

Wise Birding Holidays

Bird and mammal watching tours



SPAIN: Iberian Lynx & Eagles

Thursday 1st - Monday 5th February 2018

4 Wise Birding Clients

Leader: Chris Townend

HIGHLIGHTS OF TRIP

Iberian Lynx: After numerous hours scanning the vast habit we were finally rewarded with a close view on the morning of the 3rd as animal walked through the scrub and across the road. A different animal the following day finally gave itself up after tracking it for 45 minutes with frustrating glimpses here and there. However, the grand finale was our third animal feeding on a deer carcass, just 50M from the road on the evening of the 4th and morning of the 5th!

Spanish Imperial Eagle: Seen very well on two days including a very close adult.

Golden Eagle: Some nice views of a pair of birds on two different days.

Cinereous (Black) Vulture: Some excellent views and great to compare with the nearby Griffon Vultures too.

Spanish Ibex: A single animal gave good scope views on the 11th.



This Iberian Lynx was the definite highlight of the tour!

SUMMARY

This tour was primarily focused on trying to see Iberian Lynx well and to enjoy the other great birds and mammals of the Sierra de Andujar region of Spain. This beautiful area, just 3 hours drive from Malaga has now become the best place to see Iberian Lynx in Spain. The Iberian Lynx certainly performed very well on this trip with a number of sightings and a very special encounter on our last day. Other highlights included some great views of Spanish Imperial and Golden Eagles, Spanish Ibex as well as Mouflon, numerous Cinereous (Black) and Griffon Vultures and the usual gangs of beautiful Iberian Azure-winged Magpies! As well as our usual fantastic hospitality at Villa Matilde.

Thursday 1st February

The group met at Malaga airport where we transferred to our vehicle and headed out of the city. Passing the outskirts of Malaga we saw our first Yellow-legged Gull before heading north towards our destination in the Sierra de Andujar Natural Park. A pleasant stop en route allowed us time for coffee and a light lunch and then we continued towards Córdoba where an impressive count of 200+ White Storks were seen whilst travelling as well as Common Buzzard, Red Kite and an overwintering Black Kite. We soon arrived at the very relaxing Villa Matilde where the always smiling Roland greeted us and showed us to our rooms before we headed off for our first evening of searching for Iberian Lynx.

We spent the last couple of hours alongside the Jandula River where we enjoyed the late afternoon sunshine in the company of rattling Sardinian Warblers, Spotless Starlings, Iberian Azure-winged Magpies, Eurasian Hoopoe and our only Rock Sparrow of the trip. At dusk, we returned to our accommodation where some lovely home cooked food awaited us and everyone turned in early ready for our first full day in the beautiful Sierra de Andujar.

Friday 2nd February

After much needed coffee and breakfast, we headed out shortly after dawn at the civilised time of 08.00hrs and we were soon in the picturesque dehesa habitat so typical of the Sierra Morena region of Spain. A mix of Holm Oaks and Cork Oaks with scattered lichen covered rocks and grassland was soon to become a familiar site as we slowly drove along the dirt track searching for our main target species, the beautiful Iberian Lynx.

It was a bright still and cold morning, despite Alan braving the conditions in shorts! However, the sunshine began to slowly warm us all up as Iberian Azure-winged Magpies were a continual distraction as we carefully scanned the vast habitat for Lynx and listened for any alarm calling Common Magpies that can sometimes be helpful in locating the bearded cat. Sardinian Warblers, Blackcaps and Common Chiffchaffs were a common sight throughout the morning and as the temperature increased we enjoyed coffee whilst treated to some great views of Spanish Imperial Eagles, Griffon Vultures and Cinereous Vultures.

