

Wise Birding Holidays

Bird and mammal watching tours



SPAIN: Iberian Lynx and Eagles

Tuesday 6th - Saturday 10th January 2015

Tour Participants: John & Fiona Fyfe, Dave Hopkins, Steve Curtis and Andy Stanbury

Leader: Chris Townend

HIGHLIGHTS OF TRIP

Iberian Lynx: We enjoyed daily sightings totalling nine different encounters of at least three animals. Some exceptionally close views and animals also heard calling.

Spanish Imperial Eagle: Some excellent views of adult birds and an immature bird.

Golden Eagle: Some nice views of an immature bird on the 7th.

Spanish Ibex: A group of five animals allowed some very close views on the 7th.

Blue Rock Thrush: This stunning thrush allowed excellent views on a number of days.

Rock Bunting: Always a great bird to see with two birds recorded on the 8th.



This Iberian Lynx was just one of nine different sightings!

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 and we were very fortunate to see animals every day with a total of at least nine separate sightings! Other highlights included a group of five Spanish Ibex, superb views of the endemic Spanish Imperial Eagle as well as Golden Eagle, Rock Bunting, Cirl Bunting, Hawfinch, Crested Tit and at least four species of butterfly!

Despite the worrying crash in the rabbit population, on which the Iberian Lynx depends so heavily for food, it would appear the population of Iberian Lynx in this region is still stable, for now. This is no doubt as a result of the hard work of the people involved in the EU Lynx Life Project working to maintain the key habitat needed for both Lynx and rabbits and trying to help boost the declining rabbit population by creating man made rabbit warrens and releasing disease free rabbits.

Tuesday 6th January

The group met at Malaga airport where blue skies and sunshine welcomed everyone and we transferred to our minibus and headed out of the city. Passing the outskirts of Malaga we saw a couple of Monk Parakeets whizz over the motorway along with a few Yellow-legged Gulls before we left the coast and headed north towards Andujar. The journey was fairly uneventful until nearing Córdoba where a wintering Black Kite flew over the bus and a very unseasonal flock of 100+ White Stork were huddled together in an arable field just before our lunch stop.

After a relaxing lunch, we continued the short journey to Andujar taking in a couple of obliging Crested Larks en route. We soon arrived at the very welcoming Villa Matilde where the ever smiling Roland greeted us and showed us to our rooms before we headed off for our first evening of searching for the elusive Iberian Lynx.

We headed to the now famed site at La Lancha where we spent the last couple of hours of the day scanning the dehesa habitat. A mixture of Holm Oaks and Cork Oaks with scattered granite boulders and grassland and scrub. Here we enjoyed our first views of the gregarious Azure-winged Magpies and rattling Sardinian Warblers, both of which were soon to become a daily occurrence. We then continued to scan for our main target species when a nearby group became very excited and it was clear they were watching a Lynx! After a tense few minutes, it became clear exactly where the animal had been seen allowing Andy and a couple of other members of the group to relocate it before it slinked off into cover! Despite waiting until dusk, there were no more sightings and we all hoped it was just a taster of what was to come tomorrow!

Wednesday 7th January

After some much needed coffee and breakfast, we set off shortly after dawn, which at this time of year is not too painful, being just after 07.30hrs. We returned to where some of us had seen the Lynx the previous evening, knowing that it was very unlikely to be in the same spot today! Our journey took us through the wonderful Cork and Holm Oaks where we saw Fallow Deer and Red Deer en route before reaching our viewpoint.

The pressure was on as not everyone had managed to get a view of the Lynx the previous day and it was a little distant, so we needed some good fortune. It didn't take long! At around 09.30hrs Chris picked up an animal just below where we were all standing, a beautiful Iberian Lynx sat on a rock looking at us showing its face and beard. Most managed a quick view, before once again the animal decided to wander off with the animal soon vanishing into dense cover and was lost to view! There was relief all round as everyone managed a good view, but again it was a little brief and left us all wanting more! Were we all being too greedy!?

At around 10.30hrs we then had the encounter that everyone had hoped for, as what was presumably the same animal re-appeared in the adjacent valley. Everyone relaxed and we were all treated to prolonged views as the cat sauntered around marking its territory and we all simply enjoyed the moment. With the pressure now off, it seemed only right to celebrate with coffee and chocolate as the morning sun began to warm us up.

We spent the rest of the morning scanning for more Lynx, with no further sightings and then headed down to the dam where we took lunch. In the near vicinity were Eurasian Crag Martins, Black Redstarts, an immature Golden Eagle and best of all, a group of five Spanish Ibex that peered down at us from their rocky terrain in the now quite warm afternoon sunshine.

