

Tour Report

Spain – Iberian Lynx Quest

19 - 26 October 2019

Long-tailed tit



Spanish imperial eagle



Iberian lynx cub & male



Northern goshawk juvenile



Compiled by John L. Muddeman

Tour Leader: John Muddeman & Sergio Asián González with 10 participants.

When we first launched this trip to look for Iberian lynx in Andújar and Doñana (the last two bastions of this species in the wild) there were only around 400 free-living individuals. Today, thanks to fantastic captive breeding and reintroduction schemes, there are almost 700 individuals in areas ranging from the Algarve in southern Portugal and Extremadura in western Spain, to a huge area north-east of Andújar and southern Castilla La Mancha. Last year, thankfully, this resulted in the species being moved from the category of Critically Endangered down to Endangered. Though one would think this has made it easier to see the species, the lynx remains generally elusive! Whilst overall numbers in the Andújar and Doñana areas have both increased, the density has not increased nearly as much as their overall distribution. Nevertheless, there is a good chance of an encounter, given patience and some good luck!

Despite close similarities in their flora and vegetation structures, Andújar and Doñana are about as visually different as could possibly be imagined. Doñana is almost completely flat and the most impressive areas in Andújar encompass low mountain and valley scenery. Both regions have or have been centres for large game hunting, resulting in the Iberian lynx and their principle prey, the European rabbit, being left largely alone. By coincidence both these areas host two of Spain's largest religious festivals, at El Rocio and Andújar (these areas are best avoided during festival times, due to the huge numbers attending!). So, would we see Iberian lynx on our travels?

Day 1: Arrive Seville & transfer to Andújar

Saturday 19 October 2019

Weather: Warm & quite sunny with broken cloud; 24°C. Moderate rain for several hours overnight

Our respective morning flights from Madrid and London arrived on time, allowing me to get the minibus ready early for a quick getaway. With Sergio also arriving early, we were quickly away. The 2.5-hour drive was punctuated by two main stops, first for a tasty snack lunch at a motorway restaurant and second in the town of Andújar itself, at a supermarket where we stocked up on goodies for our picnic lunches for the next two days. The journey was further enlivened by several bird sightings along the way, including western cattle egrets, red kites and a couple of common buzzards.

We climbed and wound our way up the remaining 14 kilometres to our accommodation close to the edge of the Andújar Natural Park. After decanting into our respective rooms for the next three nights we readjusted for a short late afternoon session (as an introduction to the area) down beside the Jándula River. The impressive valley, carved over eons out of the granite bedrock, was enjoyed as we descended the rounded moss-covered boulders. The sometimes dense, sometimes very scattered, stone pine, western holm oak and narrow-leaved ash trees, plus abundant bushes of turpentine tree, made a fine sight, even if the open ground and pastures were still parched after the summer drought.

After noting the first of several groups of fine Iberian magpies and our first European rabbit, we stopped at a raised viewpoint overlooking the river and a flat area resembling parkland, quickly picking up the first, and then more of the abundant, red deer in the area. A single great cormorant sat on the tip of a fallen tree

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sticking up out of the shallower than usual river, with two large Spanish terrapins basking on its lower limbs. Numerous splashes and ripples in the river upstream signalled the presence of a Eurasian otter or two, though we saw no more than a couple of tail flicks during brief surfacing moments. A stripeless tree frog or two 'creaked' from the bushes below, undoubtedly sensing the subsequent arrival of rain. A small flock of long-tailed tits, plus single European robin and Sardinian warbler called from cover nearby, while a group of around 15 mighty griffon vultures planed gently on the wind over a peak opposite.

A footbridge upstream near a small dam was also productive, with a couple of fine grey wagtails and a dapper white wagtail for good measure, a brief flash of iridescent blue from a common kingfisher speeding past underneath, some 30 great cormorants heading off downstream overhead and a Cetti's warbler 'yelling' from the riverside scrub. A few small bats were out over the river, too.

We returned to our accommodation for a short break before heading up to the restaurant, between the rain showers which had already started, for a drink followed by an impressive evening meal.

Day 2: La Lancha track, Jándula Dam & back!

Sunday 20 October 2019

Weather: Warm & quite sunny with broken cloud; 24°C. Moderate rain for several hours overnight

With the clocks not having changed yet, we started breakfast at 8am (still before sunrise and not long after the last rain shower finally stopped), leaving an hour later. The rain had really cleared the atmosphere and dusted off the landscape, whilst helping the temperature to drop to a chilly 11°C under continuous cloud cover!

