

Spain: Sierra de Andujar, 13 - 20 January 2017

Overview

I thought it was about time I visited the Sierra de Andujar again as the last time I was there was 5 years ago in January 2012 (my trip report is on this website). Five years ago it was with 3 friends; this time just one - Richard Howard - who also came on the last trip. Back then we only stayed 3 days (although 7 days in Spain in total) this time we decided to stay for 7 days in the Sierra de Andujar - the southern portion of the Sierra Morena National Park, Jaen, in the north of Andalusia. The Iberian Lynx, as last time, was the main target species.

Richard lives in Spain although for various reasons he is currently residing in the UK. He speaks fluent Spanish which would be very useful. We chose January to visit the area as it is the height of the Iberian Lynx breeding season and consequently they are more occupied with each other and tend to show themselves more frequently. Although they can in theory be seen any month of the year December/January is when they are most often observed, in the Sierra de Andujar area at least.

We flew from the UK from our local airport London Southend (which is in South East Essex not London!) to Malaga Airport, Andalusia. After collecting our bags and picking up our hire car we set off heading north to Andujar. We stopped on the way for an hour or so at the Laguna de Fuente de Piedra which is a well known bird watching location about an 1.5 hours drive north of Malaga. In the late afternoon we arrived at Villa Matilde which was to be our base for the week. The Villa Matilde is ideally situated along a track off the JH-5002 'Los Escoriales' road a couple of kilometres from the well known Los Pinos complex. The Villa Matilde is efficiently run by Mercedes and Roland and we can thoroughly recommend it (see www.villamatilde.org) - Mercedes is Spanish and Roland is Dutch. Mercedes has her finger on the pulse when it comes to the Lynx and general wildlife of the area and was full of useful information. She speaks Spanish, English, Dutch and French and I think German and maybe other languages as well but I didn't ask. We chose a packed lunch and an evening meal, forgoing breakfast as we snacked on breakfast bars and biscuits in the morning whilst out in the field. However the Villa Matilde has just been put up for sale so it's not certain what it will be like in the future or even if it will be a guest house.

The main Lynx watching viewpoints are in the La Lancha area along the JF-5004 road reached via the Los Escoriales road the JH-5002. The Los Escoriales road is tarmac but the La Lancha road is a dirt road and badly pot-holed, apparently it hasn't been repaired for 2 years. It was painfully slow at times and we often had to drive in first gear to negotiate the holes in the road. Well at least being so slow wildlife was at less risk of being run over! The other area where lynx can be seen is in the area surrounding the Rio Jandula. You join a dirt road after turning right off the A-6177 immediately after crossing a single track road bridge. The dirt road follows the Rio Jandula past picnic sites to the Embalse del Encinarejo where

there is a car park by a dam and footbridge. This site is usually referred to as the Rio Jandula site. I'm not going to repeat here precise direction details and where to watch from as it has been amply covered in other Sierra de Andujar Lynx watching trip reports on mammalwatching.com. The most Lynx watchers at any one time along the La Lancha viewing area was around 80 on Saturday 14th. Apart from then it was usually around 20 on and off through the day. The Rio Jandula site averaged around 10 people through the day.

It got light just after 08:00 and got dark around 18:30.

A note of caution. Whilst we were in the bar of the Los Pinos our car door lock was damaged by someone trying to break in while it was parked in the car park. Fortunately they didn't succeed but with binoculars, telescopes and cameras in the car it could have been a disaster for us. So remember to lock everything in the boot or if possible take them with you and try and keep an eye on your car. Our hire car company said it was a well known crime in tourist car parks - someone watches you in the bar/restaurant while an accomplice breaks into the car. Obviously this type of thing isn't confined to Spain it's an international problem.

All photographs by Richard Howard.

Daily Log

Friday 13th. Weather: day sunny & warm, evening cool.

