

# Wild Spain – La Montana Palentina

Naturetrek Tour Report

7th – 14th September 2021

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Wildcat



Golden Eagles



Griffon Vultures



Photos and report compiled by Byron Palacios

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Tour participants: Byron Palacios & Tino Garcia (leaders), with four Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Tuesday 7th September

### Stansted – Santander – Cordovilla de Aguilar

We left a sunny England to fly to Santander where we arrived on time in the evening. After meeting up with our local guide Tino, we immediately started driving towards the small hamlet of Cordovilla de Aguilar leaving the County of Cantabria behind and driving into the very large county of Castilla y Leon, Palencia Province, where the charming 12-inhabitants village is located. Here, the lovely and charming rural houses – small complex of three Spanish style cottages – provide terrific individual accommodation. We retired to bed looking forward to the the next day.

## Day 2

Wednesday 8th September

### Cordovilla de Aguilar – Monte Aguilar

After a restful night and relaxing breakfast, we gathered together outside the cottages ready to start our first day in the field. Our morning started with a good introduction of Spanish greetings and a brief conversation which put our skills on the language straight to practice! We then started with a nice walk exploring the surroundings of Cordovilla de Aguilar with fantastic sunshine and blue skies. We managed to enjoy the first hours of the morning by watching many birds around the village such as Black Redstart, Linnets, Cirl Bunting, Black Kite, Spotted Flycatcher, Eurasian Nuthatch, Pied Flycatcher, Willow Warbler, and a very close pair of Booted Eagle with a dark morph young adult. Down in the fields, we spotted more important species such as Corn Bunting, Whinchats, Northern Raven, Stonechat, Common Buzzard and beautiful butterflies. We bumped into a family of Quail of which we had amazing close views; also a few Griffon Vultures were spotted soaring in the sky and close by, alongside a Northern Weather, Eurasian Kestrel and Egyptian Vulture. We also got to see a few interesting plants and butterflies on our walk. The time had come to return to the lodge for lunch in the lush garden of our rural houses.

After lunch and a quick break, we took a short drive towards Monte Aguilar where we spent the rest of the afternoon walking along a very nice woodland area (mainly *Quercus petraea*, *Quercus pirenaica* and *Pinus nigra*) where we saw several Pied Flycatchers, Firecrest, Long-tailed, Coal, Great and Blue Tits, Short-toed Treecreeper, Willow Warbler and Crested Tit. Some interesting plants and butterflies were also seen along the forest's track. We continued walking till late in the afternoon, making our way back through the other end of the woods and along the train track which takes you back to Cordovilla. Back in the cottages, we took a short break followed by a useful Spanish session over nice drinks. Then it was time to enjoy a delightful local supper prepared by Tino's wife Rosa.

## Day 3

Thursday 9th September

### Lores Valley

A very early start today took us to a wonderful spot in the heart of Montaña Palentina: The Valley of Lores. It took us a good hour to get there, arriving at dawn and admiring the breathtaking scenery the shadows of the big

Curavacas Mountain (2,400 metres) right in front of us! Layers of mist were forming across the valley covering the deep gullies and scrub amidst the sound of cattle bells and sheep dogs. As the very first sun beams appeared in the valley, Tino managed to spot a Cantabrian Brown Bear climbing at fairly good pace in one of the gullies and reaching the top of the mountain where we lost it. We all managed to get quick but decent views of this lovely animal through the telescopes - it was a very pleasant surprise! Many Red Deer were also spotted here alongside Red-billed Chough, Northern Raven, Griffon Vultures, Common Buzzard and Golden Eagle. We also had great views of a White-spotted Bluethroat!

After spending nearly three hours scanning, we took a stroll along the main valley track which produced Short-toed Snake Eagle, Dartford Warbler, Northern Wheatear, Black Redstart, Mistle Thrush, Stonechat, amongst others. We found a lovely spot nearby which worked very well to have our picnic lunch! After lunch and a little break, we continue driving along the main valley enjoying interesting butterflies and birds, then eventually getting to the main road and back on track to our way home in the mid afternoon.

We arrived to Cordovilla de Aguilar in order to have a nice break before another succulent and delicious dinner at the 'casas rurales', having enjoyed some Spanish practice and drinks beforehand!