We took the slow and winding drive out towards the impressive Jándula Dam, stopping quite frequently on the way whenever we saw something of interest (which was often!). Little groups and scattered individual red and fallow deer punctuated the journey, common chaffinches were audible and moving in small number throughout, as were very attractive red-legged partridge, here looking more like those in the book than many of the populations heavily altered by hybridisation with chukars for breeding and hunting purposes. A pair of common stonechats and a few crested larks fed in an area of open fields (where huge black fighting bulls are reared) were enjoyed too. We finally came out to the edge of the valley, with amazing extensive views down towards the (unseen) river and westwards across the natural park, with several square kilometres of ground extending away below us covered in predominantly western holm oak and turpentine trees, plus abundant wild rosemary and gum cistus scrub forming among the intricate network of ridges, gullies and slopes, plus random outcrops of huge and sometimes moss-covered boulders, providing wonderful Iberian lynx habitat.

We stopped and then spent the next few hours based at one or two small covered viewpoints erected beside the track, which afforded excellent views over the area, even if the chilly breeze and overcast conditions were more persistent, and colder, than we'd anticipated! The thermals, gloves and hats were put to good use. Iberian green woodpeckers called regularly from below us, though were tricky to spot, and a single calling little owl remained unseen. Not so the abundant Eurasian magpies, Iberian magpies and

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long-tailed tits, nor, as the morning progressed, the huge cinereous and griffon vultures which were using the ridge behind us for updrafts to aid them in their near effortless flight as they flew around, first to dry off after the wet night, and secondly to look for carrion. A bit of a purple patch ensued shortly afterwards, with a juvenile northern goshawk being noted hunting amongst the low scrub well down on the valley slopes below us, though fortunately, after doing something of a disappearing act just as we got the first scopes trained on it, it just as mysteriously reappeared, circling slowly up off to one side before crossing in front and then circling up again over the slopes to our left before eventually gaining enough height to cruise off over a distant ridge. A pair of stunning adult Spanish imperial eagles then also appeared, with one coming close overhead and giving fabulous views, the leading edge of its wings shining brilliant white in some welcome sunshine. A pair of common ravens glided past to add variety and a furtive Dartford warbler scolded us from some bushes just above before finally dashing across the track and down the slope to safety. Not a bad morning!!

The cold was finally setting in a bit, so we continued, heading down to the dam. Fishermen were out on the (terribly low) reservoir in their duck suits, while a few real ones in the form of a few mallard were below the dam and avoiding them. A nice little group of Eurasian crag martins hawked overhead as we crossed the dam, with at least one common house martin still present as well, while a very flighty male blue rock thrush appeared briefly a couple of times to add a splash of colour to the proceedings. We continued to a tunnel, where a few minutes were spent looking at a few roosting bats, though a hasty exit was needed as a car pulling a small boat came through and Sergio spotted and showed a fine golden eagle way off over a ridge beyond the reservoir to one or two of the group.

Walking back we detoured to get better views of some of the immense area of rocks and cliffs on the opposite side of the valley, and came up trumps with a western osprey moving south high overhead and two groups of Spanish ibex, including an excited young male keeping close to a female and her well grown kid. Lunch was calling (loudly, for some!), so we got out the bread, cheese, cold meats, lettuce, tomatoes and various other goodies for a lovely picnic in a slightly more sheltered spot.

Somewhat restored, we headed back to the main area for another lynx vigil, noting plenty of vultures again plus the Spanish imperial eagles, though this time we had split into two groups to cover more ground, with one noting a couple of high circling golden eagles as well.

With little sign of likely movement in the area, we started back with enough time for a good look at a spot where a lynx had been seen occasionally over the previous week, stopping as usual to look at close red and fallow deer, plus a couple of fine little owls out under trees in the 'dehesa'. Suddenly, as Sergio's van was disappearing around a corner in front, so I spotted a large male Iberian lynx walking out across an open area of grass off to one side. The dull light meant it was more difficult to see than expected, and in the confusion, as I tried to contact Sergio by walkie talkie and then by mobile (but there was no coverage), at least one of the group hadn't been able to see it before it walked off over a little rise. We pulled forward and were stunned to see not one, but three Iberian lynx in a shallow gully: a large male, a sprightly youngster and its presumed mother. The little group of cats was walking slowly up and away under the trees and towards a ridge. Everyone leapt out of the bus to watch before I headed off up the track to retrieve Sergio and the rest of the group.