A group of three Mouflon were a very welcome distraction as they gave good scope views, but it was a no show for any Iberian Lynx so we ventured down towards the Jandula dam for our lunch. Here, the raptor theme continued as we scoped an adult Golden Eagle sat on a rock, along with more views of the smart Spanish Imperial Eagle. Highlights around the dam during the afternoon included two Red-billed Chough, a cracking male Blue Rock Thrush, Eurasian Crag Martin, Hawfinch, Black Redstarts and a stunning Common Firecrest. Heather did very well to provide us all with a new mammal for the trip as she found three Spanish Ibex high on the ridge that gave great scope views.

Back at our main Lynx viewing area, once again we took our favoured viewpoints and remained in radio contact! It was a perfect evening with calm and sunny weather and we all enjoyed the wonderful scenery and hoped the elusive Iberian Lynx would show. Time passed with an Iberian Grey Shrike and Azure-winged Magpies for company, but alas still no Iberian Lynx! Calling Little Owls soon signified dusk was upon us and we slowly headed back towards Villa Matilde where we enjoyed some more great home cooked food and remained positive that the next day would once again, yield the main prize!

Saturday 3rd February

It was another early start to maximise our chances of an Iberian Lynx sighting, so after breakfast we returned to our now familiar watch area. Once at our chosen viewpoint, we were now fully versed in our plans and we all covered our favourite lookouts, once again remaining in radio contact. It was another calm morning and before long, the sun soon warmed us up. It was the Common Magpies that alerted us to an Iberian Lynx! Frustratingly, it was only seen by one other fellow Lynx watcher before it gave us all the slip! However, as is often the case, perseverance paid off and we were finally rewarded with some excellent views 30 minutes later as it re-appeared in full view some 500 metres further down the valley. It was a great view at only 100M from us in wonderful light as we watched it swagger through the Rosemary and scrub before it crossed the road in front of us and disappeared! A celebratory coffee break was then enjoyed by all!

As midday approached we learned about another Iberian Lynx sighting further down the valley where a different animal had been seen with a freshly killed rabbit before the cat disappeared into cover. We therefore decided to focus on this particular area and have lunch whilst keeping watch. As the hours passed, there was still no sign of the Lynx, but Dartford Warblers posed in the early evening sunshine and the now familiar sound of Spanish Imperial Eagles echoed around as birds gave more great views with both Griffon & Cinereous Vultures.

We enjoyed the sunset over the Santuario Virgen de la Cabeza and headed back to a welcome log fire and another very tasty meal at Villa Matilde.

Sunday 4th February

After breakfast, we headed out keen to make the most of our last full day and we returned to La Lancha and once again took our favoured scanning positions. All seemed quiet until around mid morning when a Lynx was spotted along the firebreak area. A small crowd had assembled nearby but the cat wasn't playing ball. However, with a little patience, we all managed to get a view of it as it slowly worked its way down the valley walking slowly between the various scrubby patches of vegetation. We managed to track it for quite some time with odd views here and there before it finally disappeared! We loitered with intent and had lunch but with no further sightings, so we headed for the La Lancha dam whilst Alan remained to keep watch in case the Lynx re-appeared.

At the dam we enjoyed more views of Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart, Crag Martins and the same three Spanish Ibex from the previous day. We then took a walk into the cave where we found roosting Schreiber's and Daubenton's Bats. It then seemed like it was getting close to "Lynx O'Clock" so we decided to head back up to see Alan and find out the latest on any cat sightings. As soon as we were back in radio contact it turned out that Alan had been watching an Iberian Lynx. Lucky, it was still sitting in the same place so we were soon enjoying some good scope views of what was presumably the same animal from earlier in the morning.

by now, the weather had certainly deteriorated and rain soon became hail! Despite the Iberian Lynx still being visible, we all retreated to the minibus for shelter! The shower didn't last too long and of course as soon as we returned, the cat had vanished once again! Therefore we decided to slowly return towards our accommodation and did some birding en route. Five Woodlarks were certainly the highlight of the early evening as well as a couple of Serin feeding in roadside fields. With the light now fading we began to head back to Villa Matilde and then just at that moment, the unexpected happened! No more than 5 kilometres from our accommodation, there by the side of the road was another Iberian Lynx feeding on a deer carcass! We then spent the next 30 minutes, until the light faded, watching this beautifully marked cat at a range of no more than 50 metres. It was certainly an exciting end to our last day and we returned to Villa Matilde full of smiles and it was beers all round!

