

Iberian Lynx Hide Stay



Preparation

Since I have been on mammalwatching.com I have shared in some posts my wish to see every cat species in the world. Why? Because Felidae are a diverse group of very different species, living in very different conditions, also when a cat can live somewhere, there is a great chance that other wildlife is pretty good too. On top of that they are of course great hunters, they look nice and are in general pretty cool animals. So far I was, as a certain orangefaced president would say: 'all talk but no action'. That was going to change however!

Since I live in the Netherlands there is not a great chance of seeing any cat species anywhere near my home. Wild cat has set foot in the southeast of the Netherlands for a couple of years now, Eurasian lynx is a very hard species to see anywhere in Europe, but its cousin the Iberian lynx is a different story. There are plenty of trip reports to be found on this website from people who have had the same idea: traveling to Spain to see that cat! Iberian lynx is also the rarest cat in this world, so I figured it would be a nice one to kick-off my catlist.

But where to go? There are a few places mentioned on this site which are supposed to be good to see lynxes. I also started googeling and I found that Wildwatching Spain has a couple of the (apparently) only hides that give you a shot at seeing the lynx. On the website they give one, two and three day vouchers. I figured that if a three day voucher is the top, there must probably be a very high rate of success. I decided to go for the three days so I could hopefully watch the lynx several times from close range which would just be the perfect way to see my first Iberian lynx. The voucher was offered for 550 euros. The hides are located in de Sierra de Andujar at the well-known place, (among others) very well described in the trip report of Lee Dingain.

I contacted Wildwatching Spain. On the site it was mentioned that there is a possibility to stay in a tented camp, pretty close to the hides and that this was included in the cost. Being a poor student, I of course went for this option. I must say that the staff of Wildwaching Spain that I had emailcontact with, did not seem very bright. A couple of mistakes, perhaps also caused by a bit of a language barrier. In the end everything seemed good so I happily took off on Monday 22 January to head off to Malaga.

First day, Monday 22 January

My flight landed pretty early. I booked my car (very cheaply) at Interrent. I have no complaints about them. Of course the usual extra insurance costs were added, but I was prepared for it and even with this, it was a good deal. I think with gas included I spent about 150 euros on my car for the whole week. I rented a fiat panda, this is not exactly an all-terrain vehicle (which the lady at the counter was happy to point out, while offering a better and more expensive car, which I stubbornly declined), but I have had no problems with it anywhere I went. I did notice however that while driving on the highway, when the road went up, the car had trouble to keep its speed. This could be solved by shifting to lower gear.

After about 2,5 hours of riding through the Spanish countryside, I arrived in Andujar. Google Maps gives you two routes from Malaga to Andujar. One follows the highway and makes a big curve to the west, and gives you about 70 extra kilometres. The other one goes more or less straight at its target but uses more countryside roads. I decide to go for the second one, and I was happy with that choice. The roads were all pretty wide and well asphalted so you can maintain pretty much the same speed as you would on the highway. The Spanish drive crazily slow however so be careful at curves, I have blazed along many Mercedes's and BMW's with my fiat panda, the Spanish like to live life at a more slower pace apparently. Anyway the country road is just better in my opinion and also give you the chance to stop if you see something interesting.

In Andujar I bought groceries. I bought six bottles of milk by mistake, because they very much looked like bottles that normally contain water, but at least I had all my supplies. I would sleep the very first night in my car. This was partially because it was cheaper, but also because the staff of Wildwaching Spain found out pretty last minute that they didn't have a guide available to bring me to the tented camp. They offered to find me a hotel room, but I declined (saving costs you know). I planned to spend the first afternoon looking for the lynx at the familiar spot with the white concrete blocks and at dusk I would ride to Jandulas Dam where I would park my car and spend the night. There were about 20/30 people present, but no lynx was seen. Fallow deer could not be missed.



I saw some nice birds, griffon vultures are common also monk vulture (which was new), can probably not be missed. I missed the Spanish Imperial Eagle however. When the evening started to fall I rode to the dam. The road was very nice by the way, I read in a report from 2017 that it was pot holed. I barely had any potholes, so they must have fixed it. It is still a non-asphalted road. I went for a short bit of spotlighting and I heard an eagle owl, I didn't see any mammals, save for one bat and I might have heard an otter splashing. I parked my car at the end of a grass area next to a barn, a few curves above the dam. I had a good sleep and I awoke early to be picked up by my guide Silvia.

Second day, Tuesday 23 January

I have no complaints about Sylvia, she does her best and did a good job. I can recommend her to anyone else. Having a good conversation in English with her was sometimes a bit, but important things can be well made clear. When I told her about my plan to sleep in the tented camp, she was surprised. Apparently the staff had not communicated this with her. She told me that it was very cold at night. My first impression of a somewhat camping like setting, with lots of other people was slightly altered. I turned out there was indeed one tent outside of a building. This building contained a kitchen. Outside were a toilet and a shower. No hot water however. I'll tell more about this later.

The area where the house stands is very beautiful however. This area is where the lynx likes to walk around and it looks perfectly suitable for such a great animal. Also lot's of fallow deer are walking around. Sylvia took me to a hide which gave me a good view. There were two hides over there, you look through mirrorglass. You are dropped off at about 8 o'clock and picked up at 18.00. Piss bottle is required! She told me that de lynxes usually came along early in the morning so I was very excited. This wore off at about 13.00 when still no lynx had showed up. With eating, texting and a bit of reading I made it through the day, of course every two seconds I looked around for the lynx. A

crested lark was a regular visitor during the day and I had good pictures of it. In the afternoon also the vultures showed themselves. When I didn't expect it at all, there it suddenly was: a lynx walking right past me at about six meters! I immediately started clicking while at the same time making a soft squeaking sound (or something like that), in the hope that it would look at me. It didn't, and in a couple of seconds it was vanished. When you are waiting all day, the excitement at such a moment is very high. However even in my adrenaline rush I knew that I wanted better looks, it didn't even look at me!



