

Wise Birding Holidays

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Trip Report

SIERRA DE ANDUJAR, SPAIN:

Iberian Lynx, Cranes, Eagles & Vultures

Saturday 24th - Wednesday 28th November 2012



Tour Participants: Kevin Bryan, Susan French & Andrew Stanbury

Leader: Chris Townend

HIGHLIGHTS OF TRIP

Iberian Lynx: Two excellent sightings of two different animals on days 2 and 4, each animal watched for at least 10-15 minutes at ranges of around 300 - 400M in telescopes.

Spanish Ibex: At least five animals seen very well over two days, including an adult male.

Mouflon: A group of 10+ animals seen very well on one day.

Common Crane: Great views of at least 200+ birds at Laguna Fuente de la Piedra.

Spanish Imperial Eagle: Excellent views of adult birds on two days.

Golden Eagle: Excellent views of three birds (adults and immature) on two days.



Our first Iberian Lynx sighting

See videos: www.wisebirding.co.uk/wise-birding-holidays-bird-mammal-videos

Saturday 24th November

We all met at a pleasantly sunny Malaga airport in the morning and transferred to our vehicle and before too long we were heading north towards our first stop, Laguna Fuente de la Piedra. Only a 50 minute drive from Malaga airport and famous for its resident population of **Greater Flamingos** and wintering **Common Cranes**!

Once at this huge lake, we were soon driving the quiet tracks surrounding the lake in search of our main target. After scanning a number of newly ploughed arable fields we found the first of many **Crested Larks**, a number of small **Corn Bunting** flocks and a rather smart **Southern Grey Shrike** posing on top of a telegraph pole. We slowly continued along the dirt track scanning every few hundred metres until Chris picked up a flock of 30+ **Common Cranes** flying. Everyone was soon on them and we followed them to a ploughed field where they dropped out of view behind an Olive grove! We continued, happy with the views, but everyone felt a bit cheated at such a brief view. Another stop a bit further along the road produced our first views of a huge flock of **Greater Flamingos** feeding in a tight flock in the centre of the lake. The light was perfect allowing the beautiful colours to be appreciated. Birds strutted around continually head turning with birds flicking out their wings in full in true poser fashion! A couple of **Stone Curlew** then flushed from a nearby field giving good flight views and Kevin found a day roosting **Little Owl** on a derelict building. Other birds in the area included a cracking male **Black Redstart**, **Serin** and a female **Marsh Harrier** hunting the edge of the lake. Chris then decided to return along the same route in the hope that the **Common Cranes** may have settled in a more visible area and we were in luck, as a group of around 40 birds fed just a couple of hundred metres from our vehicle. Once everyone was happy, we then slowly headed back to the visitor centre for lunch, but en route sharp-eyed Sue spotted a much more sizable group of **Common Cranes** feeding in full view. We took time to enjoy excellent scope views of at least 150+ birds including numerous family groups.

Once at the visitor centre we took a short stroll where we picked up some of the commoner species such as **Sardinian Warbler**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Cattle Egret**, **Cetti's Warbler** and brief **Spoonbill** flying over before we headed to a high point for lunch. Here we enjoyed more views of **Greater Flamingos**, a group of 12 **Avocet** and once again Sue's sharp eyes revealed a lone **Glossy Ibis** giving excellent flight views as it headed towards us. After a satisfying picnic lunch, we were back on the road and heading towards Andujar, keen to try our first attempt to find an **Iberian Lynx**!

We arrived at the main viewing area at around 5pm, giving us the last hour and a half of daylight to scan the numerous boulders, Rosemary bushes and scrub. It was a vast area to watch, but we continued watching until dusk with no luck. We did however, have a bonus in the form of a huge **Eurasian Eagle Owl** as it glided over our heads and it was a fitting end to a great day. We then took a short drive to our rural Villa accommodation and enjoyed a lovely warm fire and some great local food.