## Day 4

Friday 10th September

### Las Tuerces & Loras Geological Reserve

After breakfast, we drove further south to Cordovilla de Aguilar, making a quick stop in Aguilar de Campoo to collect some fresh bread, and then headed southeast through the village of Villaescusa de la Torre – the main entrance of the stunning Las Loras Geological Reserve. We made our first stop at a rather impressive natural balcony known as Cildá, old Celtic settlement. From here, the views of the river Pisuerga and Las Tuerces main crags were truly taken out of a postcard! We had amazing views of Griffon Vultures, Eurasian Kestrel, Alpine Swifts, Crag Martins, Booted Eagles, House Martins and European Swift...all flying at eye level! The bushes and rocks around us produced other interesting birds such as Common Redstart, European Stonechat, Tree Pipit, Skylark, Black Redstart, Willow Warbler, amongst others.

After having a wonderful time at this great spot, we drove a short distance to the Castle of Gama from where we enjoyed watching very interesting butterflies and birds as well as the great views. We then drove to the main area of Las Tuerces Geological Reserve where the tall table rocks are located, an ideal spot to enjoy our delicious picnic lunch! After that, we took a little trek in the labyrinth-like reserve enjoying the plenty butterflies and birds this area offers. A gorgeous Short-toed Snake Eagle was the main highlight here as she hovered right in front of us at eye level - a truly enjoyable spectacle! Interesting butterflies such as Cleopatra, Great Banded Graylings and a handful of blues were also great to see!

As the late afternoon approached, we drove back to Cordovilla de Aguilar in order to have a nice break before another succulent and delicious dinner cooked by Rosa, and more Spanish practice!

## Day 5

## Saturday 11th September

### Perapertú – Celada de Roblecedo – Peña Tejedo

After the usual start, we set off from our lodge and drove up to the upper hills of Perapertú, making an interesting stop at Cillamayor where we bought some fresh bread and enjoyed checking its interesting Romanesque church. We then continued along the main track making a stop at the Ermita de Perapertú from where we had great views of the reintroduced European Bison. Birds included Red-rumped Swallows, Mistle Thrush, Spotless Starlings, Eurasian Jay, amongst others. Further up the road, we entered in an area with great edge-of-woods meadows, ideal habitat for the powerful European Wildcat. After an intensive search, our efforts paid off as we found a fantastic male hunting in one of the meadows; we carefully stopped nearby in order to have great views without disturbing his morning activities.

After this nice experience, we continued our drive passing the tiny village of Celada de Roblecedo and driving over a metalled track which took us within its stunning woodland dominated by Pyrenean Oaks. Very active Eurasian Nuthatch, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Short-tied Treecreeper and various Tits were quite noisy at the start of our walk; nevertheless, we soon heard the wining call of the elusive Middle-spotted Woodpecker and its rather loud hammering giving away his location and showing off very well!

Lunchtime was spent at a beautiful natural balcony overlooking the impressive “cortados” or rocky walls and formations of this stunning area! After enjoying of a delicious picnic, we drove higher right above the tree line to the point known as Peña Tejedo. This spot gave us fantastic views of the various mountains of Montaña Palentina and the Picos de Europa in the background! After some time admiring the views, we spotted a kettle of Griffon Vultures flying very low in the opposite valley. This behaviour intrigued Tino and myself so we went over to investigate further and to our surprise, we found a few Iberian Wolves hidden amongst the bushes and broom within the gully. They were protecting a carcass they’ve killed a couple of day ago from the vultures, a fantastic spectacle to witness! With the help of our telescopes, we managed to get some brief views of three different in Iberian Wolves as they moved in and out of the scrub to flush the Griffon Vultures away...amazing!

After this unexpected great experience which added excitement to a very productive day, we started our drive back to Cordovilla de Aguilar in order to have a break before another scrumptious Rosa’s dinner, having enjoyed some drinks and Spanish “tertulia” beforehand!

## Day 6

## Sunday 12th September

### Amaya – Rebolledo de la Torre

After a not so typical Sunday morning breakfast surrounded by early bird calls and terracotta-tiles roofs, we jumped in our van and drove southeast in order to get to the area of Peña Amaya. We made our first stop at a view point located at the very top of the rocky cliffs opposite Peña Amaya in order to enjoy the views of this impressive table-like rock formations which once were occupied by Celtic villages. After enjoying this, we drove to the place itself where we took a good walk to the heart of the village located right on the top of the mountain. We enjoyed the breathtaking 360 degrees of the surroundings and also saw interesting birds such as Northern Wheatear, large flocks of Red-billed Choughs, Griffon Vultures, Linnets, Stonechats, Willow Warbler and a soaring female Northern Goshawk! We also saw beautiful butterflies such as Continental Swallowtail, Spanish Chalkhill Blue, and many others. Once we had explored this area, we walked back to our van and drove to a nice

and secluded spot where we enjoyed our well deserved picnic lunch, followed by a little stroll afterwards which produced a Southern Smooth Snake...to our surprise!