Arrived Malaga Airport and then drove north towards Cordoba before heading east for Andujar. In the early afternoon we spent an hour or so at the Laguna de Fuente de Piedra in the vicinity of the small pools near the visitors centre. The Laguna itself was fairly dry for the time of year but way out across the dry mud we could see around 100 Common Cranes and about 500 Greater Flamingo. White-headed Duck and Short-toed Eagle was the only other birds of note. The only mammals seen were Rabbits of which there was an abundance.

Late afternoon arrived at the Villa Matilde but too late to go to the lynx watch points. However we drove the Los Escoriales road and part of the La Lancha road just before dark seeing Red and Fallow Deer.

Saturday 14th. Weather: Cold frosty start -2 degrees, bright sunshine but cool rest of day.

We left the Villa Matilde before light and reached the La Lancha lynx viewpoints 40 minutes later at about 08:10. The only thing we saw on the drive up were two Wood Mice which were caught well in the headlights. Scanning the valley over the next few hours we saw plenty of Red Deer a few Fallow Deer, a few Rabbits and a very fine looking ram Mouflon. I also saw a group of 6 Mouflon briefly made up of females and young males. At 14:55 a Lynx was found at the top end (south end) of the valley fortunately right where we were. We

enjoyed fantastic views as it strolled around before settling on some rocks. It started looking purposefully in one direction and 'snarling' and I thought we were going to see it come face to face with another Lynx. But it slowly raised itself, leapt off the rock and dashed forward, unfortunately right behind some bushes. From another angle we could see that it had in actual fact caught and killed a rabbit and was devouring it. Rabbits appeared to be in good numbers as did Red-legged Partridges both major food items for Lynx, so all being well the Lynx will have a good breeding season. The Lynx ate every bit of the rabbit and I thought that it would then immediately go into cover and rest up to digest its meal. It didn't, instead it wandered off through the trees and bushes where we tracked its progress for a couple of hundred metres until it crossed a fire break and disappeared into thick cover. It was on view for 35 minutes and appeared again for a couple of minutes at 16:00. It looked like a young female and the occasional view under the tail bore this out. We headed back to the Villa Matilde at 18:00 happy with our first full day in the Sierra de Andujar.



Young female Iberian Lynx, same individual in all five photos, taken 14th January.



Munching a rabbit.



Just finished the whole rabbit.



Going for a wander and then getting a better view from a rock.



Sunday 15th. Weather: Cold frosty morning -3 degrees, sunny day, cool but warming up.

Drove along the bumpy road to La Lancha arriving on site at 08:20. Plenty of Red Deer and Fallow Deer in the valley. I started scanning a bit further along than yesterday covering the mid to bottom (north end) of the valley. A couple of distant Wild Boars didn't show for long but that was the best of the bunch for the whole morning. Around midday we drove down the road to the dam and road tunnel at Embalse del Jandula and ate our packed lunch there. Distantly down river on the rocks I found three male Spanish Ibex stretched out in the sun. Richard took a couple of photos but they were at quite a distance. We checked the tunnel for hibernating bats and found nine bats of two species - three probable Daubenton's, but not 100% sure, and at least six Schreiber's. We drove back up the road to La Lancha at 15:00 and were told that no Lynx had been sighted whilst we'd been away. Apart from Red and

Fallow Deer we didn't see anything else so in the late afternoon we drove off down the La Lancha and Los Escoriales roads do check the surrounding fields and estates for mammals before it got dark. However, we only saw Red and Fallow Deer there as well.



Three male Spanish Ibex, very distant! Down river from the Embalse del Jandula dam.

Monday 16th. Weather: Frosty -5 degrees, very cold start, sunny and warm during day.

