

Wise Birding Holidays

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Trip Report

SIERRA DE ANDUJAR, SPAIN:

Iberian Lynx & Eagles Tour

Monday 25th February - Friday 1st March 2013

Tour Participants: Mike Thompson, Susie Pearson, John Holmes and Kerry Holmes

Leader: Chris Townend

HIGHLIGHTS OF TRIP

Iberian Lynx: Fantastic daily sightings, totalling four and probably five different animals. This included an adult and older cub (calling), plus two different adults seen down to 20M!

Mouflon: A group of nine and a group of four animals seen over two days.

Common Genet: A single animal seen by the river Jandula at night.

Spanish Imperial Eagle: Daily sightings of up to four different birds.

Golden Eagle: Good scope views of a single adult on one day.



This animal walked right in front of our vehicle on our first full morning!

Monday 25th February

We all met at a pleasantly sunny Malaga airport in the early afternoon, transferred to our vehicle and before too long we were heading north towards Andujar and its associated mountain range, the Sierra de Andujar. Our group consisted of a self-confessed, "Cat Obsessed Team" all keen to head straight to the Sierra de Andujar Parque Natural to maximise our chances of connecting with, the world's rarest cat. The two hour journey to Cordoba was fairly uneventful other than a single **Black Kite** from the vehicle followed shortly after by a **Red Kite**. We enjoyed a short lunch break and leg stretch just outside Cordoba where we saw **Corn Bunting** and **Crested Lark** and within 3 hours of leaving Malaga we were in the heart of Iberian Lynx country on a still and sunny evening.

It was around 17.30hrs when we arrived at the main Lynx "hotspot" and the first of many hours of scanning began, or so we thought! After just ten minutes, Susie very calmly, but clearly announced that she thought she had just seen an **Iberian Lynx**! Surely, this was too good to be true!? After what seemed like an eternity, an animal appeared from behind a tree and nonchalantly padded along one of the many tracks, it was indeed, an Iberian Lynx! Mike was quickly onto the animal getting great scope views whilst Chris quickly radioed Kerry and John who were just a little further along the road! After an initial panic, the whole group was watching the bearded beauty as we enjoyed a good ten minutes of views! Green eyes, black ear tufts, white beard, bob tail dipped in ink and a beautifully spotted coat. The animal was radio collared (*an animal trapped from the area and collared to allow researchers to learn more about the movements*) and seemed quite unperturbed by the small group of onlookers. After a short while, the Lynx continued on its way down the valley towards us, with the views getting just better and better, until it then walked out of view and vanished; as these cats so often do. It then started to sink in, that the mission had been accomplished on the first night, let alone the first ten minutes of arriving! This was much to the appreciation of our group, as well as a small number of other international Lynx watchers now present with us. There were big smiles all round and despite waiting until dusk, there were no further sightings, so we headed to our lovely accommodation at Villa Matilde. Once checked in, we were soon enjoying some great home cooked food and everyone enjoyed a beer with a glass raised to "The Cat!"

Tuesday 26th February

Following the previous day's events, we were all eager to get a full day in the field. After a hearty breakfast at our lovely Villa, we were soon on the road to our main viewpoint. We slowly drove along the road stopping every now and again to scan likely looking Lynx habitat. Along the way, we enjoyed our first proper views of the beautiful **Azure-winged Magpies** and a small group of **Fallow Deer**. As we approached the best Iberian Lynx area, everyone instantly became aware of a shape on our left; slightly ahead of us but on the other side of some fencing. It was as if no-one dared to actually utter the words for a second, until Chris spoke the words that everyone already knew "It's an **Iberian Lynx** and it is about to cross the fence in front of us!" By now, we were stopped in the road and we just watched and waited with baited breath. The cat disappeared out of view momentarily as it negotiated its way through the bottom of the fence that was obscured from our view. Finally, it appeared and boldly padded across right in front of us before taking a slight leap to the bank on the other side of the road and was lost in the vegetation cover. Wow! It was only 08.25hrs and we were spoiled with yet another fabulous view of Iberian Lynx! We pulled in at the next parking spot and slowly got out of the vehicle to see if we could re-locate it, but we all knew it was probably long gone.