Sunday 25th November

This morning we enjoyed a very hearty breakfast before getting on the road and to our main Lynx viewing area arriving at first light, which was around 07.45hrs. We spread out across a number of good viewpoints and remained in radio contact. It was pleasantly mild this morning and the weather was on our side with clear skies and very little wind. Now it was just a case of remaining focused and scanning. During the morning we were distracted by the numerous **Azure-winged Magpies** moving around

in noisy groups and a small group of calling **Red-billed Chough**. Just before 10am, everyone re-grouped for a much needed cup of coffee from the back of our vehicle to recharge the battery and continue with our quest. Then at around 10.20am we were watching our first **Iberian Lynx**! It was sitting below us, in one of the valleys that we had been watching. The animal had its back to us and was partly obscured by some scrub and within seconds everyone was enjoying great scope views of its black and white patterned back of ears and its diagnostic black ear tufts! We continued to watch the animal as it began washing itself and gave some tantalising glimpses of its face and long white beard and then eventually it gave a good long stare in our direction. This was probably the most memorable view as everyone took time to look into its beautiful green eyes and see the full face. After a few more minutes of watching the animal, it decided to move and started to slowly walk up the valley through the mass of bushes. Here we were able to appreciate the bulk of the animal and the finer details of the coat markings of this fairly large male. It then broke out into a short run and we could clearly see the short "bob" tail with its black tip as if dipped in ink. It then finally disappeared over the top of the valley and vanished. It was a great fifteen minute encounter and one that everyone was made up with as the smiles all round confirmed!

. [The **Iberian Lynx** (*Lynx pardinus*) occurs only in isolated pockets of Spain and is almost extinct in Portugal. The latest survey results from Spain suggest a minimum of 84 and a maximum of 143 adults surviving in two breeding populations: in the Coto Doñana and near Andújar in the eastern Sierra Morena. The Iberian lynx is a specialised feeder, with rabbits accounting for 80-100 per cent of its diet.]

With the pressure off, we all relaxed and enjoyed the sunshine and decided to spend a short time further along the track to see if we could relocate the animal, but it soon became apparent that the animal was long gone. We then headed down to the dam where we looked for bats in a nearby tunnel. Whilst carefully searching with a less intrusive red light we managed to find a number of roosting bats that consisted of both **Greater Mouse-eared Bat** and **Schreiber's Bat**. The sun was shining and it was pleasantly warm so we decided to have lunch by the dam where we enjoyed some excellent views of **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstart**, **Crag Martin** and two wonderful **Golden Eagles** that performed exceptionally. We were also treated to some good views of both **Black and Griffon Vultures** as they too enjoyed the warm sunshine and associated thermals. It was a great feeling knowing that the Iberian Lynx was "in the bag" on our first full day and we took a short walk after lunch where yet again, Sue's sharp eyes led us all to a group three **Spanish Ibex**, a female and two youngsters. [The **Spanish Ibex** (*Capra pyrenaica*) historically occurred throughout the Iberian peninsula, including southwest France, Spain, Andorra, and Portugal (Grubb, 2005). It is, however, extinct in the northern part of its range (including in France and Andorra), and no longer occurs in the Pyrenees. It occurs in rocky habitats. Even small rocky patches in arable farmland and on the coast may be used, although cliffs and screes interspersed with scrub or pine trees are the most typical habitats.] We watched as this family group impressively negotiated the scree slope and then Kevin alerted us to a pair of very smart **Rock Buntings** feeding just beneath us.

We spent the rest of the afternoon exploring other areas and enjoying some good views of **Woodlark**, **Cirl Bunting** and the *Iberian race* **Green Woodpecker** as well as some very impressive stag **Red Deer** and the odd **Fallow Deer**. The final couple of hours of the day were spent at another site for **Iberian Lynx** though we had no luck here, but a number of emerging bats that included **Daubenton's Bat** were a pleasant surprise. Once dark, we spent a little time spotlighting an area for **Large-spotted Genet**, but we had to make do with another great meal at our accommodation instead. Here, we reflected on the fantastic **Iberian Lynx** sighting we had seen earlier in the day and celebrated with a well earned beer!

Monday 26th November

Today took the same form as yesterday and once again, we were out on the road arriving at the main Lynx watching area by dawn. Just before we arrived, a **Northern Goshawk** flew low in front of the vehicle before disappearing behind the nearby hillside. It was a little colder today and before long, we all took our positions and continued with scanning for another view of the bearded cat! A **Spanish Imperial Eagle** soon woke everyone up as Chris called it on the radio, presumably a bird leaving its roost. It flapped away and over everyone's head, but the light was still a little dim to see any great detail, though very nice all the same! Once again, **Azure-winged Magpies** were never far away and the odd **Dartford Warbler** showed itself, playing hide and seek in the Rosemary bushes. Then Chris alerted everyone to a group of around 10+ **Mouflon** that appeared on the opposite valley, allowing some excellent scope views of these "giant" sheep. The buff, dark brown and white blotched coats were very clear in the morning sunshine along with the huge curled horns. The mammal theme continued as Kevin spotted a group of **Wild Boar** in the valley below him and we were treated to a total of 16 animals from large males to tiny youngsters; an amazing site as they worked their way along the valley bottom. By mid morning, we had still not managed to find an Iberian Lynx but the bird distractions continued with a male **Hen Harrier** gliding high over the site found by Andy and then a fine male **Blue Rock Thrush** and cracking **Firecrest**, both much appreciated by Sue. A perched **Spanish Imperial Eagle** also gave some good scope views allowing its white forewing and golden head markings to be clearly seen.

