

IBERIAN LYNX & BIRDS OF SOUTHERN SPAIN

TOUR REPORT 2025

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Our fourth Iberian Lynx & Birds of Southern Spain tour was another great success. It provides a wonderful break in the dreary winter many birders experience in the northern hemisphere. Spain is always lovely to visit, with its kind people, wonderful food and great infrastructure, and Andújar is definitely one of the best areas with amazing wildlife on offer. As the name suggests, our main target for this tour was a mammal, the Iberian Lynx. We had amazing views of at least two individuals, again on our first day in the region! We enjoyed prolonged views of a sleeping individual, that luckily did wake up and gave quite a show by slowly walking up towards us. The supporting cast of birds here is also phenomenal, with Spanish Imperial Eagles, plenty of Cinereous and Griffon Vultures overhead, Dartford and Sardinian Warblers singing in the scrubs and Iberian Magpies and Iberian Green Woodpeckers foraging in the dehesa. In total, we recorded 114 bird species. We also made visits along our route from Madrid to Sierra de Andujar to the steppes and wetlands at Ciudad Real. This resulted in great views of large flocks of Great and Little Bustard, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Calandra Larks, several nice Iberian Grey Shrikes, while we saw nice species of waterfowl at the wetland reserves, including White-headed Duck, but also Marbled Teal, Ferruginous Duck and Red-crested Pochards, while Western Swampheens were scurrying about and enjoyed plenty Little Grebes showing closely. Prolonged views of a Water Rail foraging out in the open was another highlight here. We ended the tour on a high note, literally, in the pine forests near Madrid, where we enjoyed Golden Eagle, Northern Raven and Coal Tits.

We began the tour at Madrid Airport, from where we quickly made our way south. En route, we already had our first encounters with the Spanish avifauna, with several Red Kites and Common Buzzards flying overhead and plenty of Spotless Starlings on the electricity wires along the road. Our first stop would be the Lagunar de Alcazar, a wetland holding interesting waterfowl. As soon as we put the scopes out, we noticed a small flock of Common Cranes that was resting inside the reservoir. In front, several groups of White-headed Ducks drifting about asleep and many Northern Shovelers, Gadwall, Mallards, Common Pochards and Eurasian Teals feeding along the reedbed shores. An Eurasian Wigeon was a surprise and nice addition to our trip list. Furthermore, many Little Grebes and Eurasian Coots were present on the lakes, about 55 Greater Flamingo, several Black-necked Grebes and among the reeds we found several Western Swampheens. Western Marsh Harriers were hunting above the reedbeds and once in a while the reeds would drain with Eurasian Coots and ducks fleeing from the hunting harriers. In the surrounding area, we found several Black Redstarts, a pair of Common Chiffchaff and a shy Cetti's Warbler. Once we had our fill of the birds here we made our way towards Castilla La Mancha. Just before we reached the castle, we were alerted to the presence of a large raptor by a small group of Iberian and Eurasian Magpies mobbing it. It turned out to be a wonderful Spanish Imperial Eagle, perched nicely. We arrived at the castle soon after and had no difficulty locating the resident pair of Black Wheaters. They were accompanied by a few Rock Sparrows, and a Blue Rock Thrush was singing from atop the castle battlements close by. A few Thekla's Larks showed very well and we also found a beautiful Eurasian Hoopoe. As light was fading, a small flock of Eurasian Crag Martins filled the sky and with that, we set out onwards to our accommodation in Sierra de Andújar, ready for some cat hunting the following day!

The next morning, we were out and about at sunrise. We had four full days here, in theory, to find the cat we were looking for. Along the road up to the viewpoint for the lynx, we made several stops to enjoy the great birds this area has to offer. Needless to say, on our first drive, we made plenty of stops! On the fields we had several Iberian and Eurasian Magpies chattering about, Common Wood Pigeons crashing through, a Eurasian Hoopoe looking for worms in the soil and a single Song Thrush hopping about. It was a very clear day, which was surprising, as quite often the valley is filled with mist. We set up at one of the viewpoints along La Lancha and thus the waiting

