

Iberian Lynx Tour Trip Report

Jan. 2-5, 2020



The wonderful crew on this winter tour, that provided way more than expected

Report compiled by tour leader Álvaro Peral
Images courtesy of Álvaro Peral



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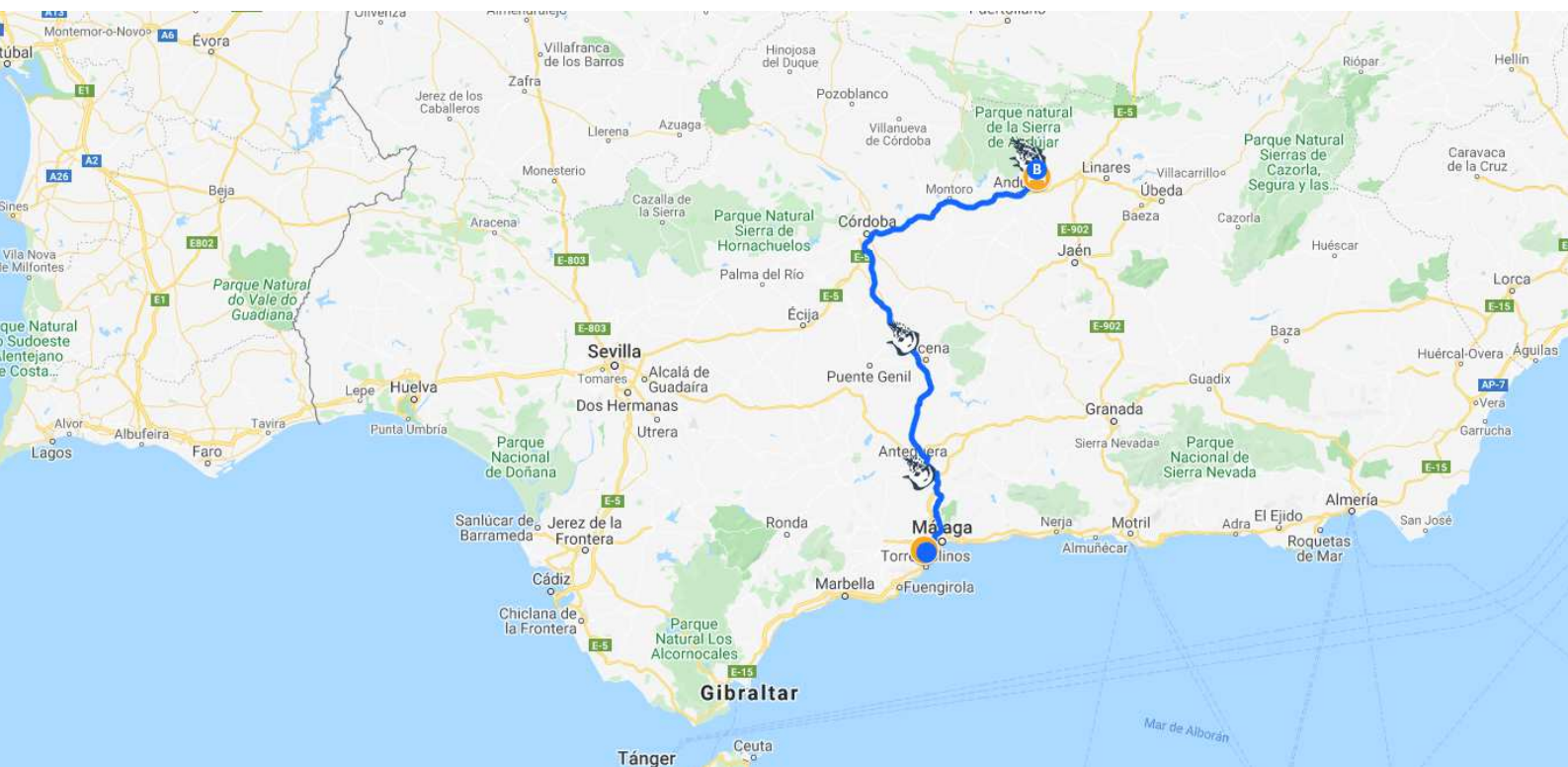
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Introduction

Finding the most scarce feline in Europe is not an easy job. But it certainly can be one of the most rewarding tours someone can guide, precisely for the difficulty that finding this species entrains. Tour info here:

<http://www.wildandalucia.com/iberian-lynx-tour/>

The tour itinerary below shows the route we took on this 4-day tour starting and finishing in Málaga.