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We returned to find a gathering of people who'd appeared from nowhere. Four motorists, two 4WDs and a few more were all present and either looking, or wondering what was going on, but the cats had gone. We spent another hour or so searching the same site and nearby, just hoping they'd reappear, but despite seeing a tremendous herd of nearly 50 mouflon, dozens of red deer, including some superb stags, and plenty of skittish fallow deer, we were out of luck. A remarkable piped chorus of Iberian midwife toads at one spot along a small stream line was wonderful to hear though, and it was remarkable to think that they'd possibly been underground for probably the best part of a year (especially given the conditions last winter and this year's drought).

We returned in good spirits, especially since this was just the first full day of the tour and firmly crossed our fingers for the following morning.

Day 3: La Lancha track, midday break & Baños de la Encina track

Monday 21 October 2019

Weather: Chilly (8.5°C) start, but feeling warm in still sunny conditions; some broken cloud in the afternoon; max. 18°C

Today we had a totally different start to the day, with cold, bright sunny skies and thick fog near our accommodation enveloping us in an ethereal shroud for part of the journey out. The fog slid gently away down the valley, however, leaving us with beautiful and clear views over the pleated landscape we'd scoured the day before; given the near total absence of a breeze, it felt warm in the sun.

Interestingly, there was a lot less general activity than the day before, even though we were kept busy with birds and a few other animals on the drive out, with a little owl, woodlark and a Eurasian hoopoe or two between us, though it was rather quiet once out in the watching area as we scoured for cats. The pair of Spanish imperial eagles reappeared, though right at the end, following hot on the heels of plenty of Eurasian griffon and a few cinereous vultures, plus a Eurasian sparrowhawk for some, while a couple of Iberian green woodpeckers also showed, and the numerous Iberian and Eurasian magpies kept us entertained, even if they hardly ever burst out into their alarm calls, which could have heralded the presence of lynx. A different male blue rock thrush from the day before entertained half the group, with passing Eurasian crag martins, and a few small birds in the bushes, including the lovely grey-backed and dark headed local race of the abundant long-tailed tits, delighted at regular intervals. A couple of Dartford and Sardinian warblers also appeared for a few of the group.

Lunch was taken again at our picnic viewpoint with the fantastic views our main distraction, before we decided to change location and check another area in the middle and late afternoon. The drive out was also quite quiet, though a corn bunting and common stonechat or two livened it up, along with one or two stag red deer and the usual skittish fallow deer. We stopped with a fine view over steep rocky slopes leading down to some large open fields below with scattered western holm oaks. This area was alive with rabbits a couple of years ago, but the drought had left it parched under the trees now. A pool in an open field was attracting regular visits from deer, but we kept scanning. Searching for lynx takes patience, and of course it was shortly after we'd started to break up into little groups and take short walks along the track that

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Sergio's voice crackled over the walkie-talkie: 'Tengo un lince'. I rounded up a couple of other wanderers and we returned as quickly as possible to the main group, the telescopes all pointing in the same direction. There was some confusion, with some saying the cat had been for a drink at an old bath placed strategically as a drinking trough in the corner of a field, while Sergio noted it had attacked a pigeon which was in a cage half hidden behind some bushes. What?! There was no sign of the animal, but at least we could indeed see a mottled largely white pigeon in a cage. I changed angle slightly and there was a brown spotted 'lump' in the grass to the left. I tried again a little further on and yes, it was clearly the lynx, still just a few metres from the cage. Despite initial difficulties in picking it out, we finally all got views of it, despite the distance and so thankfully got all the groups' members onto an Iberian lynx. Hooray! To our delight, the lynx also returned to sit and watch the pigeon from both behind and in front of the cage, which is when we realised that it was a trap, with hidden camera, precisely for taking images of lynx attracted to the pigeon (which was perfectly safe inside!).

The animal failed to move more though and as the light started to dip, so we started the drive back just before dusk. Indeed, the falling light levels had triggered lots of other animals to appear, and we stopped frequently along the track as herds of red and fallow deer plus a few mouflon were also out, and a very large wild boar was rooting around at the base of the fence beside the track, which gave us terrific views. The red skyline further on as we progressed was a treat and we arrived back in good time for another drink followed by a hearty dinner at our accommodation, naturally with a broad smile on all our faces.