After another well earned coffee break back at our vehicle, the weather deteriorated a little so we took a slow drive through more suitable Lynx habitat. Here we enjoyed some great views of more **Woodlark** and **Cirl Bunting** and a very obliging **Little Owl** perched on top of a rock. The Spanish fighting Bulls looked a little miserable in the dreary weather and we continued scanning various suitable rocks and overhangs where an Iberian Lynx could shelter from the rain! We then decided to return to the main Lynx viewing area in the hope that the rain might abate, though we realised there would be no gain without a little pain! Everyone soon realised just how lucky we had been having our first sighting so early in the trip. During the final hour of light, the rain abated a little and our hopes were raised of a Lynx sighting, but despite our best efforts, we failed to find another Lynx and we headed back to the very welcome warm fire and great food at our Villa, taking in a **Natterjack Toad** on the road en route!

Tuesday 27th November

Once again, after some very welcome coffee, we were out again and returning to our viewpoints. As dawn broke, it became apparent the weather from yesterday had passed and we were hopefully in for another good day of weather. We adopted our usual drill of scanning from various viewpoints but remaining in radio and visual contact. The **Azure-winged Magpies** once again greeted us all and both **Dartford** and **Sardinian Warblers** rattled and sang around us. Then, just like the first day, we had a coffee at around 10am and shortly after we were watching our second **Iberian Lynx** of the trip! This time the animal was sat in a different valley tucked in close to a bush and appeared to be dozing. It was face on, showing off what seemed to be a slightly less formed beard and everyone was smiling once again as we were all treated to excellent scope views. Once again, it was a fairly relaxed affair with the animal sat tight, but then after around 15 minutes, it literally "sprang" into action as it attempted to ambush a nearby rabbit, but failed. This was clearly all too exhausting and the animal then chose to walk a little way and then have another rest as it lay in the sunshine and rolled over having a good scratch – simply brilliant! After a little while the animal was seen very briefly again by other Lynx watchers and it appeared to be heading towards the valley where we had our very first encounter. We gave it a little more time and tried a few different angles and after an hour or so we headed to the end of the valley to have lunch. These cats are simply the masters of disappearing into thin air! Whilst having lunch we were treated to a group of 11 **Common Cranes** bugling overhead as they drifted south and it was already another great day!

After lunch we decided to return to the dam and check an area for bats again with the same species found; **Greater Mouse-eared Bat** and **Schreiber's Bat**. However, the real highlight was a second view of **Spanish Ibex**, but this time there were five animals including a fantastic adult male, complete with huge horns! It was a great sighting and not a particularly easy mammal to find in this region of Spain. Feeling pleased with ourselves, we returned to the "Lynx hotspot" for the final couple of hours of the day. The wind had strengthened and the birds of prey were certainly taking advantage of it, as we were treated to some excellent views of both **Black and Griffon Vultures** in the early evening light. Then a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** appeared and all three birds were visible in the sky at one time! We continued scanning for Lynx until the sun set behind the prominent Virgen de la Cabeza church and despite no other sightings, it had definitely been another day to remember!

Wednesday 28th November

Our final morning allowed just enough time to spend the first hour and a half of the morning by the river Jandula. Visibility was poor due to some early morning fog, but we still managed to pick up some new bird species for the trip. In particular, **Short-toed Treecreeper** and a couple of cracking **Crested Tits**, but probably the highlight was a flock of at least 20+ **Hawfinch** that showed very well before it was time for us to head back to Malaga! The return journey to the airport was fairly uneventful, other than a group of 4 **White Storks** and an unseasonal group of **Black Kites**. 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!