It was pretty chilly with a slight breeze and we decided to remain in the area for a while and scan other suitable areas. A **Southern Grey Shrike** perched up in a nearby bush as it sensibly took advantage of the early morning sunshine, allowing some excellent scope views. We all admired the fantastic vista and scanned for just a few minutes when all of a sudden a "yowling" call could be heard from somewhere to the left of us. Chris immediately went into scanning mode as he announced it was surely an **Iberian Lynx** and pretty closeby! The call continued, very loud and very clear and despite everyone's best efforts, we just could not locate it. Another few minutes passed and then all of a sudden, Chris waved everyone over, to look in his scope, but no sooner had Kerry arrived to look, than the animal had disappeared! An anxious 15-20 minutes passed with everyone very much focused on the spot. Then once again, some excitement from Chris and "not one but two **Iberian Lynx** in the same area!!" A quick run for a scope and everyone was soon just lapping up mega views of what appeared to be an adult and a youngster (clearly smaller in size with a smaller face and beard) about 1 year old. The next 30 minutes were just fantastic, as we watched these beautiful animals lying on top of a moss covered boulder. More Lynx watchers arrived and we tried to regain composure and get over the shock of having seen 3 different animals in the space of an hour!

The animals finally slinked off and it was time for a celebratory coffee and a couple of welcome fly-by **Great Spotted Cuckoos**! No sooner had we finished our coffee than the "yowling" started again! A slow amble up the track and once again, we were watching the same two animals. Here, we followed them through the mix of Oaks and Rosemary and witnessed some interesting behaviour – an absolute treat and only 10.30hrs!! Then as if things could not get any better, a fine adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** soared overhead. We all agreed our chances of seeing another Lynx, better than what we had just witnessed was pretty slim, so we headed down towards the dam. Here we spent the rest of the morning concentrating more on birding. Highlights included great views of **Eurasian Crag Martins**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and an adult **Golden Eagle**. A short walk in the nearby tunnel revealed very few roosting bats which were too concealed to identify to species, but everyone was happy as the sun was shining and Iberian Lynx was well and truly in the bag! We enjoyed a very pleasant lunch break as numerous **Griffon Vultures** and the odd **Black Vulture** sailed overhead.

With the pressure off, we spent the afternoon by the river Jandula, another area where Iberian Lynx can be seen. It was pretty quiet, other than the rattling of **Sardinian Warblers** and then Mike found a small group of **Red-rumped Swallows** hawking above the river before the sun began to set and we headed back to our Villa. Here, we all reminisced about the fantastic day whilst enjoying a great meal, including Roland's famous chocolate mousse!

Wednesday 27th February

Once again, after some very welcome coffee and a great breakfast, we were out early again and returned to our main viewpoint where we had our very first Lynx sighting. A couple of **Hoopoes** were a very welcome distraction on our drive in. We adopted our usual drill of scanning from various viewpoints but remaining in radio and visual contact. It was another pleasant day, though still a little chilly in the early part of the morning. There were always birds to distract you, with gangs of noisy **Azure-winged Magpies** flying overhead, **Dartford Warblers** and **Sardinian Warblers** playing hide and seek in the Rosemary and small numbers of **Red-billed Chough** giving their distinctive harsh cries.

We took our compulsory coffee break whilst at the "Lynx Hotspot" and discussed how despite having had excellent views of Iberian Lynx over the last couple of days, we were all still eager for more! It was now around 11am and despite now further Lynx sightings everyone was in high spirits, including John who was valiantly struggling on without a moan or groan, despite a rather nasty cold!

Then at around 11.20hrs a shout of "**Iberian Lynx**" had everyone totally focused on the spot, literally metres away from where the animal Susie had found on our very first evening! Unfortunately, this time, it seemed our luck had finally run out as the animal disappeared behind a Rosemary bush, never to be seen again, so we all had to make do with just a few seconds of a feline rush! Despite the brief views, the animal appeared to be un-collared and therefore different to the animal on the first evening. We carried on scanning a little longer and then decided to return to Villa Matilde for lunch and some relaxation time.

In the afternoon, John decided to relax and try and shake off his cold in the hope that he would be fit for some nocturnal mammals later. The rest of us headed off, once again, into the beautiful Holm and Cork Oak habitat where we explored a different area that looked good for Lynx. As we slowly drove along the track we took in the great scenery and stopped to scan a few rocky areas that certainly looked as if they really should have a Lynx sitting on them, but alas no. We returned to our favoured Lynx "hotspot" and of course checked out "yowling corner" as it had become affectionately known! All was quiet and we had no further Lynx sightings but a fine group of **Mouflon** was very welcome. There were nine of these "giant sheep" in total and good scope views showed their buff, dark brown and white blotched coats and huge curled horns. For the last couple of hours we were brilliantly entertained by the constant aerial displays of a mix of **Black Vulture**, **Griffon Vulture** and of course the majestic **Imperial Eagles**.

