with breath-taking landscapes, good weather, as well as some great wildlife sightings. We were lucky enough to see the mysterious Iberian Wolf, whilst enjoying other elusive species such as European Wildcat, Red Deer and others. We enjoyed exploring the unique and dramatic landscapes, as well as experiencing the local villages, culture, people and fine food and wine, prepared by Rosa at our exquisite rural lodges.

Day 1

Monday 24th October

Stansted airport to Santander – Cordovilla de Aguilar

After a late evening flight and transfer, we arrived in Cordovilla de Aguila, our base for the duration of tour. After a quick briefing at the Casa Rurales, owned by Tino and Rosa, we headed to bed, ready for our first day of wolf searching the next day.

Day 2

Tuesday 25th October

Resoba – Cervera de Pisuerga – Verdeña

After breakfast in our cosy cottages, we set out (still in the dark!) on our adventure to find the elusive Iberian Wolf. Our first scanning spot was a high point overlooking the Montana Palentina mountain range, where we watched the sunrise and Griffon Vultures soaring overhead. It didn't take long before Tino spotted three wolves on a pasture. Soon, they went into the forest and out of sight, but we were hopeful they would reappear, which they did, in spectacular fashion.

The three wolves were playing between the pasture and forest, giving great views to the whole group. Another wolf soon joined, bringing the total to four, one adult, one sub-adult and two young wolves from this year. The group watched the wolves for in total around 45 minutes, before they retreated into the forest just before the rain came. We stayed in the area for a while longer and were lucky enough to see a rainbow form and again, have wonderful views of Griffon Vultures, both perched on a ridge in front of us and soaring above. What a fantastic first morning of the trip!

After all the excitement, we headed for a well-deserved coffee break in the nearby village of Cervera de Pisuerga. Coffee and sweet treat fuelled, we headed out to a different area of the Montana Palentina in the search for Wild Cat. As Tino and Taea were setting up for lunch, a group member spotted a cat in a nearby prairie. It was in fact

an adult male of eight years old, which we watched for around an hour moving around the field, providing spectacular views of this magnificent individual.

We couldn't believe our luck for our first morning wildlife searching, and enjoyed a well-earned hot lunch, prepared by Rosa, whilst watching Red Deer, Red Kites, a Common Buzzard (but a Northern morph from Scandinavia) and an Iberian Grey Shrike.

After a successful day, it was time to head back to the Casa Rurales and rest before enjoying a traditional Spanish dinner together, prepared by Rosa.

Day 3

Wednesday 26th October

Resoba – Cervera de Pisuerga – Piedrasluengas

We started off the day heading to the same spot where we were lucky spotting wolves the previous day. Although we saw yet another beautiful sunrise over the mountains, this morning the wolves were elusive. However, Griffon Vultures perched themselves on a ridge in front of us, and we were all spoiled with a Golden Eagle pair also perched and later soaring above us.

On the way back to the vehicles, Tino spotted some fresh wolf tracks. The group enjoyed learning about how to identify between wolf and dog prints and learning about wolf behaviour. After this, it was time for an eagerly anticipated coffee and snack in Cervera de Pisuerga.

Afterwards, we headed to an area full of prairies, to search for Wildcat. Once again, we were in for a treat, as the group watched a male move around his territory, in quite close proximity, for over an hour. The views were excellent. After all the excitement, it was time for another fantastic hot lunch of traditional 'Garbanzos' (chickpeas) in the field. We also saw Common Buzzards, Red Kites and Common Kestrels flying over as we were driving through this beautiful landscape, before heading home for a rest and dinner. Wonderful!

Day 4

Thursday 27th October

Resoba – Cervera de Pisuerga – Monte Mayor – Celada de Robecedo

We started off the day heading towards the same place as the previous two days, to try and catch a glimpse of Iberian wolves once more. However, it was incredibly windy, so we decided to go somewhere close by (safe from the wrath of the wind!) and scan a different mountain range. Although no wolves this morning were spotted, we were gifted with Griffon Vultures searching for their breakfast above our heads, as well as an impressive Red Deer stag and several females. As well, the group viewed Crag Martins and Red Kites flying overhead, all whilst watching the sun rise over the Palentina mountains.

After a much-appreciated coffee break, we headed to a different habitat - primitive forest. Some of the trees within the forest were around 800 years old! We did a circular route through this amazing forest, learning from Tino about the trees, plants, mammals, birds, lichens, fungi, and insects that call this forest home. Group members were also lucky enough to see several Eurasian Nuthatches, Long-tailed Tits, Common Buzzards and hear the calls of a Middle Spotted Woodpecker. A delicious lunch (as always!) was then enjoyed in the grounds of a local medieval church, which are abundant in the Montana Palentina region.

After lunch, we headed home, but not before we got great views of a male Red Fox in a close-by field, searching for insects in late afternoon sun. As if we hadn't already had a successful day of wildlife watching, we were treated to incredible views of a Wildcat close to home. Even more fascinating, we were able to watch how the Wildcat interacted with a man walking in the same field searching for mushrooms. The magnificent animal lay close to the ground and watched the man, without moving, cross the field, before then heading into the forest when he was a safe distance away.

An exciting and memorable day!