Conservation Donation – Following the successful conclusion of this tour, a £125 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>



Common Cranes – Laguna Fuente de Piedra



Greater Flamingos – Laguna Fuente de la Piedra



1st Iberian Lynx sighting



2nd Iberian Lynx sighting



Black Vulture



Azure-winged Magpies



Male Spanish Ibex



Mouflon



Dartford Warbler



Male Sardinian Warbler



Iberian Lynx – Day 2



Watching Iberian Lynx!

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BIRD LIST for Iberian Lynx & Eagles, 24-28 November 2012

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Laguna Fuente de la Piedra (LFP)
2	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	LFP
3	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	LFP
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	LFP
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	LFP
6	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	LFP
7	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Daily around La Lancha area (LL)
8	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	LFP
9	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	LFP & La Lancha Dam (LLD)
10	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	A single bird at LFP
11	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	LFP & Rio Jandula river (RJ)
12	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	4 birds en route to airport
13	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	A single bird at LFP
14	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	A single bird at LFP
15	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	A few hundred birds at LFP
16	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	A number of late/wintering birds
17	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	A male high over LL
18	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Two or three birds LL
19	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Ones and twos LL
20	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	A female at LFP
21	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Singles at LL
22	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	A single female LL
23	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Singles en route to LL
24	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	1-2 adults LL on 2 days
25	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Total of 2 adults and an 1imm
26	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Recorded on 2 days
27	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	LFP
28	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	LFP and RJ
29	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	200+ LFP and 11 birds over LL
30	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	LFP
31	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	12 birds LFP
32	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedipnemos</i>	2 birds LFP
33	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	LFP and en route to airport
34	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	LFP and en route to airport
35	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	LFP
36	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	LFP and en route to airport
37	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Recorded on 3 days
38	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	2 birds over LL on 2 days
39	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Daily sightings

BIRD LIST continued

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
40	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Four out of five days
41	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	LFP and LL day and night views
42	Eurasian Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	A single bird at dusk near LL
43	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Heard only RJ
44	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Max. count 4 - Recorded on 3 days
45	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>	Daily views of this distinct race
46	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Recorded on 2 days
47	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Travelling to and from airport
48	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	Groups of 2-3 en route to LL
49	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Daily sightings
50	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	LFP only
51	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	LFP only
52	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Recorded on 4 days
53	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Daily sightings
54	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	RJ only
55	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	One day at LL
56	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Daily sightings
57	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Daily sightings
58	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	Recorded at LFP and LL
59	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Recorded on 4 days – some males
60	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Daily sightings
61	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Recorded on 4 days
62	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
63	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	LFP only
64	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Recorded on 4 days
65	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Recorded daily
66	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	Recorded daily at LL
67	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Recorded daily
68	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	Recorded on 2 days LL and RJ
69	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
70	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Recorded on 4 days
71	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Recorded daily
72	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	Recorded on 3 days – 2 birds at RJ
73	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	Three birds RJ
74	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	Recorded on 4 days
75	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Recorded on 3 days
76	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	Recorded daily
77	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Recorded daily

BIRD LIST continued

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
78	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Up to 5 birds at LL on 2 days
79	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	LFP only
80	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Recorded on one day
81	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Recorded daily
82	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Recorded on 2 days
83	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	Recorded on 2 days at RJ
84	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Recorded on 3 days
85	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Recorded on 3 days
86	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Recorded on 3 days
87	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	2 birds over LL
88	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	LFP only
89	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Recorded on 3 days – 20+ at RJ
90	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	Singles on 2 days en route to LL
91	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Recorded on 3 days
92	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	Recorded on 3 days

Mammal and Reptile List

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>	Two animals on 2 different days
2	Mouflon	<i>Ovis musimon</i>	10+ animals seen from LL
3	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>	A group of 3 and then 5 incl. a male
4	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Recorded daily
5	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	3 animals en route to LFP
6	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	Recorded on 4 days
7	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Recorded on 3 days – 16 at LL
8	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Recorded daily
9	Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	Recorded on 2 days
10	Greater Mouse-eared Bat	<i>Myotis myotis</i>	Single animal at roost on 2 days
11	Schreiber's Bat	<i>Miniopterus schreibersii</i>	Group of 8+ at roost on 2 days
12	Daubenton's Bat	<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>	A few emerging t dusk RJ
13	Natterjack Toad	<i>Epidalea calamita</i>	A single on road en route to Villa
	Mouse sp	-	Animal unidentified at LFP

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