We decided to do the Rio Jandula dam and bridge area today as otters had been seen regularly from the footbridge in recent days. We were on the bridge at 08:00 along with four Spanish guys looking for a photo opportunity of an Otter. At 08:20 I saw an Otter surface and dive a couple of times about 50 metres away before it headed off down river. Although it was on show for only a couple of minutes it was easy to follow as the river was flat calm and every ripple on the surface could be seen. At 08:45 another Otter appeared below us between the bridge and the dam and this one showed exceedingly well hunting for fish and crustaceans. It even came out onto rocks where we could hear it crunching its breakfast. Richard got some decent photos. After giving us a splendid show for about ten minutes it swam under the bridge and made its way slowly down river before disappearing round a bend in the river. I'm sure two Otters were involved as there was no way the first Otter could have come up river, under the bridge past us without being seen. You could follow the Otter's bubble trails as well as every surface ripple it made the river was that still and calm.

For most of the day I scanned for Lynx from the hill to the left of the dam but only saw Red Deer. Richard walked the river edge taking photos of birds and hoping for more photos of an Otter. He did see an Otter again briefly but no photos this time. However, mid-afternoon his attention was drawn by a small group of people desperate to get his attention and just as well they did as he was then put on to a Lynx on the other side of the river. It was striding through the trees and bushes yowling as it went. A good but all too brief sighting with unfortunately no photo opportunities. I was still on the hill and didn't see anything! Later we scanned till dark, further down the road past the picnic sites but only saw Rabbits, Red and Fallow Deer.



Otter, Rio Jandula, 16th January



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Tuesday 17th. Weather: Frosty -3 degrees, cold start but warming up in the sunshine.

We returned again to the Rio Jandula dam site this morning and again were on the bridge for 08:00. This time only Richard got a brief view of an otter about 50 metres downstream. We didn't see much else during the morning just Red Deer and a few Rabbits and at lunchtime we drove to the town of Andujar to get some petrol.

In the afternoon we did a slow drive along the Los Escoriales and La Lancha roads. A Lynx had been seen a couple of days earlier in fields along the Los Escoriales road but we only saw Red and Fallow Deer. We scanned the valley looking north from the La Lancha viewpoints and at 16:45 I picked up a very distant Lynx walking along a hill top. It was only in view for a couple of minutes but with its characteristic Lynx outline and in the low late afternoon sunshine it was a very atmospheric sighting. We then drove back down the roads to the Villa Matilde while it was still light but didn't see any Lynx, just Red and Fallow Deer.

Wednesday 18th. Weather: Frosty cold start -4 degrees, sunny and warmer later turning a little cloudy and windy late afternoon.

Started driving up the roads at 8:00 heading for La Lancha but again only saw the usual Red and Fallow Deer. A couple staying at the Villa Matilda drove up the roads a little later and at 09:00 had good views of a Lynx along the Los Escoriales road. When we arrived at the La Lancha viewpoints at 08:55 a small group of people were already watching a Lynx so we got straight on to it. It was quite close and just sat on a rock below the road for about ten minutes before wandering off through the undergrowth where, for the most part, we were able to follow its progress. We had it in sight on and off until a final sighting at 09:30. It was a male, you could tell as on occasions it lifted its tail as it walked along or scent marked. It was not far from where we saw the young female Lynx on Saturday.

For the next hour we didn't see much apart from Red and Fallow Deer although Richard saw a ram Mouflon. So we walked a bit further along the road and scanned north down the valley. At 10:45 I picked up a Lynx sitting under a tree on the slope of a hill and got Richard onto it. Before long it started walking up the hill to the top, then walked along a track a short way before disappearing over a rise. In all it was on view about five minutes and unfortunately rather distant, the nearest people to us were a few hundred metres away and we were obscured by a bend in the road so we couldn't alert anyone while the Lynx was on view. As it was not far from where I picked up the Lynx late afternoon yesterday it may have been the same individual - but who knows! After that the only other mammals we saw in the valley was another fine ram Mouflon, Red and Fallow Deer and Rabbits.



Male Iberian Lynx, taken on the 18th January.

We then drove back down the La Lancha/Los Escoriales roads, seeing Red & Fallow Deer, and went round to the Rio Jandula site being there from 15:00 till 18:00, but this time only seeing Red Deer and Rabbits. On the way back to the Villa Matilde we stopped in at the Los Pinos for a beer.