Day 1 (2/1/2020) – Arrival to the Sierra de Andújar

We met in Málaga in the morning and -as promised- headed to the magnificent Torcal de Antequera in search of what would be our first mammal of the tour, the endemic Iberian Ibx. Having organized many wildlife trips to this magnificent Nature Reserve, I was aware of how unpredictable the weather could be up in the mountains. As we drove up outside Málaga the fog was increasing and I thought there were just slim chances to have some visibility. Our first stop got us distant views of **Thekla Lark** in the mist, definitely not the easiest bird to ID at the beginning of a tour. A flock of **Red-billed Chough** called in the distance, and we had better views of it as soon as the mist cleared for a few minutes. Already at 1100 m.a.s.l. we left the thick layer of clouds below and enjoyed one of the most dramatic landscapes one can get of the area (below):



Suddenly a small family group of **Iberian Ibex** was seen at short distance from the road, so we stopped and enjoyed a dozen of these relaxed king of the heights. The stillness of the site was spectacular and just interrupted by the distant call of Wren and Rock Bunting. Having enjoyed this first sighting, we felt it was a good idea to leave the site at once to gain time and continue driving north. A coffee stop on route provided **Cirl Bunting**, **Grey Wagtail** and the first of the many jokes of the tour. I must say it felt like being with friends the whole time. We stopped for a tapas lunch in Pedro Abad and arrived to La Caracola ecolodge in the afternoon. With just a few minutes to leave our stuff, we went on a first short patrol to look for the Iberian Lynx.



On this quick recce we didn't see the Lynx, but got familiar with the area and enjoyed nice sightings of **Little Owl**, **Hoopoe**, **Red Deer** and **Fallow Deer**. It was time to get back to our hotel, get things sorted and enjoy a first dinner with the charming services of Ramón, Laura and Luis, our hosts at the hotel.

Day 2 (3/1/2020) – Lynx time

It feels the right way to be the first guests to enjoy breakfast and set off as early as 7:30 with our batteries well filled up. Today is devoted to the Lynx quest in the area of El Jándula. The whole morning was as misty as shown on the picture below. We scanned ca. 1 Km of land trying to see Lynx, but we could just hope to hear mobbing magpies and alike. It wasn't till 1 pm when the mist cleared up and as we were on the middle of our picnic, all of a sudden a male **Iberian Lynx** passed by quickly and we got nice but short views of it at just 60 m distance!



We lost sight of it as this one walked very quickly and found it a minute later on the other side of the track. Presumably this one had crossed it into one of the road drainage concrete pipes. It continued its course uphill and I was lucky to get a couple of id shots (left).