The sun was shining and our short drive from our picnic spot to the village of Rebolledo de la Torre was very pleasant, and once we got there, we were greeted by a pair of beautiful Golden Eagles soaring above us and then perching on the top of the cliff. This gave us amazing views of this gorgeous pair of powerful eagles! We then checked out the very interesting carvings of the village's Romanesque church and Tino explaining to us all about them. A short stroll around the church produced Yellowhammer, Northern Raven, Western Bonelli's Warbler, and others.

After having an enjoyable time and a quick refresh at the village's water fountain, we headed back to our lodge in Cordovilla in order to take the usual well deserved break after a long day in the field. Another delicious dinner cooked by Rosa was served at the usual time, alongside lots of Spanish, drinks and fun times!

## Day 7

Monday 13th September

### Montaña Palentina Natural Park (Lores Valley – Polentinos)

After a very early start and before dawn, we drove once again for about 50 minutes towards the heart of the Montaña Palentina National Park, Lores Valley, to the same spot we got good results on Day 3. Hoping to see if any of the area's large carnivores turn up. We managed to spot some Red Deer, some of the males calling very loudly. As the sun was breaking through, the impressive Curavacas Mountain revealed their dark conglomerate rock changing colour tones as the sunlight increased. It was very breezy and quite quiet, perhaps due to the stormy atmosphere that was predicted for later on that day. It was, however, another great feeling and experience, especially to be here in the early morning surrounded by such a beautiful wildlife environment! We then drove down the valley exploring lush thick Beech woodland and nearby rocky hills and meadows: the first ones produced over a dozen Chamois grazing peacefully, whereas a beautiful female Wildcat was spotted hunting along a lower meadow not far from the hamlet of Lores...and we had fantastic close views of this beautiful animal, watching her hunting and eating Water Voles (*terrestris* ssp.). What a show!

By lunchtime, the wind picked up a bit more so we found some shelter at a beautiful and pristine Beech woodland near the hamlet of Polentinos. Lots of Spotted and Pied Flycatchers were seen here, alongside Nuthatch, Crested and Coal Tits, amongst others. As the weather was getting windier and windier, we started our 40-minute drive to our lodge where we took the usual break, followed by another superb dinner delivered by Rosa...and endless wine and Spanish!

## Day 8

Tuesday 14th September

### River Pisuerga basin (Cervera & Salinas de Pisuerga) – Aguilar Dam

After a relaxing start of the morning, we hit the road on this our very last day exploring this wonderful area of northern Spain! We started by driving to Cervera de Pisuerga from where we enjoyed an interesting exploration of this portion of the river Pisuerga. The first stop was a visit to the ancient 7<sup>th</sup> Century Eremitorio Rupestre before a nice stroll around the village of Salinas de Pisuerga which produced good birds such as White-throated Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Serin, Spotted and Pied Flycatcher, amongst others. From here, we left the riverside and

drove towards the Aguilar's Dam where we had very interesting birds such as Western Osprey (actively fishing in front of us!), Eurasian Spoonbill, Common Sandpipers, amongst others. The woodland by the shore provided great views of Red Crossbills and the always cute Crested Tit. We enjoyed our very last picnic lunch on this beautiful spot, exploring the semi open areas afterwards finding Tawny Pipit, Great Spotted Woodpecker and the elusive Woodlarks! Beyond the forest and the dam, just on top of some fields, a group of nearly a dozen of Stone Curlews (Eurasian Thick-knee) were found alongside Northern Wheatear and Little Owl. After a very productive last day, we drove to our lodge in order to get ready to our final journey to the airport and to our very last meal together, enjoying all the delicious dinner Rosa has cooked for us!

We left Cordovilla de Aguilar with endless thanks to Rosa for providing amazing food and care during our stay at the cottages. We then set off to Santander Airport where we said goodbye to Tino with massive thanks for all that he'd done for us during the week!