Feeling energised and with stomachs full, we headed back to our main Lynx watchpoint for a late afternoon session. With the pressure now off, we took a more relaxed approach with each of us taking different areas to watch but remaining in radio contact. At around 16.30hrs, a Lynx had been sighted in one of the valleys just below the main track road and appeared to be heading towards the road. News quickly spread between us and we were all focused on the area. Within the next few minutes, the animal continued its path and finally sat in full view just metres away from the very quiet and adoring small crowd. It was a superb view and then as if the animal knew it was the star of the show at round 16.45hrs it then proceeded to nonchalantly cross the road in full view of its admirers with a slow saunter - Quite simply WOW!

It had been a superb day with a true Iberian Lynx grand finale and we all decided to head back to our accommodation for a celebratory drink and hearty meal at the warm and cosy Villa Matilde.

Thursday 8th January

This morning after another great breakfast and essential coffee, we headed to a different Lynx watching area. It had been a very cold night and there was a hard frost on the ground as we arrived alongside the river Jandula. We slowly drove the road in the early morning gloom. After about five minutes of slowly driving and scanning, Fiona's sharp eyes immediately spotted the outline of a cat and instantly called out "Lynx!"

The animal was sat motionless beside a tree and could so easily have been overlooked as a tree stump. After a few seconds it began to walk slowly amongst the nearby bushes and it soon became apparent that it was one of the radio collared individuals which are monitored by researchers. It then typically vanished!

A great start to the morning with an Iberian Lynx in the bag before 08.30hrs! So we continued to the river and had a look for other wildlife which included Iberian Green Woodpecker, Iberian Grey Shrike and the usual gangs of Azure-winged Magpies. As the morning sunshine once again began to warm us up, a second sighting of a Lynx at around 09.50hrs had us walking swiftly to where a hunting animal was seen dashing across an open rocky outcrop and then once again disappeared. It really seemed wherever we ventured, our group was destined to see Lynx! Now our fourth Iberian Lynx sighting in 36 hours! Another coffee break seemed appropriate and we all enjoyed good scope views of a number of perched Hawfinch.

The afternoon was spent visiting a new area to the west of our usual Lynx watching area and we explored the Puertobajo Estate. This estate is working hard to maintain the correct habitat requirements for the Iberian Lynx as well as attempting to address the rabbit population decline. Volunteers and estate workers have been building artificial rabbit warrens and releasing disease free rabbits through continued support from WWF and the EU Life Project.

It was great to spend the afternoon being guided around the estate and although we had no further Iberian Lynx sightings, it was great to explore the wonderful surroundings and to enjoy some good bird sightings too. Highlights included both adult and immature Spanish Imperial Eagles, Thekla Lark, Eurasian Hoopoe, Red-billed Chough and many Eurasian Griffon Vultures as well as the odd Black Vulture.

Chris's driving skills were also put to the test as we carefully negotiated some rather steep tracks, not for the faint hearted! However, we finally made it back to familiar territory with just the tunnel to negotiate, but would our minibus fit!? Of course it would, there was no pressure at all!

A great day and some wonderful weather, scenery and good banter, rounded off nicely with some more lovely home cooked food at Villa Matilde.

Friday 9th January

Today was our last full day and everyone was keen to make the most of it and we were not to be disappointed! Once again, it was a calm and sunny day and we all took our positions at various viewpoints with the comfort of knowing that we all had radio contact! However, this morning it was Andy who had chosen the right position as at 09.50hrs an Iberian Lynx popped its head up from below the main track on which he was standing and then crossed right in front of him! We all headed towards Andy and loitered with intent but it seemed the animal had already gone. We loitered a little longer and then watched the same animal wandering above us in between the vegetation before being treated to yet another sighting at around midday just below us! Despite the now distinctly warm conditions, this male was quite active as it wandered amongst the rocks and Rosemary bushes marking its territory as it went.

It had been another great morning of Lynx watching as well as raptors as we enjoyed overhead views of an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle and the now familiar Vultures. Our picnic lunch was once again enjoyed down at the dam where we relaxed and looked for butterflies and reptiles.

We then returned to the Lynx hotspot and once again were treated to yet more Iberian Lynx views! It was almost a re-run of our first full day as we watched an animal slowly work its way up one of the valleys, randomly stopping and resting in the shade every now and again and allowing some fantastic scope views! Once again, it crossed the track road in front of us, just like the first full day, though a different male to the animal seen on our first full day (confirmed by coat markings) and it really could not have been a better end to the day! We then travelled back to the river Jandula, allowing Dave to entertain us with his deer calling skills en route!

We then spent the last hour before daylight back at the river Jandula where we hoped for an Otter sighting and waited until dark in the hope of adding Genet to our mammal list. However, it seemed our mammal luck on this trip lay wholly with Iberian Lynx and despite no Otter* or Genet sightings, we all returned happy for one final meal at Villa Matilde where we all raised a glass to team Lynx!