After dinner, John was feeling a little more chipper and so we all ventured out for a couple of hours in search of any nocturnal mammals. We spent the majority of the evening alongside the Rio Jandula. With a little patience we were rewarded with a **Badger** that crossed right in front of our vehicle and later, a brilliant **Common Genet** was watched in our headlights.

Thursday 28th February

Well, today was our final full day and everyone was eager to end the trip on a high and keep our record of daily Iberian Lynx sightings! On arriving at the "hotspot" it became obvious that visibility was greatly reduced due to mist! Every now and then, there were breaks in the mist, but despite our best positive mental attitude we had to accept that we were unable to do much scanning for a while! We spent a little time down at the dam, but the rain persisted and before long we found ourselves in a snow shower! There was nothing for it, we just had to turn to our coffee supply and sit it out. Fortunately, it did not last too long and finally after about an hour, the weather looked a little more promising and by early afternoon, the visibility was 100% once again and our team were determined to find another Iberian Lynx!

During the afternoon, we notched up a number of good birds and mammals. A small group of 3 **Mouflon** was a good find by Mike and very much appreciated by John who missed the sighting from the previous day. A **Wild Boar**, again spotted by Mike, gave some excellent views as it snuffled about in the valley beneath us and scuffed up the ground in search of food. The now, daily occurrence of raptors continued to entertain us with the usual selection of vultures and **Spanish Imperial Eagles**, including views

of a perched bird. Other birds of note included **Hawfinch**, that with patience gave some good views on the ground, a single **Black Kite** over the area and the now expected **Azure-winged Magpies**, **Red-billed Choughs** and both **Sardinian** and **Dartford Warblers**.

It was approaching the last hour or so of daylight and it certainly felt like "Lynx O'clock" and as scanning increased so did the pressure – Surely our record of daily sightings was not about to come to an end? Then there was a distant shout and Chris could see Andy (leader of another English visiting group) waving about 150 metres up the road and two bends away! We all jumped in the vehicle and before we knew it, we were out of the vehicle and staring into the face of another male **Iberian Lynx**! The animal was another radio-collared individual and was sitting just off the edge of the road no further than 30 metres from us, seemingly quite unperturbed by its small appreciative audience! It was great to look into those beautiful green eyes and see the size of those paws! Unfortunately, it did not stay long and slipped between a couple of boulders and disappeared. We gained a little height and looked down into the valley below us and just as we thought that was our finale, Kerry coolly re-located the animal in the valley. It never ceases to amaze me, how quickly these animals move! We watched as it paced further down into the valley and a memory that we all held on to, knowing that regardless of the number of times that you see this wonderful cat, they always leave you wanting more! Very happy with our day's work and grateful to Andy for the shout, we packed up and headed back to Villa Matilde for another great meal and celebratory beers!

Friday 1st March

On our final morning we enjoyed another traditional breakfast, said our goodbyes to Roland and Mercedes and then headed south towards Malaga. The journey was fairly uneventful other than 2 **White Storks** seen from the vehicle. We then arrived at Laguna Fuente de la Piedra, a RAMSAR site for its internationally important numbers of wintering waterbirds. Here, we enjoyed a good hour or so of birding before heading for the airport. The birding was good and varied in comparison to the last few days with notable species being hundreds of **Greater Flamingos**, a small group of **Avocet** and a large raft of 70+ **Black-necked Grebe**, some of which were almost in full summer plumage. A **Wryneck** was an unseasonal find and Mike found a fine **Yellow Wagtail**, just to remind us Spring was not far away! We then took a short drive to an area favoured by **Common Cranes** and within a few minutes Mike had located a couple of birds that showed very well in the late morning sunshine and a great finale to the trip. We arrived back at Malaga in good time for our mid afternoon flight back to the UK and it had certainly been a great trip with many great memories of the "bearded one!"