Day 4: El Encinarejo (pre-breakfast); transfer to El Rocío, Raya Real

Tuesday 22 October 2019

Weather: Chilly, damp & overcast (8.5°C) Andújar area; quite sunny with light cloud after Córdoba; max. 19°C.

It was a chilly, damp and overcast start in the Andújar area, though we had a fun start watching birds down at the dam along the El Encinarejo track. This was richer than during our first visit there, with the river and scrubby edges to its otherwise rocky banks providing excellent habitat for a number of small birds. Looking down we enjoyed good views of grey and white wagtails, black redstarts, European robins, Eurasian wren, heard a singing cirl bunting, watched the to-ings and fro-ings of a couple of common chiffchaffs and a Cetti's warbler, while one of the biggest surprises was when one of the group called out 'Eurasian wryneck!' Despite us all trying to pick it out in a small willow bush directly below us, it soon seemed futile, with nothing to be seen, and doubts naturally crept in when various other birds, including several flighty Eurasian blackcaps were spotted diving in and out of the same bush. Indeed, we'd basically given up looking for it and were concentrating on one or two of the small number of rock sparrows present on wires and dead trees nearby when it suddenly reappeared, flying back across from the far side before diving into the same willow, then nipping across to a small bramble, where it finally showed for a lucky view before again dropping out of sight and this time for good. We headed back for a slightly later breakfast than usual, then after half an hour to finalise packing, shared the luggage between the two vans and headed off, with two monk parakeets flying off from roadside trees a surprise for the first bus.

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The cloud we'd been under early in the morning kept to the north-west, bringing us out into sun, and much better temperatures, though not until we'd passed a disturbingly thick cloud of smog produced from a single Gemasolar thermosolar plant, having to burn fuel in order to keep up output in the cloudy conditions. The atmospheric impact was hugely greater than solar plants and solar towers. These gather sunlight reflected off an array of mirrors below and we saw some later en route, showing how Spain is beginning to harvest one of its most abundant free energy sources, the sun, albeit to the benefit of large corporations.

A few birds were noted on the way, especially from the second bus where Colin and I noted a couple of black-winged and almost a dozen red kites, plenty of common buzzards and other commoner species as we progressed; at least ten painted lady butterflies brightened up a flower bed bordering the car park where we took a quiet drinks break before reaching Seville. Since we couldn't stop for a small group of black-winged stilts along a drainage channel beside the ring road, the rest of the route was only punctuated again by a lunch break after Seville, which comprised a spread of local dishes to dip into and try, before reaching El Rocío, our destination for the rest of the tour.

After a quick check-in and having settled into the rooms, the remainder of the afternoon was spent on a drive into the national park with a local guide in a private 4WD capable of traversing the soft sand abundant along the northern edge of the reserve and coinciding with the best area for Iberian lynx within the Doñana protected area. The mixture of open seasonal grassland amongst stone pine forest mixed with denser mixed tree and bush cover in the moister areas is perfect for rabbits, and so for the lynx too. The drought had led to the grassland areas being incredibly flat and open, meaning it was easier to search in this completely flat landscape, but also less varied than usual due to a lack of autumn rains.

Plenty of red-legged partridge and a few European rabbits were active, while out on the edge of the forest a juvenile Spanish imperial eagle sat distantly on a treetop and a couple of Iberian grey shrikes were noted. Two whinchats showed how late certain migrants can hang around in this part of Europe. Plenty of red and a few fallow deer were present, otherwise it was rather quiet and we returned in good time to enjoy a drink before our first dinner in Doñana.

Day 5: Raya Real-La Escupidera, Dehesa de Abajo rice fields & Aznalcázar

Wednesday 23 October 2019

Weather: Largely cloudy & chilly until midday; moderate showers for about an hour in the afternoon; max. 18°C.

Following a slightly earlier breakfast we were out with Manolo again from just after 8.15am and again cruised the lovely Raya Real, the boundary between the stone pine forests of the Parque Natural to the north and the much more open and varied pastures and cork oak dominated woodlands of the Parque Nacional to the south. The ground having been flailed in the spring, the drought meant no regrowth had occurred and it was much more open than I've ever seen it before. A few European rabbits and red-legged partridges seemed to be acting as bait for any possible lynx, though the numerous red deer to the south were less likely targets.