It was a wild experience...and a wild experience it was, so full of interesting walks, extreme 4x4 rides, adventures, great wildlife, inhospitable habitat and stunning landscapes; wild were the moments we enjoyed walking and trekking the rough terrain, cheerful and happy! And wild was the delicious food we had...unique, authentic...scrumptious! Wild were the funny moments of learning the Spanish language, either in very serious mood or in great laughter having fun! All accompanied by delicious, wines, cava and beer; great moments that our eyes and minds will keep and remember forever! We also got to know a great part of Spain, the Wild Spain, La Montaña Palentina....

'Hasta siempre amigos!!!'

To Sheena, Tanya, Graham and Steven...MIL GRACIAS AMIGOS!! 🙏🙏🙏

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## Checklists

### Birds

			September							
	Common name	Scientific name	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			x				x	x
2	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>								x
3	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>		x						
4	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>								x
5	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>							x	x
6	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>								x
7	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			x					x
8	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>								x
9	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>		x						
10	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
11	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>			x			x		
12	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			x	x				
13	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>		x	x	x	x	x		x
14	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>						x		
15	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				x	x			
16	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>		x						
17	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
18	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			x					
19	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>								x
20	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>								x
21	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>								x
22	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>								x
23	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		x						
24	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
25	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>								x
26	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>				x				
27	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>								x
28	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>			x					
29	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			x					
30	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>						x		
31	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>					x			
32	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>						x		x
33	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>						h		
34	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		x		x	x	x	x	x
35	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				x	x	x	x	
36	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
37	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>				x	x	x	x	
38	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>					x			
39	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
40	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		x		x	x	x	x	
41	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		x	x	x	x		x	x
42	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		x			h		x	x
43	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		x	x	x	x			x
44	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		x			x	x	x	x
45	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>								x
46	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			x					
47	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			x			x		



	Common name	Scientific name	September							
			7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
48	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
49	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			x	x	x	x		
50	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
51	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>					x			
52	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>						h		h
53	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		x	x	x	x			
54	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		x		x		x	x	x
55	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			x	x				x
56	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>						x		
57	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		h	x	x			h	x
58	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				x				
59	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		x					h	
60	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>					x		h	
61	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		h						
62	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		x			x		h	h
63	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		x			x		h	h
64	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>					x			x
65	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		x		x	x	x	x	
66	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>					x			
67	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x
68	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		x		x		x	x	x
69	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				x	x	x	x	x
70	White-spotted Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>				x				
71	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
72	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
73	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			x				x	
74	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		x		x			x	
75	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		x	x	x	x	x		x
76	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		x		x	x	x	x	x
77	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>								x
78	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		x	x	x	x	x		x
79	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>				x	x			x
80	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>							x	x
81	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				x	x	x	x	x
82	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>								x
83	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			x					
84	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>					x			
85	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		x						
86	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>				x	x	x	x	x
87	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		x						
88	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		x	x	x	x	x		x
89	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			x	x		x		
90	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>								x
91	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		x						
92	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			x			x		
93	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>							x	
94	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		x						
95	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>								x

## Mammals

			September							
	Common name	Scientific name	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>						x		
2	Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>							16	
3	Cantabrian Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos pyrenaicus</i>				1				
4	Iberian Wolf	<i>Canis lupus signatus</i>				3				
5	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>							1	
6	European Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris silvestris</i>					1		1	
7	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>			x					
8	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>				x			x	
9	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>								

## Other Wildlife

	Common name	Scientific name	TL
1	Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	X
2	Pale Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias hyale</i>	X
3	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	X
4	Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>	X
5	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>	X
6	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	X
7	Escher's Blue	<i>Agrodiaetus escheri</i>	X
8	Turquoise Blue	<i>Plebicula dorylas</i>	X
9	Spanish Chalk-hill Blue	<i>Lysandra albicans</i>	X
10	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	X
11	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	X
12	Spanish Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas desfontainii</i>	X
13	Rock Grayling	<i>Hipparchia alcyone</i>	X
14	Great Banded Grayling	<i>Kanetisa circe</i>	X
15	Common Brassy Ringlet	<i>Erebia cassioides</i>	X
16	Southern Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia cecilia</i>	X
17	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	X
18	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	X
19	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	X
20	Red-underwing Skipper	<i>Spialia orbifer</i>	X
21	Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>	X
	<b>OTHER WILDLIFE</b>		
	Chalk Burnet	<i>Zygaena fausta</i>	X
	Jersey Tiger	<i>Euplagia quadripunctaria</i>	
	Southern Smooth Snake	<i>Coronella girondica</i>	X
	Viviparous Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>	X
	Great Green Cricket	<i>Tettigonia viridissimama</i>	X
	Field Cricket	<i>Gryllus campestris</i>	X