Conservation Donation – Following the successful conclusion of this tour, a £150 donation from Wise Birding Holidays was made to the **LIFE-Nature Project “Enhancing habitat for the Iberian Lynx and Black Vulture in SE Portugal”**

It is a partnership between LPN – *Liga para a Protecção da Natureza* (the most ancient Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation of the Iberian Peninsula) and *Fauna & Flora International*. This project aims to contribute to the conservation of the Iberian Lynx, the Black Vulture and their habitats in southeast Portugal, while benefiting a wide set of other species. **The main objectives are:**

- Improve the survival, feeding and breeding conditions of the two species;
- Establish management agreements with stakeholders to promote the conservation of the natural landscape where the Iberian lynx and the Black Vulture inhabit;
- Develop educational and environmental awareness activities to involve the society in Nature and Biodiversity conservation. You can find out more on the following link:

<http://habitatlinceabutre.lpn.pt/default.aspx>



Sierra de Andujar – Home of the Iberian Lynx



Mother and Cub seen on our first full day



This animal walked right out in front of us on our first morning



Black Vulture



Griffon Vulture



Dartford Warbler



Sardinian Warbler



Embalse del Jandula



Scanning and more scanning!



Wild Boar



Azure-winged Magpie



This Male Iberian Lynx was seen on our last evening



The animal seen on our first morning

BIRD LIST for Wise Birding Holidays' Iberian Lynx & Eagles Tour
25th February -1st March 2013

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Laguna Fuente de la Piedra (LFP)
2	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	LFP
3	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	LFP
4	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	LFP
5	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Daily around La Lancha area (LL)
6	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	LFP
7	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	70+ at LFP
8	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	LFP & La Lancha Dam (LLD)
9	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	A single bird at LFP
10	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	A single bird at LFP
11	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	LFP
12	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	2 birds en route to airport
13	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	A few hundred birds at LFP
14	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Singles over LL & en route Cordoba
15	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	A single bird near Cordoba
16	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Daily at LL
17	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Daily at LL
18	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Single at LL
19	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Singles en route to LL & airport
20	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	Up to 4 adults LL on 3 days
21	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	One adult LL
22	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
23	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	LFP
24	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	Good views of 2 adults at LFPL
25	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	LFP
26	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	Up to 10 birds LFP
27	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	LFP and en route to LL
28	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	LFP
29	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Two birds LFP
30	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	A single bird near LL
31	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	LFP and en route to airport
32	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	LFP
33	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	LFP and en route to airport
34	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Recorded on 2 days
35	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Daily sightings
36	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Recorded on 3 days
37	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>	Two birds calling overhead at LL
38	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	Heard at our accommodation
39	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Good views around LL
40	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Max. count 4 - Recorded on 1 day
41	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>	Daily views of this distinct race

BIRD LIST for Wise Birding Holidays' Iberian Lynx & Eagles Tour continued

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
42	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Recorded on one day
43	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	Single bird at LFP
44	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Travelling to and from airport
45	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	Two birds en route to LL
46	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Recorded on 3 days
47	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Recorded on 3 days
48	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	Up to 6 birds at Rio Jandula (RJ)
49	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Recorded on 2 days
50	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Recorded on 4 days
51	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Recorded on 3 days
52	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	A single bird at LFP
53	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	One day at LL
54	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Daily sightings
55	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Daily sightings
56	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	Recorded on one day at LL
57	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Recorded on 3 days
58	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Daily sightings
59	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Recorded on 3 days
60	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
61	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Recorded on 4 days
62	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Recorded daily
63	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	Recorded on 3 days at LL
64	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Recorded daily
65	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
66	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Recorded on 3 days
67	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Recorded daily
68	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	Recorded on 2 days
69	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Single bird on one day
70	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	Recorded on 3 days
71	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Recorded on 2 days
72	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	Recorded daily
73	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Recorded daily
74	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Up to 7 birds at LL on 3 days
75	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	Recorded on 2 days
76	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Recorded daily
77	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Recorded on 3 days
78	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Recorded daily
79	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Recorded on 3 days
80	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Recorded daily
81	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Recorded on day one only
82	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Recorded on 3 days – 10+
83	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	Recorded on 1 day

MAMMAL & REPTILE LIST for Wise Birding Holidays' Iberian Lynx & Eagles Tour

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>	Daily sightings! Up to 5 animals
2	Mouflon	<i>Ovis musimon</i>	9 & 4 animals seen from LL
4	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Recorded daily
6	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	Recorded daily
7	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Single animal at LL
8	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Recorded daily
9	Common Genet	<i>Genetta genetia</i>	One along RJ at night on 27 th
10	Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanica</i>	One on 26 th in warm weather
11	Bat Sp	-	Concealed at roost and unable to id

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