game began. The viewpoints have some nice vegetation next to them and they are filled with Dartford and Sardinian Warblers, singing and foraging. We encountered our first Long-tailed Tits of the local race *irbii*, European Stonechats, Common Blackbirds and European Robins. As soon as it started heating up, Griffon Vultures started taking to the sky, using the thermal updraft. We found a few Cinereous Vultures among them as well. Another highlight was a Spanish Imperial Eagle, that was perched atop one of the oak trees in the valley. Just when we were thinking about relocating, some action was happening further up the road. That usually means only one thing: lynx! We made our way up the road very quickly and it turned out to be a beautiful Iberian Lynx indeed. It was sleeping next to a rock in the shadow of a tree. A bit difficult to pick out at first, but scope views were great. After what felt like an eternity, the big cat woke up and walked straight up towards the road. We could follow it for quite a while, until it disappeared behind one of the hills. We relocated, hoping to pick it up when it would actually cross the road, but soon found out it had taken a different turn and crossed somewhere behind us. Some of us managed to catch a glimpse of a lynx bum walking up the hill. Very happy with this, we headed further up the road towards the reservoir dam, which holds the Jandula River at bay. The large structure, the hydro-electric dam, attracts Crag Martins which winter here. There was quite a large flock today and we enjoyed great views, along with a pair of Red-billed Choughs and a male Blue Rock Thrush. There were also plenty of Spanish Ibex about, with a few males among the small herds. The lake behind the dam had a handful of Great Cormorants perched along the shoreline, but not much else was about. Only a single Little Owl was present in the afternoon and it seems this species is in decline, even here now. Not much else of note was seen, as we slowly drove back to the accommodation along La Lancha.

As we were eager to get more lynx on our list, we were back at La Lancha in the morning. It was a bit quiet on the cat front, but we had great views of Red-legged Partridges throughout, with quite a few males climbing atop big boulders announcing their presence and claiming their territory. We also enjoyed walkaway views of a pair of Iberian Green Woodpeckers and found several Great Spotted Woodpeckers too. Struggling yesterday, we tried again to get some photographs of the very shy Crested Tits along the road, which went a bit better this morning, with a pair feeding along the bushes. Great Tits, a few Blue Tits and a nice flock of Long-tailed Tits were also present. Noteworthy were the numbers of Common Chiffchaffs wintering here this year. Normally, most of them congregate around the river, but we noted plenty along the road as well. this year. A few Eurasian Blackcaps were foraging in the roadside bushes too, with more of these wintering here instead of Africa. A few European Serins showed nicely as well and some were singing as well, which felt a bit early as mornings were still cold with 6-8 degrees. Definitely not spring yet! In the afternoon, we visited the Jandula river downstream, on the other side of the reservoir dam. This lower part of the river is lush and holds many wintering birds. This is also an excellent place for Eurasian Otter. A small bridge spans across the river and offers a great viewpoint for scanning the waters for any movement. No otter to be seen when we arrived there, so we birded the area and found a fine Rock Bunting, several Grey Wagtails flying up and down the river, a Common Kingfisher feeding on the fish-rich waters and most interesting were the large numbers of Common Chiffchaff picking insects from the water surface while several Cetti's Warblers were singing their heart out. We enjoyed great views of a showy Rock Bunting and a Hawfinch that flew in and perched nicely was a great bonus. Several other people were already poised, waiting for the otter to show and some of us managed to get a glimpse or two of the otter surfacing, while it was hunting for fish. A Grey Heron and some Great Cormorants were a fleeting distraction, much nicer were the flock of Iberian Magpies that crossed the river and flew overhead. One after the other made the crossing and then our attention shifted as we found two Short-toed Treecreepers foraging and gliding among the cork oaks. We admired several singing Spotless Starlings before the sun set and enjoyed a nice dinner before setting out again for a night drive. It was quite eventful with a surprise Roe Deer walking along the road as well as several Red Deer. We spotted at the end of the road near the place the otter was seen as we've been able to spot it during the darkness sometimes. It wasn't home, but several Tawny Owls starting singing and we managed to locate at least two of these owls that gave away great views. A pair of European Rabbits running across the road finished the night for us.

