

Iberian Lynx

15th - 21st January 2022
Led by Jon Dunn & Pau Lucio



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Day 1 – 15th January

Our group arrived smoothly and without incident (well, apart from someone picking up the wrong suitcase! A minor drama quickly and easily resolved, thankfully) and we were soon on the road, heading north inland in two spacious Mercedes people carriers from Malaga on a cloudless, still day. This promised to be just the midwinter tonic we all so desperately craved.

Bird sightings came from both vehicles – Red Kites circling the road, optimistically looking for carrion, and a flyover Hoopoe, to give a small taste of the exotic. This was, after we'd checked into our lovely, traditional stone-built Andalusian guest house, further reinforced by our first sightings of what would prove to be many Iberian Magpies. Now we really knew we were in a unique corner of Europe!

We only had an hour of daylight to play with so, after a brief stop to admire some muscular, brooding black Spanish bulls and their attendant hosts of White Wagtails, we made our way deeper into the Parque Natural de la Sierra de Andújar, joining a number of Spanish families and friends on a high road overlooking a sweeping valley in the hills – a fine vantage point from which to look for Iberian Lynx. We heard there had been multiple sightings here during the course of the day, so this boded well for our coming stay in the area, but didn't augur an early first sighting for the group.



Small parties of Red Deer were the only mammals we encountered, picking their way unobtrusively through the low scrub that blanketed the hillsides – but it was hard to keep our eyes on them as there were Crag Martins scything low overhead as the sun set and a full moon rose through the trees and up into the sky. It was time to head for the guesthouse and a delicious dinner, and to lay some plans for the next day...

Day 2 – 16th January

An early start this morning saw us leaving the hotel shortly after 7am in pitch darkness, collected by our local guides who would accompany us into a private estate during the coming two days. Fernando and Inma were friendly and, above all, knew the individual cats in whose territories we would be guests: their identities, their relationships, and above all their likely daily habits. This insight was to prove absolutely invaluable to delivering superlative sightings of these elusive, rare wraiths of the Iberian peninsula.

As dawn broke we arrived upon the estate, interrupted only by close sightings of Little Owls as we drove slowly along unmade, undulating earth tracks that took us deep into the hills. Their calls would periodically ring out all day long, but that was still to come. First, we needed to set up our observation post on a hilltop overlooking a sheltered, secluded valley bordered on one side by a steep, boulder-strewn hillside punctuated by areas of thick tree cover.

The vehicles had no sooner been parked and we'd spilled out, binoculars and telescopes at the ready, than Fernando announced he had seen our first Iberian Lynx! There, sat amongst the rocks on that adjacent hillside, was not one, nor two cats – no, we'd hit the jackpot straight away with a mother and her two well-grown cubs! The sighting lasted some 10 minutes as they gradually melted away across the hillside and over a far ridge, leaving us in a state of serious elation in their wake.

The day that followed was lynx-free, though far from uneventful. Fernando and Inma explained how the cats were most active in the hours of dawn and dusk, preferring to hunt their favoured prey, rabbits, during those crepuscular times. The height of the day would usually see them settled somewhere peaceful and out of sight. We, meanwhile, were distracted largely by the wildlife – the birding here was to prove to be excellent, not least as a succession of raptors soared over the hilltops around us. Some 40 Griffon Vultures kettled



Griffon Vulture © Jon Dunn

overhead, with sporadic sightings of Black Vulture for good measure. Eagles were represented by both Golden and Spanish Imperial, while from time to time the calls of Choughs rang from the higher crags. Closer to us, the day was punctuated by the laughing calls of Iberian Green Woodpeckers – with patience, views of these were possible – and the occasional cacophony of Little Owls. First one would call, and this would soon set off every Little Owl in the area for a few minutes raucous shouting at one another. If this all weren't enough, Thekla Larks came to dust-bathe on the tracks around us, and the surrounding trees and scrub were alive with parties

of electric blue-winged Iberian Magpies.

Jon, unable to resist a little botanising, found abundant Least Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum lusitanicum* nearby – a number of the group enjoyed 'twanging' the fertile spikes of these tiny ferns, releasing small puffs of spores – and, a little further away, a colony of Friar's Cowl *Arisarum vulgare*. The latter only he and Doug saw today, as with the afternoon closing in, we needed to stay on the hilltop if we were to enjoy the vantage point it afforded as dusk fell and, just maybe, the mother lynx and her cubs might venture into the open to hunt rabbits.