Still I was happy with the sighting. At 18.00 a Spanish guy named Pablo (I think?), picked me up. Luckily I had been busy with Spanish in the fall of 2017 so I knew quite a few words. These proved to be valuable because Pablo didn't speak any English, he liked my photo though. He made it clear to me that I could sleep in the kitchen, because it would be less cold than outside and I could use the stove, which ran on gas. It turned out that the pans that were present in the kitchen were all made of a very thick metal and dirty. I cleaned one first and then put it on the fire, but that didn't burn very bright and the pan was hardly getting warm. There were no cooking pans, so I cooked my spaghetti in the water cooker (one of my better ideas). All in all it took me about two hours before I had a somewhat hot meal of spaghetti. The pit burned less and less bright, and I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to heat my food at all, but in the end I could eat.

I was however fed up with all the trouble it caused to stay at this place and I decided to text Sylvia and ask her for a hotel. She quickly booked this for me, so the second night I would stay there. Still I smelled gas, I checked all the pits but they all appeared to be turned off. I tried to turn off all the gas bottles too but, this was easier said than done. With some help from the more technical members of my family (through the family app), I probably turned them off eventually. I still smelled something so I had Sylvia call Pablo. He came along and made sure the gas was turned off. Finally I could sleep. I made my bed on the table because it was better isolated than the floor. I didn't go to sleep just yet, because the stars were just too beautiful to not spend an hour taking pictures of it. Finally I went to sleep.



I woke up early, Sylvia would pick me up at 8 o'clock. The view from the estate is really beautiful so I took some more pictures. I was taken to a different hide. This hide had considerably more birdlife so I got some nice photos of red legged partridges and other stuff.



Red billed cough was a new one for me. Although it all looked very beautiful I did not have any luck with the lynxes. I didn't see any mammal actually from the hide, aside from one fallow deer at the end of the afternoon. At 18.00 I was picked up again and driven to the dam. In the car were two Germans who had spent the day in the hide where I was yesterday, they hadn't seen anything. At the dam, I followed Sylvia to Los Pinos and got a room there. Staff spoke mostly Spanish, English appeared to be hard/impossible for them. It wasn't a real problem, we understood each other well enough and they have nice rooms for a good price (45 per night). I had a whole bungalow for myself, because there was no one else. The bungalows have a couple of rooms and a shared bathroom. The food was not very expensive and pretty good.

Thursday 25 January

The next morning it had to happen! This was my last day, so although I had seen a lynx, I would still be pretty disappointed had it been my only observation. Sylvia picked me up around six at Los Pinos, we would meet the Germans on the dam and then drive to the hide. On the road we saw one wild boar, so that was a new mammal for the trip list. At the dam it turned out that the Germans would not be joining us, because they explained their stomachs were bothering them. Probably smart to not go in a hide then, because there are few things more annoying than 'having to go' but not being able to. So it would again be a lone sit for me this day. Sylvia dropped me off at the hide where I had stayed the first day. This was the first day that was not a clear sunny one, it was very foggy. I did see my first rabbit on the estate, so that was perhaps a bit promising. My crested lark joined me again together with some tree larks. Then around 11 o'clock suddenly a very large ghost stepped out of the bushes. It was a lynx! I seemed so big, because I had seen nothing but small birds and a rabbit that day. I think it couldn't have been more than 10 meters away. I started clicking and the lynx heard me, it looked at me for one second and then continued it's way, it was all over in about ten seconds,

perhaps less. It was enough though! Although I had hoped to see a lynx with clear conditions, the fog also added a little something to the photo and I was really happy.







I immediately started sending pictures to friends. I also send some to Sylvia, who asked if I wanted to depart earlier that day. I decided to do that because then I would still have plenty of time to drive back to Malaga and get in to my hotel there. On the road back I was pretty sure to have seen an otter, but when we stopped it was nowhere to be seen.

Sylvia dropped me off at Los Pinos and I drove three hours back to Malaga. I booked a room in a hotel next to the highway. Although the location of the hotel was perfect, the hotel itself was not really that much. Staff couldn't have been a day over 20, that wasn't a problem, but what surprised me was that even these youngsters are so horribly bad at English. For a fellow European from a country where everyone who is born after the Cold War speaks English, this is pretty strange. Could

also have been caused by their general level of intelligence, because when I ordered food (horribly bad, would have liked to see Gordon Ramsay step in to this hotel one day), one of them kept checking on me (literally!) every 30 seconds. The room looked nice, but the window was next to the kitchen so all the smells from there floated into the room. I had a good night though and in the morning I rode to Malaga, dropped off my car and flew back to Amsterdam.

Some final notes

Because Sylvia had asked me to send some pictures I send some a couple of weeks later for advertising purposes. I did tell her that I didn't need to be compensated for that but that I expected that they would mention me as photographer wherever they published my pictures. However after I spotted my picture on their Facebook page, they didn't mention me anywhere. I complained about this, after that I got a reaction from the staff, saying that he would write some sort of article where he would indeed post my name next to the pictures, but I haven't seen anything since. They also didn't change anything on the Facebook page. I find this particular thing a bit exemplary for the service that I got from the staff of Wildwatching Spain together with other things I have mentioned earlier. I have no complaints about the local guide, but the desk people, should have done a better job. This would be a reason for me to find another tour company, had they not been the only ones that had lynx hides. I would certainly not use them for anything else.

So, if you want to see a lynx really well it is a smart idea to book a hide. If you just want to see it and do not want to miss it I would recommend to use the known spots, as you will probably have a greater chance of seeing one, as well as other good mammals and birds.