Monday 5th February

Our initial plan for the day was to leave early and explore the Laguna de Fuente de Piedra for some birding. However, with an Iberian Lynx feeding on a deer carcass just five minutes away, the temptation to return in the morning was just too much! Therefore, after breakfast we returned to see if the Lynx might just return. On arrival, it seemed the carcass had disappeared, but it soon became apparent that it had simply been covered with grass by the Lynx. We waited for around ten minutes and unbelievably, the Iberian Lynx strolled in from stage left and began covering the carcass with grass again! The light was improving all the time and we all just watched and stared in disbelief as we all focused on

the beautiful detail of the cat's face and its pelage markings before it finally strolled off up the hillside and disappeared behind some vegetation! **Wow!**

The rest of the morning was spent travelling to Malaga, but there was still just enough time for a very quick visit to Laguna de Fuente de Piedra. Here we ended the tour well with some new birds that included Eurasian Thick-Knee, Marsh Harrier, Greater Flamingo and Black-winged Stilt.

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” This is a partnership between LPN – Liga para a Protecção da Natureza and Fauna and Flora International. The Lynx Programme for LPN ensures the conservation of almost 20,000 hectares of suitable Mediterranean habitat for the Iberian lynx in the Southeast of Portugal through numerous management agreements with local landowners and other stakeholders. Rabbits are the main prey item for the Iberian Lynx and ensuring there is a healthy population of wild rabbits is crucial. Therefore, the project works hard to provide accessible food, water and artificial shelter specifically for rabbits to maintain the population. Thousands of children from the programme's intervention area along with hundreds of local and regional stakeholders have been educated on the problems facing the Iberian Lynx and the importance of its future conservation and protection. You can find out more about this project by visiting the following link: www.lpn.pt/homepage/What-we-do/Programs/Lynx-Programme/Content.aspx?tabid=2454&code=en



Cinereous Vulture (above) and Spanish Imperial Eagles (below)





**Our first Iberian Lynx sighting!
Thanks to tour participant Alan Hand's photo (below)**





One of three Mouflon seen (above) and Spanish Ibex (below)





The male Iberian Lynx feeding on a deer carcass on the evening of the 4th and the morning of the 5th





Male Iberian Lynx. The video can be found at:

<http://www.wisebirding.co.uk/wise-birding-holidays-bird-mammal-videos>



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SPAIN: Birds, Mammals, Reptiles & Amphibians Checklist for 1st - 5th February 2018

This bird checklist follows the nomenclature and classification from HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World and the associated online resource, HBW Alive

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	#	Species Notes
1	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	1	Recorded in small numbers at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra on the 5th.
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	2	A pair recorded at La Lancha dam on the 4th.
3	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	3	A common species in the Lynx area recorded on 3 days.
4	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	4	A count of 70+ flying over on our first evening at Encinerejo.
5	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	5	A single bird at Encinerejo on the 1st.
6	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	6	A count of 200+ birds near Cordoba whilst travelling on the 1st was a large count for the time of year.
7	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	7	Recorded daily whilst looking for Lynx with a max. count of 40+ on the 2nd.
8	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	8	Seen very well on the 2nd and 3rd with a max. count of 6 birds on the 2nd.
9	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	9	A perched adult was seen well in the scope near La Lancha dam on the 2nd.
10	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	10	Recorded on three days whilst in the Lynx area with 2-3 adults seen.
11	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	11	Two birds whilst travelling on the 1st were notable for the area.
12	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	12	A single bird whilst travelling on the 1st.
13	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	13	A single bird hunting over Laguna de Fuente de Piedra on the 5th.
14	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	14	Recorded only on the first day whilst travelling.
15	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	15	One over La Lancha on the 3rd.
16	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	16	A couple of birds whilst travelling on the 1st and a single at La Lancha on the 3rd.
17	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	17	Recorded at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra on the 5th only.
18	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	18	Recorded at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra on the 5th only.
19	Eurasian Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>	19	A single bird scoped from the visitor centre at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra.
20	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	20	At least one bird at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra.
21	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	21	Small numbers at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra.
22	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	22	Recorded whilst travelling on the 1st and again on the 5th.
23	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	23	Small groups at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra.
24	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	24	Recorded whilst travelling near Malaga airport.
25	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	25	Recorded daily.
26	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	26	Recorded on three days.
27	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	27	Heard at our accommodation at Villa Matilde and also during the day on the 2nd.
28	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	28	Recorded on three days, mostly heard.
29	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	29	A single on the 1st and 2 birds on the 4th.