After another lovely Spanish breakfast, we went back to La Lancha again, with the same goal in mind, but also to just soak in the place and its wildlife. We enjoyed more Iberian Green Woodpeckers, Red-legged Partridges, Mistle Thrushes and Iberian Magpies feeding in the morning sun. New today were a pair of Common Firecrests foraging in the same bushes with the Long-tailed, Crested and Great Tits. After this initial highlight, it became clear that it was quiet at the main area for the lynx, so we decided to spend more time near the dam and the nearby ruins. We stopped at the higher parts of the ruins first, where we obtained great views of a pair of Eurasian Nuthatches. Making our way down, we saw a few more European Greenfinches and Goldfinches, while an Eurasian Sparrowhawk bombed through the forest. When we reached the dam, it was clear that most of the Crag Martins must spend some of their time elsewhere, as we only noted four this time. The Great Cormorants and Grey Heron were still present and as it was another nice, hot, sunny day, the vultures were out in full force too with plenty of Griffon and Cinereous Vultures soaring above. As we explored the area, we suddenly noticed a clear line being drawn across the lake, as if something was swimming across. It turned out to be an Eurasian Otter! It gave us a long time

to study its behaviour, as it had caught a fish and was munching on it across from where we were. What a wonderful sight and nice for the people who missed it before. In previous visits, a Eurasian Eagle-Owl was found roosting in a crevice on the other side of the viewpoint near the dam and luckily, it was the same this year and we enjoyed good scope views! While we were watching the Eagle-Owl, a Red Fox had suddenly appeared behind us. It was a very inquisitive individual, coming up to us very close and not really shy at all. The Iberian Ibex nearby didn't really like the look of him though, and kept their distance. One minor disappointment was that we could not relocate the Alpine Accentor that was photographed near the viewpoint, but a few obliging European Serins softened the blow a bit. Just before sunset, we stopped along the road again, hoping for some more Lynx, but we had to make due with several Little Owls and a few distant Mouflon.

Our last day and we were still eager, but it had been quiet on the lynx front. Others present hadn't seen any activity either, so we were lucky that we saw them when we did! We spent the whole day at La Lancha again, but didn't see many new birds. The Eagle-Owl was still there, we had another nice encounter with a pair of Iberian Green Woodpeckers, a single Crested Tit was there today. New were a larger flock of Western House Martins that were roosting at the dam. We did some touring around to the other side of the natural reserve area and added a flock of House Sparrows to our tally. Two Meadow Pipits were a nice addition to the day list and we had large flocks of Eurasian Chaffinches here, but it turned out to be a rather uneventful day after that and we enjoyed a great last dinner at the typical local Spanish restaurant.

We had enjoyed our stay in Andújar a lot, but after one last wonderful breakfast, we made for Ciudad Real to get a change of scenery! We arrived a bit early and still had some morning fog on the steppes. The first of many Iberian Grey Shrikes were seen, but we concentrated on finding the main targets first. It didn't take long before we located a big group of majestic Great Bustards on the vast grasslands here. Getting very close was quite impossible, as they were a bit skittish. Impressive beasts, especially when they take to flight. Not soon after, we found a flock of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse on the ground that allowed for some good observation. We struggled with Black-bellied Sandgrouse this year, as the few we found definitely didn't like sitting on the ground and were very shy. The best observations were when they flew overhead. Birding these steppes was certainly very entertaining and we added loads of new birds. A large flock of Calandra Larks remained a bit distant, but we had point-blank views of Crested Larks and Corn Buntings. We also enjoyed a mixed flock of sparrows, that also included a few Eurasian Tree Sparrows amongst the Spanish Sparrows. After lunch, we located a large group of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse that had some Little Bustards in amongst them! They were quietly relaxing and sleeping, until something scared them and they took to the wing. Marsh Harriers and Red Kites patrolled the plains while several Northern Lapwings, European Golden Plovers, Spotless Starlings, White Wagtails, Common Linnets, and various other finches fed on the open ground. Several groups of Red-legged Partridges were showing a lot closer than in Andújar so we enjoyed a few photo-ops with them. In the afternoon, we decided to see if we could add some more waterfowl and passerines to the list and visited Parque Nacional de Los Tablas de Damiel. This was a great move as we added several new good species of duck. Apart from the common species, we ran into a small group of Marbled Teals resting along the bank of a small stream. Along the walkway, we added a small group of Ferruginous Ducks and plenty of Red-crested Pochards. It was an interesting area to explore, with a few White Wagtails, European Stonechats and Cetti's Warblers. A few Common Reed Buntings were nice, but the highlight was definitely a very obliging Water Rail that was foraging all out in the open. Not the rarest species per se, but to obtain views like this is quite rare! Once the rail had been absorbed back into the reeds, we made our way to the edge of the reserve where there was a nice hill with viewpoint atop. It turned out the area was a wintering area for Common Cranes and we could pick up thousands of birds in the distance with the scope, foraging between the oaks looking for acorns. A few were a bit closer and allowed for nice observation. A Hen Harrier surprised us when it came crashing through, hunting the Meadow Pipits. After the sun set completely, we headed for our comfortable hotel to escape the sudden cold that had caught us off guard. A great last dinner in a typical Spanish restaurant followed.