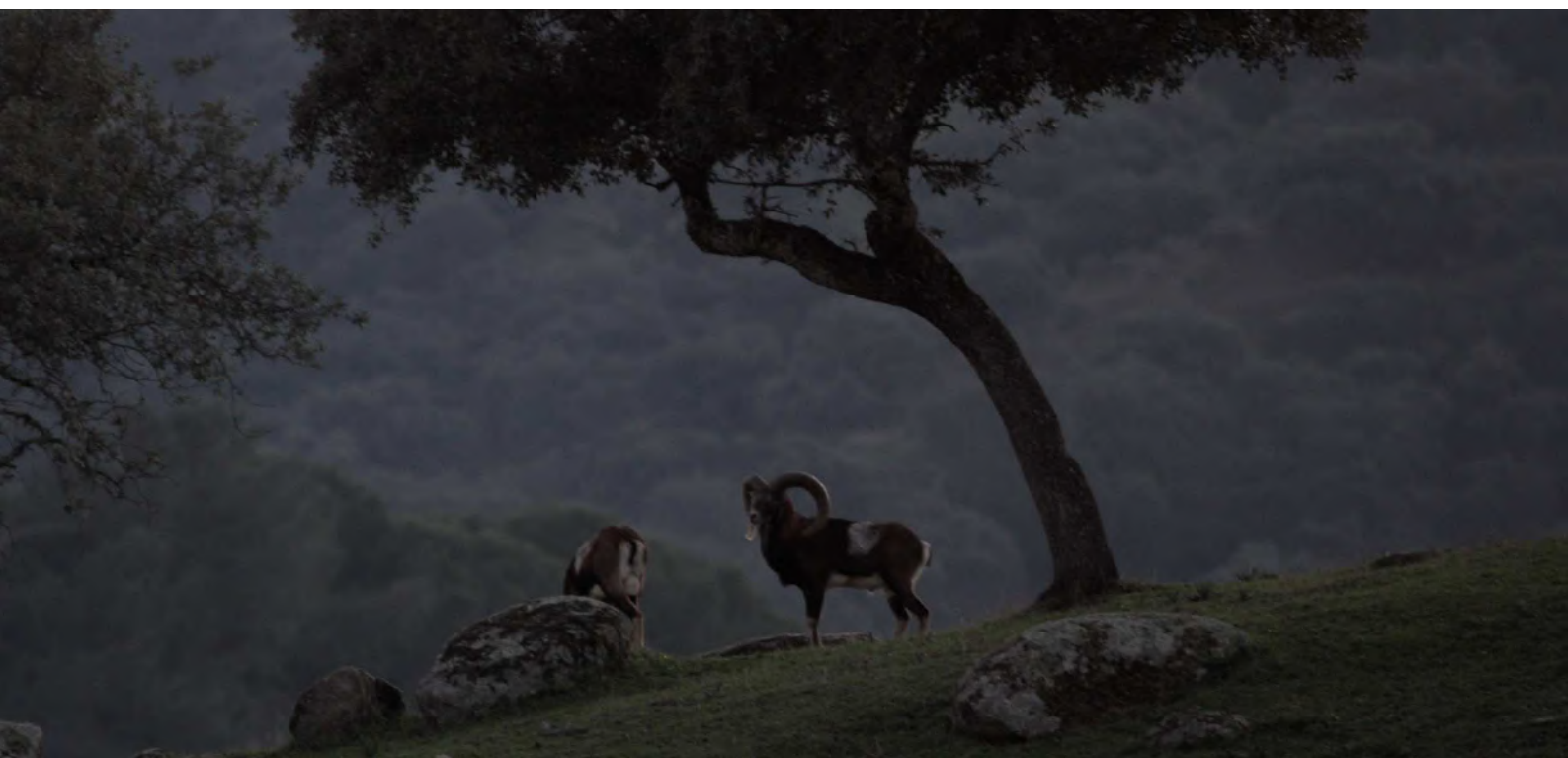
This shows us that while looking for the Lynx for hours even in bad weather conditions one can never lose hopes or stop looking. Keeping a good mood and awareness throughout the tour is crucial for success.

With this big intake of energy we had to keep looking there the rest of the afternoon. Unfortunately Carol didn't see this Lynx and after a funny "we have to find out why" I really felt I had to speed up another Lynx encounter. But as always, the Lynx is the one that rules the tour and it had to be on another day. We spent a more relaxed afternoon enjoying both **Griffon** and **Black Vulture** flying in and out a thermal overhead:



We explored the reservoir of El Jándula and its abandoned village, where we got to see **Blue Rock Thrush** on the dam and also a single **Iberian Ibex** on a far rocky outcrop. The eucalyptus at the village provided several **Hawfinch** whereas **Crag Martin** was seen many times. It was a nice sunny afternoon and we enjoyed the landscape very much.

We then got information that a Lynx was being seen in a nearby site and we rushed to see it. It was not just a Lynx but 2 adult **Lynx** and a young one. It was an very brief but amazing sighting of them playing around and hoping from boulder to boulder. I got them on the scope and I think it was Joan that could enjoy this marvelous quick scope sighting, whereas the rest of us watched them with our binoculars. No time for taking a picture to show here, but it will definitely be stuck on our minds for a long time. On the way back to the hotel we saw 2 beautiful specimens of **Mouflon** and how not to mention our local pair of **Little Owl**, always roosting on their boulders.