As the sun began to drop, bathing the valley in golden light, we couldn't find her or her young. That was not, however, such a terrible disappointment... as, all of a sudden, our fourth Iberian Lynx of the day made himself known to us. A large male, sporting magnificent facial tufts, this was Ícaro – a well-known and distinctive animal. Having walked slowly across open grassland in front of us, he settled for a while to lie in the shade of some trees, facing us as we watched spellbound from a respectful distance. After a while, he made a half-hearted attempt to hunt rabbits, waiting patiently outside a burrow. One may have had a lucky escape as, at one point, he rushed forward with incredible speed towards the burrow entrance... but came away with nothing. He returned to the depths of a nearby grove of trees and, with daylight now almost gone, we set off for the hotel and a triumphant dinner.

Four Iberian Lynxes in one day! We'd set the bar high.

Day 3 – 17th January



Iberian Lynx © D. Preston

Today found us returning to the scene of the previous day's triumph, albeit with a somewhat different approach. Having enjoyed the luxury of seeing so many cats the day before, and having had such prolonged views of Ícaro, Fernando and Inma set us up beneath trees on the valley floor as dawn broke – closer to where Ícaro had been hunting. We waited, silently, hoping our luck would hold and he would still be hunting in the area. If he was, we didn't see him – the closer horizons and restricted views at this elevation made us all the more appreciative of the value of our higher vantage point yesterday. That said, being down at the valley floor meant that a sighting, if it came, could well be considerably closer than hitherto...



Friar's Cowl © Jon Dunn

For the rest of the morning and early afternoon we were back up on our hilltop, enjoying the birding once more and, thanks to Doug discovering another small colony of Friar's Cowl nearby, making small excursions to photograph interesting plants.

At Fernando and Inma's suggestion, we split the group in the afternoon, allowing those who wanted to remain at the vantage point on high to sit on the hilltop in the sun and those, armed with cameras and hoping for closer views, to spend the following hours until dusk sat in silence, deep shade and cover at the foot of the hill.

In the event, this paid off for both groups when, shortly before dusk, the Magpies gathering to roost in the dense shrubs and trees on the adjacent boulder-strewn hillside began to alarm call and, a few moments later, an Iberian Lynx appeared traversing the hill a couple of hundred metres from those sat in silence. A flurry of directions and shutters firing followed... the cat, however, was making smooth, fast progress across the hill and a few all too short moments later was gone. Inma alerted Fernando and the rest of the group via radio and, a little while later, another cat appeared some distance away. This was yesterday's adult female – and the first animal appeared to have been one of her sons. Those on the hilltop could see her more clearly than those below. Something for everyone today, then!

Day 4 – 18th January

Another pre-dawn start saw us leaving the hotel to head for a day in the Parque Natural de la Sierra de Andújar, scanning the countryside from purpose-built vantage-points along a dusty road that leads deep into the hills. Our objective was, of course, Iberian Lynx, but with their activity typically concentrated on early mornings and late afternoons, we would be looking for other wildlife besides.

With no lynx forthcoming in the morning shift at the viewing platform, the group split up to walk the level road and explore what they could find and see on and from the roadside margins. An early distraction proved to be botanical – the discovery of first one and, later, many delicate buttery yellow daffodils – these were the highly scented *Narcissus jonquilla*. Growing all around them were small, nodding pink flowers – the unopened ones like small bells, but the opened flowers a neat star shape that looked a little like a Primula. There was a clue there – these were *Erodium primulaceum*.

The birding was good here too – early triumphs being several Dartford Warblers and some confiding Rock Buntings.



Rock Bunting © H. Crowe

We moved to the end of the road for lunch overlooking a large reservoir, with Spanish Imperial Eagles flying high overhead as we ate our bocadillos in the warm sunshine. After lunch, dropping down to the dam that



Provence Hairstreak © D. Preston

holds the reservoir in place, we hit mammal gold with first an Otter swimming in the river far below us and then the first of many Iberian Ibex clambering across the near vertical rock faces on the far side of the gorge before us. To begin with all we saw were females and young kids but, after a while, a party of magnificently horned males appeared a little closer to us in the lush vegetation of the gorge floor.

Returning to the roadside vantage points for the afternoon, the action came thick and fast with first the discovery by David of two or three freshly emerged Provence Hairstreaks and, no

sooner were some of the group photographing these engaging butterflies, a cry from down the road of “Lynx! Lynx!” – a cat was moving across the hillside below us. Only Howard was quick enough out of the blocks to catch a glimpse of this one.