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A couple of pools from recent rain were a magnet for birds at one point, with numerous Iberian magpies the most colourful, but two or three hawfinches coming down to drink the most noteworthy. Just before and after passing the national park boundary gate out on the open (dry) marsh, we were very aware of the surprisingly large number of small birds present. 120 corn buntings, numerous feisty common stonechats, a black redstart, small flocks of European serin, common linnet and European goldfinches, a few fly-over Eurasian skylarks and a late northern wheatear were all welcome, though a few raptors tried to steal the show. A female and then later adult male hen harrier, red kite, two western marsh harriers, including a very unusual partially melanistic male, common kestrel and black-winged kite were all quite quickly noted, with a shy little owl in some stumps sadly not hanging around to show itself for most of the group. Some 65 griffon vultures and a single cinereous vulture were sitting way out over the nearly bare grassland, while a juvenile Spanish imperial eagle sitting in a stork's nest at the top of a cork oak was a good find, only bettered by another flying from the other side. Three Eurasian stone-curlews in flight, twice, were an excellent find.

Given the surprisingly chilly conditions (thanks mainly to a notable breeze), we finally pulled ourselves away and headed back into the forest. This time we headed towards the Palacio del Rey, though we diverted off through the forest and went out to the edge of the open marsh. Another late migrant in the form of a strange-looking common redstart sat in a bush slightly behind us at one point, though a hovering short-toed snake eagle not long after was probably going to stay and become a wintering bird. The return drive was uneventful in the now warmer and sunnier conditions.

Our tasty picnic lunch was finally taken just outside the front of the hotel after we'd kindly been given permission to move a table from the bar, so thankfully remaining much warmer than out at the windy 'lake' edge and under suddenly increasing and threatening-looking cloud.

We left again at 4pm, this time in our own vehicles, and after refuelling Sergio's and then checking tyre pressures on mine, we were off again, this time to the northern marshes, and especially rice fields, near the Dehesa de Abajo. This was phenomenal for birds, with thousands present in the harvested rice fields, including four black storks, thousands of glossy ibis, several hundred greater flamingos, our first Eurasian spoonbills, a couple of great egrets for a lucky couple, hovering common kestrel and black-winged kite, thousands of black-headed and lesser black-backed gulls, many dozen white storks and a smattering of waders, including dapper black-winged stilts and rather less showy common greenshanks, plus a few others. A flock of five red-rumped swallows went over, though over the final and rather green rice fields ahead, numerous barn swallows and sand martins fed, plus another fine red-rumped swallow.

We raced on to get a chance at our final stop of the day, enjoying the end of the rain just before we arrived, and after a few hundred metres of walking, stood amongst the wild olives overlooking a large open patch of ground rich in European rabbits. Remarkably, it was also heaving in mosquitoes, making a quiet and unobtrusive watch tricky. Finally, after we'd seen a calling woodlark come close overhead and heard a pair of calling tawny owls some time later, a lovely Iberian lynx was suddenly spotted on the edge of the forest off to one side. Though enjoyed through the scopes, it soon disappeared into the bushes, so after a tense wait with the time clearly running on, Sergio and the clients took a walk round to see if it was on one of the tracks. It only showed briefly to me, however, as I waited back at the original spot, while it was clearly eying-up the group walking past it. The lynx could clearly see them, though they couldn't see it. It quickly

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went to ground under a large tree with lots of scrub and, despite waiting until it was almost too dark to see, no further sign was seen, but it had still set a new record on a Wildlife Worldwide tour, of five Iberian lynx in one trip!

We returned shortly after 9pm, late but happy after another excellent day, and headed straight into dinner.

Day 6: Odiel Estuary, Laguna del Portil & Raya Real (on foot)

Thursday 24 October 2019

Weather: Largely fine & sunny; mild to very warm; 18-24.5°C

In order to take a break from 'lynxing', we headed off towards Huelva and spent the majority of the day concentrating on birdwatching. And very rewarding it was too, especially in the mild conditions as we set off and then subsequent lovely warm sunshine in the afternoon.