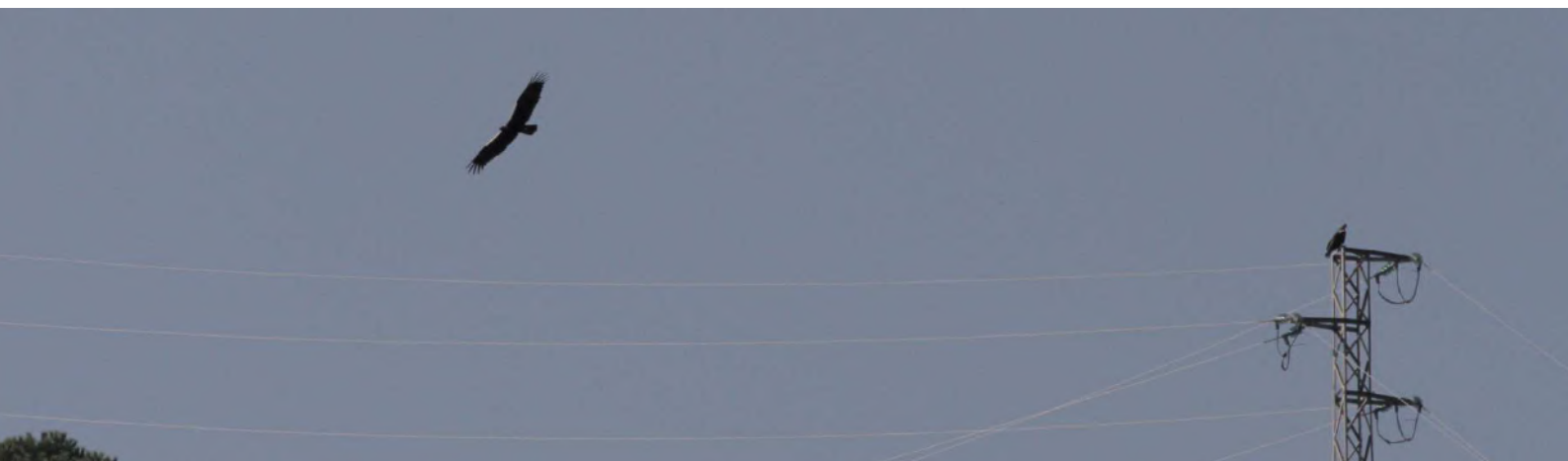
Day 3 (4/1/2020) – Still Lynx time

As it's happened in other years I felt the Lynx sightings tended to concentrate in the afternoon, so visiting other areas of the Sierra de Andújar was a brilliant idea. We went on exploring the Jándula river. After checking some traditional Otter spots, we went for a walk and saw a magnificent sunrise in the misty river. The stillness of the river banks was very enjoyable, and the Tamarisks on



its shores held scores of **Blackcap**, Robin and Chiffchaff. A pair of **Kingfisher** passed by a few times next to us as we scoured my favourite Otter spots. Although we didn't see the Otters this time, there was plenty of evidence of their presence in this river. Other birds that passed by along the river included **Iberian Magpie**, Cormorant, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Cettis Warbler and Mallard.

We improvised a picnic table along the river and enjoyed a nice picnic in the Sun as a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was flying in the distance and delighted us with their raven-like calls.



Watching this picture I take the opportunity to make a short break and introduce you to a platform fighting against the many bird electrocutions in Spain: <http://www.sostendidos.com/>



It was time to go back to other Lynx spots and try to get more sightings. The afternoon rewarded us with nice views of Iberian Magpie, which we were following closely might they help to locate a Lynx. Ditto for Magpie, which was a common sight too. We kept the idea of waiting at one spot and moving nearby. It was a pleasure to confirm how healthy population of **Rabbit** and **Red-legged Partridge** were right at the middle of a Lynx territory. No wonder the Lynx fights to eradicate other competitors from its territories, such as Red Fox, Genet and feral cat.

Other common sightings in this environment were **Mistle Thrush** and **Iberian Green Woodpecker**. These species were seen in dozens throughout the tour, specially at the pastures of the dehesa habitat, were we were expecting to have better views of Lynx.