The last day of our journey was largely a travel day as we made our way back from Ciudad Real to Madrid. However, we weren't fully done yet. We made our way towards the mountains northwest of Madrid. It wasn't very birdy but we had a nice time with several beautiful Coal Tits, while two Northern Ravens flew past. A Golden Eagle wasn't picked up by everyone, but the scenery was quite good here. We made our way to the airport and that is where we ended the tour. Spain certainly provided for us this short tour and content with all our sightings, we headed for our overnight hotel or flight home.

BIRD OF THE TRIP

- 1st: Iberian Lynx
- 2nd: Great Bustard
- 3rd: Eurasian Otter
- 4th: Crested Tit
- 5th: Water Rail

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g., it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

The species names and taxonomy used in the bird list follows Gill, F., Donsker, D., & Rasmussen, P.(Eds). **2024. IOC World Bird List (v14.2).**

Where the subspecies seen is/are known, these are often given in parentheses at the end of the species comment.

BIRDS

- Greylag Goose *Anser anser*
- Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
- Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*
- Gadwall *Mareca strepera*
- Eurasian Wigeon *Macera penelope*
- Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
- Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*
- Marbled Teal ◊ (M Duck) *Marmaronetta angustirostris*
- Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*
- Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*
- Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*
- White-headed Duck ◊ *Oxyura leucocephala*
- Red-legged Partridge ◊ *Alectoris rufa*
- Great Bustard ◊ *Otis tarda*
- Little Bustard ◊ *Tetrax tetrax*
- Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*
- Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*
- Rock Dove (introduced) (Feral Pigeon) *Columba [livia] var_domestica*
- Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
- Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
- Water Rail ◊ *Rallus aquaticus*
- Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
- Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*
- Western Swamphen ◊ *Porphyrio porphyrio*
- Common Crane *Grus grus*
- Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
- Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*
- Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*
- Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*
- Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
- European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*
- Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
- Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
- Little Stint *Calidris minuta*
- Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
- Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
Great Egret *Ardea alba*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*
Cinereous Vulture ◊ (Monk V) *Aegypius monachus*
Spanish Imperial Eagle ◊ (Spanish E) *Aquila adalberti*
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*
Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
Red Kite *Milvus milvus*
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
Little Owl *Athene noctua*
Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo*
Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
Iberian Green Woodpecker ◊ *Picus sharpei*
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Iberian Grey Shrike ◊ *Lanius meridionalis*
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
Iberian Magpie ◊ *Cyanopica cooki*
Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*
Red-billed Chough *Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax*
Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*
Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*
Northern Raven *Corvus corax*
Coal Tit *Periparus ater*
Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*
Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*
Great Tit *Parus major*
Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Thekla's Lark ◊ *Galerida theklae*
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*
Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*
Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
Western House Martin *Delichon urbicum*
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
Sardinian Warbler ◊ *Curruca melanocephala*
Dartford Warbler ◊ *Curruca undata*
Common Firecrest ◊ *Regulus ignicapilla*
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*
Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*
Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
Spotless Starling ◊ *Sturnus unicolor*

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*
Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*
European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Bluethroat ◊ *Luscinia svecica*
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*
European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*
Black Wheatear ◊ *Oenanthe leucura*
Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
White Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] alba*
Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
Eurasian Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*
Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*
European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
European Serin *Serinus serinus*
Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*
Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*
Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

MAMMALS

Iberian Lynx ◊ *Lynx pardinus*
Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*
Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra*
Western Red Deer (Maral) *Cervus elaphus*
Common Fallow Deer *Dama dama*
Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*
Iberian Ibex (Spanish Ibex) ◊ *Capra pyrenaica*
Mouflon (introduced) *Ovis gmelii*
Iberian Hare (Granada H) ◊ *Lepus granatensis*
European Rabbit ◊ *Oryctolagus cuniculus*
House Mouse *Mus musculus*