The tide was rising, and was ideal by the time we reached the Odiel mid-morning. This meant that the wading birds had come up, pushed by the rising tideline, from their feeding areas into ever smaller areas until they are forced to roost in the well vegetated saltmarsh for a few hours. Indeed, we continued down towards the lower and still exposed flats first in order to see what was there, and hit the jackpot. A short walk took us out over a little footbridge over a channel, and to our delight a few bluethroats were present, including one or two quite blue-fronted males, even though they were in duller non-breeding plumage. Our first look out revealed just a few birds and higher water than I'd expected, but with the scopes and persistence, we quickly found much more. Many of the smaller gulls out on the water were slender-billed, even outnumbering the black-headed gulls also present. A flock of birds roosting on a sandy spit contained impressive Caspian, plus plenty of sandwich and a few common terns, whimbrel and lesser black-backed gulls, with already roosting grey plover and bar-tailed godwit, plus numerous Eurasian curlews, off to one side. A western osprey flew across the back, diving half-heartedly, before securing a fish and flying off with it trailed by a consort of unhappy gulls. Distant yellow-legged gulls were added to the list, while out to sea at distance, large numbers of sandwich terns and even a couple of northern gannets could be seen.

We continued, stopping periodically along the narrow road in order to search through the fine array of waders on the mudflats below us, adding dunlin, little stint, common ringed plover, a single red knot, a few bar-tailed godwit, numerous common redshank and common greenshank, plus a few ruddy turnstones too, as well as more whimbrel and Eurasian curlews. Little egrets were quite common, including a small roost containing a ghostly grey hybrid western reef egret, along with a few great egrets and Eurasian spoonbills as well. Finding that the road was still blocked for works (at least three years after they'd started!) and after unsuccessfully trying to catch a poor lesser black-backed gull fouled with fishing gear, we walked out onto the beach for a look at the very tranquil Atlantic, which also produced a surprising haul of new species. A large bulky 'gull' was actually the first of at least seven different great skuas we noted heading north-west, small numbers of northern gannets gave most of the group their first views, two small groups of gulls passing along the shoreline were Mediterranean gulls, while along the beach itself, a single Kentish plover and two very distant Eurasian oystercatchers, a very local bird here in southern Spain, put in guest appearances.

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The tide had risen markedly by the time we returned, flooding almost all the mudflats available for feeding, so we stopped briefly at the reserve's visitor centre for a comfort break, and a quick check – a couple of common sandpipers were on the river's edge. A small freshwater pool nearby held a small variety of duck, including northern shoveler, gadwall and Eurasian teal, plus a small flock of feeding and resting black-tailed godwits (unlike their saltwater-loving cousins the bar-tailed we'd seen earlier), but time was moving on and we needed lunch, so we headed into a nearby village and a local bar for a relaxing break.

Time had really run on by the time we finished, so we scooted round the corner to another freshwater lake, this time with good water levels and it was rich in birds. To our delight, a single marsh tern dipping and swooping over the surface was a juvenile white-winged tern, a very uncommon visitor to the area, with single great crested and black-necked grebes noted by one or two of the group amongst the much more numerous little grebes. A couple of distant common waxbills in emergent stems over the water, a pair of northern pintails which hid for most of the time in the bushes and even a loudly calling European crested tit behind us beside the seaside flats were welcome and sometimes surprising additions. The numerous Audouin's gulls coming in to bathe and drink amongst the yellow-legged and lesser black-backed gulls were more expected, but neither the number nor the variety of plumages was expected.

We left much later than expected, and due to popular demand from the group headed directly back to El Rocío and out to the start of the Raya Real. We walked out, some of us after noting a pied flycatcher in the adjacent trees, to take up a view at the edge of the national park, and waited. And waited, and waited, very patiently in tranquil conditions, despite the odd vehicle and horse rider passing. Though the chance of a wandering Iberian lynx was our main aim, we also enjoyed a few red-legged partridges, a furtive song thrush, a couple of European rabbits and one or two other birds, including several silent common chiffchaffs in the bushes and trees beside and over us, and a couple of hooting tawny owls as dusk descended.

We headed back for a drink before dinner and had a long checklist to go through afterwards, given the rich variety of birds enjoyed throughout the day.

Day 7: Raya Real & Palacio del Rey estate morning/evening; near Aznalcázar (evening)

Friday 25 October 2019

Weather: Largely fine & sunny with some light cloud; cool start, warming later; 13-25°C

Our last day is traditionally taken close to El Rocío, and since we've had a couple of past trips where we've only seen Iberian lynx during the last half hour of the last full day of the tour by doing this, there's sense to it. Of course, today was more of a luxury, since we'd had good views and the pressure was, thankfully, off. We once again had a slightly earlier (7.30am) breakfast and were taken out along the Raya Real. A couple of groups of wild greylag geese flew over noisily, heralding the imminent arrival of winter, even though most of the seasonally flooded saltmarsh was still dry. One wondered whether they would stay on or more to wetter sites. Relatively little was moving once again, though one of the morning's highlights was the opportunity to see three different Spanish imperial eagles, with both juveniles and adults seen and also to see how the rice fields, adjacent to the estate were a magnet for birds. A possible booted eagle perched on

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a wire was just too far away to be sure of, but the species now regularly winters in the area, and indeed well up the east coast of Spain. One that got away!