We spent the last hours of daylight perched on the roadside hoping for another sighting, but alas it wasn't to be. We left for the hotel and another delicious evening meal appreciating more than ever our good fortune having access to the private estate for the previous two days.

Day 5 – 19th January

Another early start found us watching a new day dawn on a bridge beneath a dam where we knew there were Otters to be found. Alas, some noisy French and Spanish wildlife photographers also knew the animals were there, and arrived shortly after us, disturbing the site to the extent that no animals were seen. This was disappointing, but we drew some consolation from a blue bullet Kingfisher zipping back and forth beneath us, and V formations of Cormorants passing overhead.

The temperature was a nippy -5 degrees Celsius, so we were happy to leave the photographers to their thankless task and head back to the hotel to collect our luggage and depart for pastures new. Ramón, our generous host, bid us goodbye and, to our delight, we all left with gifts of Iberian Lynx artwork by a local artist.



Our next stop, in neighbouring Granada, was a limestone mountain that we'd heard was a reliable site for Spanish Ibex. We'd no sooner arrived than Doug called out that there were some animals close to the road. This was no exaggeration – a female was a couple of metres from the vehicle, grazing at the roadside. Above her, on



some low crags, were a mixed herd of males, females and yearlings – some of the males sporting impressive, long, curved horns they occasionally put to good use butting one another. The dominant male was showing a healthy interest in the females in his herd...

The roadside was lined with many beautiful purple *Iris planifolia* and, at the hilltop, we found some confiding Rock Buntings and rocks adorned with myriad lichens, to Jon's delight. We ate lunch in the sun there, admired passing vultures overhead, and stopped on the way back downhill to take images of those lovely irises.

We made good time to our new hotel, the base for our final two nights in Spain, and made light work that evening of the British Government passenger locator forms for our return home. Some hoops, these days, have to be jumped through if we're to enjoy travelling again...

Day 6 – 20th January

By the standards of the past few days, taking breakfast at 7:30am felt positively indulgent – the extra hour in bed was bliss. We still left the hotel before daybreak, setting off for a day of local birding in the area. Our first stop was in the heart of an area of cultivated fields. We were greeted by a flock of some 50 confiding Bramblings – these attractive finches aren't always seen in such numbers at this low elevation, so we speculated that the recent sustained cold snap may have brought them down from the hills in search of food.

They were a good start, but much better was soon to





follow with the sighting of a flock of 24 Little Bustards, feeding and occasionally wheeling in flight over frosted fields. Below them we found another Iberian Hare, and Green Sandpipers lurking on the damp edges of the irrigation channels that threaded the fields.

Nearby, a brief stop at the edge of town gave us a flock of over 100 Stone Curlews at close range and, behind us on overhead wires, superb views of a trio of singing, glossy black Spotless Starlings.

A drive deeper inland was broken with a coffee stop in the plaza of a sleepy rural town – as we drove out of town, we were greeted by a bill-clattering White Stork atop a chimney nest. The immensity of the mirror calm Fuente de Piedra lagoon awaited us

next. Here, from the viewing platforms and hides, we obtained distant views of Greater Flamingos, and closer views of a variety of wildfowl species, amongst them a trio of fine drake Red-crested Pochards.

Setting off to search the farmland around the lagoon for Common Cranes, our journey was interrupted twice over – first with the discovery of a watchful Black-winged Kite perched atop a tree, and latterly with the first of two sightings of Egyptian Mongoose amongst the olive groves, Pau spotting the first animal, and a little while later, Doug finding another individual. Moving liked greased lightning across the ground, not all of us were fortunate enough to lay eyes on these speedy predators.



Our first Common Cranes were a small party of five birds but, after an enjoyable open air picnic lunch, we found a somewhat larger flock – somewhere in the hundreds of birds, scattered widely across the fields in loose feeding parties. The sound of their bugling flight overhead was echoing in our ears as we returned to the vehicles for a triumphant, but reluctant, return to the hotel. It had been another good day but, alas, the holiday was drawing to an end now.

Day 7 – 21st January

An early start ensured we made good time back to Málaga airport – only an hour from the hotel, but we made sure we were there in good time for everyone to make their flights. The airport was quiet and efficient, and our return to our respective home countries – this was a cosmopolitan group with guests from all over Europe and, indeed, the USA – was seamless and uneventful.