The afternoon went on smoothly and we in the group were covering over 500 m of land constantly checking the lynx-prone areas. We ended up hitting the lottery again: a beautiful young male Lynx appeared on the run and kept its course parallel to our road so we could track it for a few minutes.

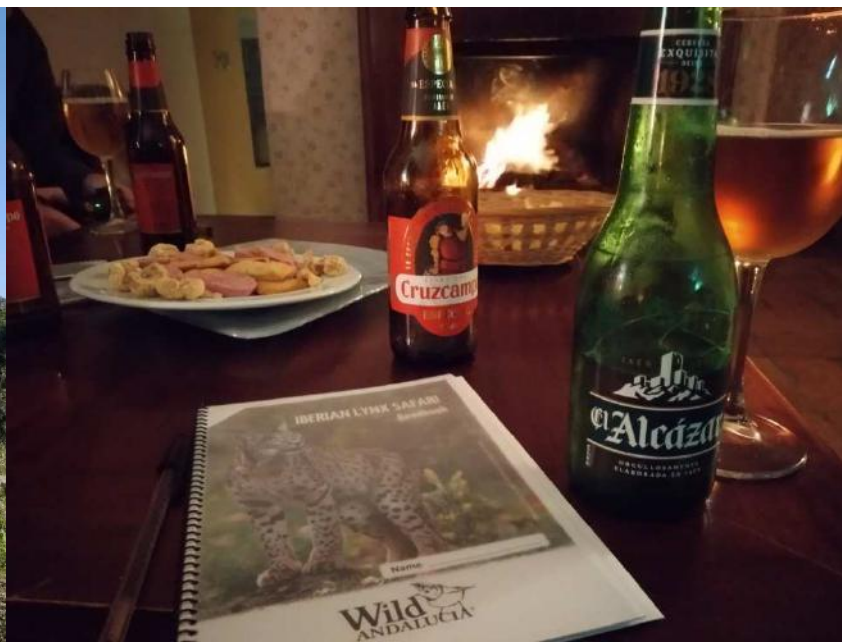


It stopped regularly atop some granite boulders but kept a generally fast course. We all got nice views of it because the terrain wasn't very bosky and it kept at some reasonable 60 m from us.



This was definitely the sighting of the trip and I have to say, one of the best I've ever had. It was around 5pm and the rest of the afternoon we enjoyed sharing our sightings, pictures and enthusiasm with other lynx watchers that were around us. With a big smile on our face we returned to our hotel, where we enjoyed some drinks by the fireplace before dinner.

This evening, paella was served and we stayed a long time discussing about our sightings not just among ourselves but with some other naturalists staying there. After a few days on the Lynx quest, we started to recognize faces of like-minded people, mostly Europeans. This year we've noticed a good number of enthusiasts from Madrid, North Spain, France, Scandinavia and Belgium.



It was time to head back to Málaga, where some people would catch a flight and other would continue a trip across southern Spain. We kept our breakfast schedule to allow some time for a quick visit to the largest lagoon in Andalucía, at Fuente de Piedra.

The surrounding farmlands rewarded us with nice scope views of **Stone Curlew**, whereas the hide provided **White-headed Duck** and other wildfowl. Hundreds of **Lesser Black-backed** and **Black-headed Gulls** roosted at the lagoon, which showed not much water.



Tour analysis

This lynx tour has been more successful than the average one. It produced **3 Lynx sightings** with a minimum of 4 and maximum of 5 different animals. We had dry weather, with misty mornings and around 0 °C and generally sunny days with an average of maximum temperatures of 15 °C.

As important as the tour organization we thank **La Caracola Casa Rural** for hosting us in its cozy resort, where we always felt like at home.

I must very much thank to **John, Joan, Linda, Carol and Dirk** for being part of these magnificent 4 days in the Sierra de Andújar. These mountains witnessed some of my best summer days as a child and it is a privilege to return here many years after to see a growing number of not just Iberian Lynx but also Spanish wildlife lovers. No doubt these are good seeds for a brighter future.

Thank you for your time and interest taken while reading this tour report.

Best regards,

Alvaro Peral
Alvaro Peral – [Wild Andalucía](http://www.wildandalucia.com)