The fascinating La Garvija hunting outhouse of the Palacio del Rey provided a welcome chance of a pitstop, and in the rice fields over the fence, over 70 white storks, along with a fine flock of northern lapwings, were two of the most obvious species, though an impressively large flock of Spanish sparrows also wheeled over the uncut fields. The time flew by as we traversed the dry grasslands and forests, but gave us more time to see many of the characteristic birds of the area, including Eurasian hoopoe, woodlarks, Iberian grey shrikes, Iberian magpies and great spotted woodpecker.

Our picnic lunch, given the very warm conditions, was taken in a park in El Rocío. While little distracted us as we set it up and ate, there was a distinct pause as a couple of us suddenly heard a calling brambling. It called again, twice, before suddenly taking off from high in a Eucalyptus tree and heading off. A most unexpected surprise here.

A short break ensued before we headed off again for our last chance of lynx, meeting outside at 4.30pm, and either coming with me and the Doñana Nature guides, or with Sergio back to the site near Aznalcázar. Both groups enjoyed a very warm evening, with a fine variety of birds noted between us, though smoke from the farmers burning off the rice field stubble gave us a smoky experience near El Rocío until the wind changed a little and finally started to clear it. The most notable birds included black-winged kite, more woodlarks, a juvenile hen harrier, corn buntings and black redstarts, amongst others. Sergio though came up trumps with his group, finally spotting a sitting lynx on the edge of an open pasture as the light started to fade, though as time went on and others couldn't see it, so he realised it was a fine example of the rare 'lynxbush'. Indeed, his first ever, though it wouldn't have been mine had I seen it as well!!

We rounded off with another pre-dinner drink and lively conversation at the table and after our final call-over, headed off to our rooms to start packing!

Day 8: Transfer El Rocío to Seville (& flights home)

Saturday 26 October 2019

With different flights this year to previously, we had a last leisurely breakfast and then headed off to the airport after final packing. We all bade our farewells, with Sergio and I going our separate ways as well after an excellent tour.

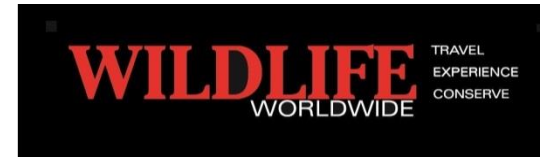
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Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	BIRDS									
1	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>					✓	✓	✓	
3	Northern shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>						✓		
4	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>						✓		
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
6	Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>						✓		
7	Eurasian teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>						✓		
8	Common pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>						✓		
9	Ferruginous duck hybrid	<i>Aythya nyroca X ?ferina</i>						✓		
10	Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>					✓			
12	Common wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
15	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>						✓		
16	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>					✓	✓		
17	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>						✓		
18	Black-necked grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>						✓		

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19	Greater flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>					✓	✓		
20	Eurasian stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>					✓			
21	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>						✓		
22	Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
23	Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>					✓		✓	
24	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>						✓		
25	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>						✓		
26	Kentish plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>						✓		
27	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>						✓		
28	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>						✓		
29	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>						✓		
30	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>						✓		
31	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>						✓		
32	Red knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>						✓		
33	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>					✓			
34	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>						✓		
35	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>						✓		
36	Little stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>						✓		
37	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					✓	✓		
38	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>						✓		
39	Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>					✓	✓		
40	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>						✓		
41	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>						✓		
42	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>					✓	✓		

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43	Slender-billed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>						✓		
44	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
45	Audouin's gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>						✓		
46	Mediterranean gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephala</i>						✓		
47	Yellow-legged gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>						✓		
48	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>					✓	✓	✓	
49	Caspian tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>						✓		
50	Sandwich tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>						✓		
51	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>						✓		
52	White-winged tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>						✓		
53	Great skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>						✓		
54	Black stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>					✓			
55	White stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
56	Northern gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>						✓		
57	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
58	Glossy ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>					✓	✓		
59	Eurasian spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>					✓	✓		
60	Western cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
61	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
62	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>					✓	✓		
63	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
64	Western reef egret hybrid	<i>Egretta garzetta X gularis</i>						✓		
65	Western osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓				✓		
66	Black-winged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	