Day 5

Friday 28th October

Resoba – Salinas de Pisuergra – Santander Airport

Our final day started off in the same area as the previous days, but a different viewing spot, higher up in the mountains, offering fantastic views of Montana Palentina. Tino and two group members managed to catch a glimpse of an adult wolf chasing a deer, before it headed into the forest and out of sight. Apart from this, we saw many female Red Deer and some impressive stags, as well as a Golden Eagle, Common Buzzards, Griffon Vultures and a couple of Red Kites. We went on a short walk afterwards and found interesting (and extremely recent!) wolf excrement from the pack in the area, as well as excrement of Beech Martin, Broom Hare, Eurasian Badger and Red Fox. It was then time for a picnic lunch overlooking the mountains, where numerous Rock Lizards basked in the sun obligingly for the group to admire and photograph.

We then headed to a different area, along the river Pisuergra, called Salinas de Pisuergra. Almost immediately, we were treated to great views of four Iberian Dippers. As well, we enjoyed at least 12 Iberian Chiffchaffs flying in and out of a nearby bush searching for insects. Afterwards, as we walked alongside the river, the group spotted Long-tailed Tits, Blackcaps, Marsh Tits and Grey Herons, as well as other species. Also, Cetti's Warbler, Iberian Green Woodpecker and Short-toed Treecreeper were heard. We then enjoyed a wonderful second picnic, including Rosa's famous 'Tortilla Española' and a coffee in the local bar, whilst sitting by the river. It was then time to reluctantly head to the airport, whilst looking back fondly over the week we shared, and the amazing wildlife we had seen.

Species lists

Mammals

| Common name | Scientific name | October 2022 | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|----|----|----|----|
| | | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| Cantabrian Chamois | <i>Rupicapra pyrenaica parva</i> | | | | | |
| Iberian Wolf | <i>Canis lupus lupus</i> | | 4 | | | 1 |
| Red Fox | <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> | | | | 1 | |
| European Wildcat | <i>Felis silvestris silvestris</i> | | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| Roe Deer | <i>Capreolus capreolus</i> | | | | | |
| Red Deer | <i>Cervus elaphus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| OTHER WILDLIFE: | | | | | | |
| Rock Lizard | | | | | | ✓ |
| Clouded Yellow | | | | | ✓ | |
| Wall Brown | | | | | ✓ | |
| Painted Lady | | | | | ✓ | |

Birds

| | Common Name | Scientific Name | October 2022 | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 1 | Red-legged Partridge | <i>Alectoris rufa</i> | | | | H | |
| 2 | Mallard | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 3 | Common Wood Pigeon | <i>Columba palumbus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 4 | Eurasian Collared Dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | | | | | ✓ |
| 5 | Great Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | | | | | ✓ |
| 6 | Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | | | | | ✓ |
| 7 | Griffon Vulture | <i>Gyps fulvus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 8 | Golden Eagle | <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 9 | Eurasian Sparrowhawk | <i>Accipiter nisus</i> | | | | ✓ | |
| 10 | Red Kite | <i>Milvus milvus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 11 | Common Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 12 | Middle Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocoptes medius</i> | | | | H | |
| 13 | Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i> | | ✓ | | H | |
| 14 | Iberian Green Woodpecker | <i>Picus sharpei</i> | | | | H | H |
| 15 | Common Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 16 | Little Owl | <i>Athene noctua</i> | | H | | | |
| 17 | Eurasian Jay | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 18 | Eurasian Magpie | <i>Pica pica</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 19 | Red-billed Chough | <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H |
| 20 | Carrion Crow | <i>Corvus corone</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 21 | Northern Raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 22 | Coal Tit | <i>Parus ater</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 23 | European Crested Tit | <i>Lophophanes cristatus</i> | | | | ✓ | |
| 24 | Marsh Tit | <i>Poecile palustris</i> | | | | | ✓ |
| 25 | Eurasian Blue Tit | <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 26 | Great Tit | <i>Parus major</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 27 | Woodlark | <i>Lullula arborea</i> | | | ✓ | | |
| 28 | Eurasian Nuthatch | <i>Sitta europaea</i> | | | H | ✓ | H |

| | | | October 2022 | | | | |
|----|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|----|----|----|----|
| | Common Name | Scientific Name | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | Short-toed Treecreeper | <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i> | | | | H | H |
| 30 | Spotless Starling | <i>Sturnus unicolor</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 31 | Common Blackbird | <i>Turdus merula</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 32 | Song Thrush | <i>Turdus philomelos</i> | | ✓ | | | |
| 33 | Mistle Thrush | <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 34 | European Robin | <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> | | | | | ✓ |
| 35 | Black Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 36 | European Stonechat | <i>Saxicola rubicola</i> | | | | ✓ | |
| 37 | White-throated Dipper | <i>Cinclus cinclus</i> | | | | | ✓ |
| 38 | Iberian Chiffchaff | <i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i> | | | | | ✓ |
| 39 | House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 40 | Rock Sparrow | <i>Petronia petronia</i> | | | ✓ | | |
| 41 | Dunnock | <i>Prunella modularis</i> | | | ✓ | | |
| 42 | Meadow Pipit | <i>Anthus pratensis</i> | | | ✓ | H | |
| 43 | Grey Wagtail | <i>Motacilla cinerea</i> | | | ✓ | | |
| 44 | White Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba</i> | | | | ✓ | |
| 45 | Common Chaffinch | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 46 | Eurasian Bullfinch | <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> | | | | | ✓ |
| 47 | European Greenfinch | <i>Chloris chloris</i> | | | | | ✓ |
| 48 | Common Linnet | <i>Linaria cannabina</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 49 | European Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | | | | ✓ | |
| 50 | European Serin | <i>Serinus serinus</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 51 | Siskin | <i>Spinus spinus</i> | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 52 | Hawfinch | <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i> | | ✓ | | | |

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