** Fiona returned to the river later in the evening and enjoyed a sighting of at least two Otters fishing from the bridge in torchlight!*

Saturday 10th January

After an early breakfast, we were soon packed and back on the road heading south. As the sun began to rise we were not far from Malaga and back safely at the airport in good time for our mid morning flight back to the UK with our Iberian Lynx mission accomplished!

Iberian Lynx and Spanish Ibex



Spanish Imperial Eagle, Iberian Lynx and Crested Tit



Eurasian Griffon Vulture and typical Iberian Lynx habitat



Iberian Lynx 8th Jan by tour participant Andy Stanbury



Sunset over Santuario Virgen de la Cabeza and Team Lynx!



Conservation Donation – Following the successful conclusion of this tour, a £150 donation from Wise Birding Holidays was given to Wild Watching Spain. The donation will contribute towards the work being driven by WWF and the EU Life Project to help the Iberian Lynx in an attempt to try and reverse the dramatic decline in the rabbit population, through the creation of artificial rabbit warrens in the Puertobajo Estate and surrounding area.

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WISE BIRDING HOLIDAYS LTD – SPAIN: Iberian Lynx & Eagles, Jan 2015

Wise Birding Holidays Checklist:

SPAIN: Iberian Lynx & Eagles Checklist

Tuesday 6th - Saturday 10th January 2015

#	BIRD SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	NOTES
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Recorded on the 8th only
2	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Recorded on 4 days
3	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Recorded on 3 days
4	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	A single bird near Andujar
5	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Recorded on 2 days
6	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	An unseasonal flock of 100+ birds near Cordoba was a surprise
7	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Recorded on 3 days with max counts of 20+
8	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Recorded on 3 days with max counts of 4+
9	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	An immature bird was seen well on the 7th
10	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	Recorded on 3 days with excellent views of adults plus an immature on the 8th
11	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	A single bird en route to Sierra de Andujar
12	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	A single bird en route to Sierra de Andujar
13	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Two birds were seen on the 9th
14	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Recorded on 2 days
15	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	Recorded on the first day only near Malaga
16	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Recorded on 4 days
17	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
18	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Recorded on 3 days

#	BIRD SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	NOTES
19	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	Heard on the 7th and the 9th
20	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Recorded on 4 days with sightings during the day and night
21	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Recorded on 3 days with a max count of three birds on the 8th
22	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>	Recorded on 4 days
23	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Recorded on 3 days
24	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Recorded en route to the Sierra de Andujar
25	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	A small group of 3 birds were seen whilst n the Puertobajo Estate
26	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	A group of five birds were seen by Andy on the 9th
27	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Recorded on 3 days
28	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Recorded on 2 days
29	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Recorded on 4 days
30	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Recorded on 2 days
31	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Recorded on the 8th only
32	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Recorded on 4 days
33	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Recorded on 4 days
34	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	Recorded on 2 days
35	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Recorded on 4 days
36	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
37	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Recorded on 4 days
38	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Recorded on 2 days with a max count of 3+ birds on the 7th
39	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Recorded on 4 days
40	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Recorded on 4 days
41	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	Recorded on 4 days

#	BIRD SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	NOTES
42	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Recorded on 3 days
43	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	Recorded on 2 days
44	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Recorded on 4 days
45	European Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Recorded on 3 days
46	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	Recorded on 3 days
47	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Recorded on 3 days
48	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Recorded on the 8th only
49	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	Recorded on 2 days
50	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	Recorded on 2 days
51	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
52	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Recorded on 4 days
53	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Recorded on the 8th only
54	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	Recorded on the 8th only
55	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Recorded on 2 days with two birds on the 8th and heard on th 9th
56	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Recorded on the 6th only
57	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Recorded on the 6th only
58	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Recorded on 4 days
59	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Recorded on 3 days
60	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Recorded on 4 days
61	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Recorded on 2 days
62	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Recorded on 2 days
63	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Recorded on 3 days
64	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Recorded on 3 days

#	BIRD SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	NOTES
65	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Recorded on the 8th only
66	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Recorded on 3 days
67	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
68	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Two birds were seen on the 8th
69	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	Recorded en route to the Sierra de Andujar
70	Monk Parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>	Seen on the outskirts of Malaga whilst leaving the airport on the 6th
#	MAMMAL SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	NOTES
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>	Recorded on all 4 days involving a minimum of three different animals
2	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>	A group of five animals were seen well on the 7th
3	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Seen daily
4	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	Seen daily
5	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Recorded on 3 days
6	Otter	<i>Lutre lutre</i>	Fiona made a return visit to the river Jandula and saw 2 animals on the 8th
7	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Seen daily

#	BUTTERFLIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	NOTES
1	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	Recorded on 2 days
2	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>	Recorded on 2 days
3	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	Recorded on the 9th only
4	Blue sp	-	Recorded on the 9th only

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