Jon and Pau would like to thank the group for their friendly, good-humoured company and sharp eyes – we all contributed sightings of mammals, birds, insects and wildflowers for the greater enjoyment of one another, and many a story was swapped over the delicious dinners our hosts prepared. We look forward to travelling with you again someday soon.

Species Lists

Mammals			Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
			15th Jan	16th Jan	17th Jan	18th Jan	19th Jan	20th Jan	21st Jan
1	Iberian Lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>		✓	✓	✓			
2	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				✓			
3	Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
4	Fallow deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓		✓			
5	Spanish Ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica</i>				✓	✓		
6	Egyptian mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>						✓	
7	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>		✓	✓			✓	
8	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Birds			Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
			15th Jan	16th Jan	17th Jan	18th Jan	19th Jan	20th Jan	21st Jan
1	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>						✓	
2	Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>						✓	
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				✓		✓	
4	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>						✓	
5	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>						✓	
6	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>						✓	
7	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>						✓	
9	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>					✓		
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓				✓		
11	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>					✓		
12	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>							✓
13	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>						✓	
14	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓				✓	✓	
15	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>						✓	
16	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓				✓	✓	
17	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓	✓			
18	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
19	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓	✓				
20	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>						✓	
21	Eurasian Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓				✓	✓	
22	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓	✓	✓			
23	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓	✓	✓			
24	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓	♪♪			
25	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		♪♪	♪♪				
26	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>						✓	
27	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>						✓	
28	Common Cranes	<i>Grus grus</i>						✓	
29	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>						✓	

30	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>						✓	
31	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>						✓	
32	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>						✓	
33	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>						✓	
34	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>						✓	
35	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahelis</i>						✓	
36	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>						✓	
37	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
38	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
39	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓				✓	✓	
40	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓						
41	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					✓		
42	Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>		✓	✓		✓		
43	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>						✓	
44	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>					✓	✓	
45	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓	✓				
46	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				✓			
47	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
48	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓				✓	✓	
49	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>					✓	✓	
50	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
51	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
52	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>		✓	✓				
54	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓				
55	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓				
56	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
57	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		✓	✓				
58	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		
59	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephalus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
60	Darford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				✓			
61	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>						✓	
62	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
63	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					✓		
64	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
65	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
66	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓	✓			
67	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
68	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
69	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>				✓		✓	
70	Red-billed Cough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>		✓	✓				
71	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓				✓	
72	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>			🎵				
73	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	

74	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>					✓	✓	
75	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>						✓	
76	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>					✓		
77	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
78	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>						✓	
79	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		✓			✓	✓	
80	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓		✓	✓	
81	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓			✓	✓	
82	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓					✓	
83	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		✓					
84	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓	✓				
85	Nuttach	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓			
86	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>			✓				✓
87	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				✓	✓		





Waiting for Lynx © Pau Lucio



Iberian Lynx © Jon Dunn



Friar's Cowl © D. Preston



Iberian Ibex © D. Preston



White Stork © Pau Lucio



Iberian Lynx © Jon Dunn



Picnic lunch © L. Crowe



Sardinian Warbler © Jon Dunn



Views from Málaga mountains © Pau Lucio



Iberian Lynx © D. Preston



Black Vulture © D. Preston



Wolf Moon © D. Preston



Friar's Cowl © L. Crowe



Griffon Vulture © Pau Lucio



Provence Hairstreak © Jon Dunn



Adalújar Sunrise © L. Crowe



© D. Preston



Iberian Lynx © Pau Lucio



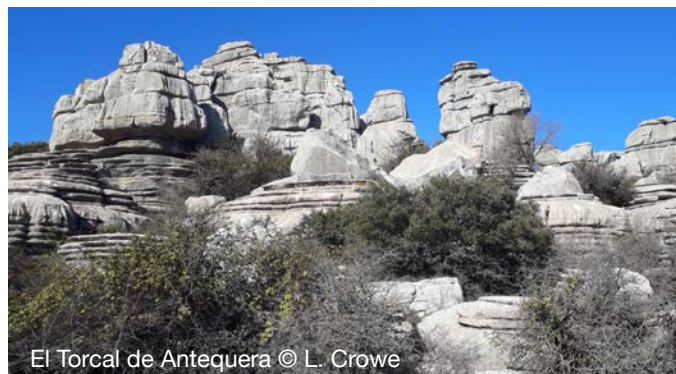
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