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30	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>	30	Heard more than seen, but seen well on the 3rd around La Lancha.
31	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	31	Seen whilst travelling on the 1st and 5th.
32	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	32	A group of 5 birds showed very well in fields en route to La Lancha on the 4th.
33	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	33	Recorded on three days with the best views around La Lancha dam.
34	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	34	A couple of birds in fields near Los Escoriales on the 4th.
35	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	35	At least 2 birds at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra.
36	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	36	A single bird near La Lancha dam on the 3rd.
37	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	37	Recorded on three days.
38	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	38	Nice views of male and female birds on at least 2 days around La Lancha.
39	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	39	A single male at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra.
40	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	40	A common species whilst driving to La Lancha each morning.
41	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	41	Recorded daily.
42	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	42	Some great views of stunning males and females on at least 3 days.
43	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	43	Recorded on 3 days.
44	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	44	A familiar sound from the bushes whilst looking for Lynx and recorded daily.
45	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	45	Some good views whilst waiting for Lynx to appear. Recorded on at least 2 days.
46	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	46	Recorded daily.
47	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	47	A single male seen very well near La Lancha dam on the 2nd.
48	European Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	48	Recorded on 2 days.
49	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	49	Recorded on 4 days.
50	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	50	A single bird showed well at La Lancha on the 2nd.
51	Iberian Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	51	Always great to see with small flocks recorded daily.
52	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	52	Recorded daily and often led us to the location of the Lynx!
53	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	53	Two birds showed well at La Lancha dam on the 2nd.
54	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	54	Recorded whilst travelling on the 1st and again on the 5th.
55	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	55	Recorded on at least 3 days.
56	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	56	A single bird showed well in the scope at Encinerejo on the evening of the 1st.
57	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	57	Recorded on 4 days.
58	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	58	Small numbers at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra.

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59	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	59	Recorded on at least 2 days.
60	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	60	Recorded on 2 days.
61	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	61	Singles on the 2nd and 3rd whilst at La Lancha.
MAMMAL SPECIES				
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>	1	One animal seen well on the 3rd and two different animals on the 4th, including a male feeding on a deer carcass which was seen again on the morning of the 5th! See Video: http://www.wisebirding.co.uk/wise-birding-holidays-bird-mammal-videos
2	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>	2	Female with two younger animals on the 2nd and 4th.
3	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	3	Recorded on 3 days from La Lancha.
4	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	4	Recorded on 3 days, mostly on the drive in to La Lancha.
5	Mouflon	<i>Ovis musimon</i>	5	Three animals including an impressive male seen well from La Lancha on the 2nd and the 3rd.
6	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	6	Recorded daily.
7	Schreiber's Bat	<i>Miniopterus schreibersii</i>	7	One seen in the tunnel at La Lancha dam on the 4th.
8	Daubenton's Bat	<i>Myotis bechsteinii</i>	8	At least one in the tunnel at La Lancha dam on the 4th.

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