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67	Griffon vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
68	Cinereous vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓		
69	Short-toed snake eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>					✓			
70	Spanish imperial eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
71	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓						
72	Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
73	Northern goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		✓						
74	Western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>					✓	✓	✓	
75	Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>					✓		✓	
76	Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓			✓	✓		✓	
77	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
78	Tawny owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>					✓	✓	✓	
79	Little owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
80	Eurasian hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
81	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓		
82	Eurasian wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>				✓				
83	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓			✓	✓	
84	Iberian green woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>		✓	✓	✓				
85	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
86	Monk parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>				✓				✓
87	Iberian grey shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>				✓	✓		✓	
88	Eurasian jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				✓				
89	Iberian magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
90	Eurasian magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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91	Western jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓		✓					
92	Northern raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
93	European crested tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>						✓		
94	Eurasian blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
95	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
96	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			✓			✓	✓	
97	Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>					✓	✓		
98	Crested lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
99	Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>					✓			
100	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>				✓	✓	✓		
101	Eurasian crag martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓	✓					
102	Common house martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓			✓			
103	Red-rumped swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>					✓			
104	Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
105	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
106	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			✓			✓		
107	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
108	Zitting cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>					✓	✓	✓	
109	Eurasian blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
110	Dartford warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓	✓	✓				
111	Sardinian warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
112	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				✓				
113	Eurasian nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓					
114	Spotless starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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115	Common blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
116	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>				✓	✓	✓		
117	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
118	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>						✓		
119	European pied flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>						✓		
120	Black redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
121	Common redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>					✓			
122	Blue rock thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		✓	✓					
123	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				✓				
124	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
125	Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>					✓			
126	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
127	Spanish sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>							✓	
128	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>					✓			
129	Rock sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓				
130	Common waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>					✓	✓		
131	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓		✓				
132	White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
133	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
134	Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
135	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			✓				✓	
136	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
137	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
138	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓		✓	✓		

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139	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
140	European serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
141	Corn bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
142	Cirl bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				✓				
	MAMMALS	MAMMALIA								
1	European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Bat sp	<i>Chiroptera</i>		✓✓✓		✓		✓	✓	
3	Iberian lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>		✓	✓		✓			
4	Red fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	✓					✓		
5	European otter	<i>Nutria nutria</i>	✓							
6	Wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓	✓		✓			
7	Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
8	Fallow deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
9	Spanish ibex	<i>Capra hispanica</i>		✓						
10	Mouflon	<i>Ovis orientalis</i>		✓						
	AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES	AMPHIBIA & REPTILIA								
1	Iberian midwife toad	<i>Alytes cisternasii</i>		✓						
2	Stripeless tree frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>	✓							
3	Spanish terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>	✓					✓		
4	Large psammodromus	<i>Psammodromus algirus</i>			✓					
5	Vaucher's wall lizard	<i>Podarcis vaucheri</i>					✓	✓	✓	
6	Western Montpellier snake	<i>Malpolon monspessulanus</i>							✓	
	BUTTERFLIES	LEPIDOPTERA								
1	Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>						✓		

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2	Bath white	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>			✓			✓		
3	Clouded yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>			✓				✓	
4	Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Lang's short-tailed blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>			✓					
6	Spanish brown argus	<i>Plebejus (Aricia) crameri</i>			✓					
7	Small heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			✓					
	DAMSELFLIES & DRAGONFLIES	ODONATA								
1	Emperor sp	<i>Anax sp.</i>					✓			
2	Migrant hawk	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
3	Red-veined darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>							✓	
4	Southern darter	<i>Sympetrum meridionale</i>					✓			
	OTHER INSECTS	INSECTA								
1	Blue-winged grasshopper	Acrididae sp.			✓					
2	Scarab beetle	<i>Scarabaeus (Ateuchetus) cicatricosus</i>					✓			
3	Dung beetle sp	Scarabaeidae				✓				
4	Ant sp	Formicidae				✓		✓		
	LARGER FISH									
1	Mullet sp	Mugilidae						✓		

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