Red Deer stag.



Fallow Deer buck.

Thursday 19th. Weather: Cold 1 degree all day. Dull, cloudy, light snow shower late afternoon.

An 08:00 start and a slow drive along the Los Escoriales and La Lancha roads to look for Lynx but no luck. We arrived at the La Lancha viewpoints about 45 minutes later and began scanning. Over the next couple of hours not much was seen although Richard had a brief view of a ram Mouflon and we both saw many Red Deer and a few Fallow Deer. Then at 11:00 someone spotted a lynx approx 150 metres away walking along a firebreak. It didn't take long for all the watchers that morning (about 25) to get on to it. Although when it hunkered down and was partially obscured in some low vegetation it was quite difficult to see until it sat up or moved a bit. The tawny spotted coat of the Lynx came into its own and proved to be excellent camouflage. It stayed low for some time but eventually started to wander around the bushes and trees sniffing and scent marking as it went - definitely a female as she often lifted her tail to scent mark so it was easy to tell. At one point she even walked towards the road giving super views.



Female Iberian Lynx, on 19th January.



Female Iberian Lynx, 19th January.

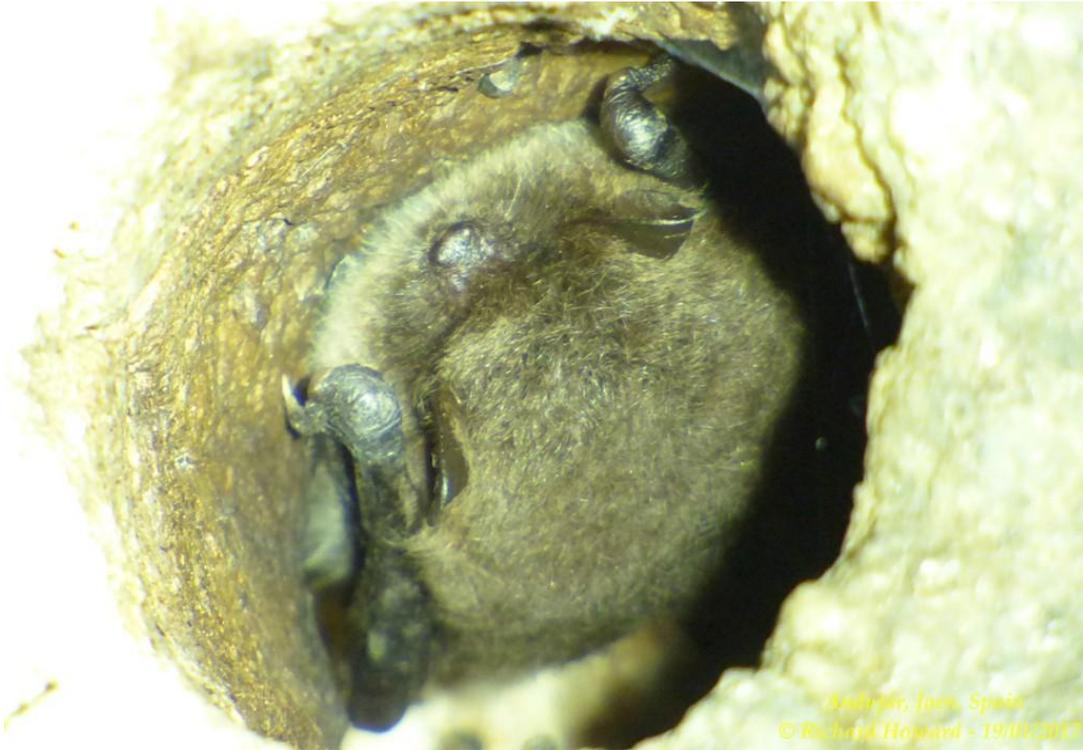


Female Iberian Lynx, 19th January.

After some time she wandered off into thick cover and that was the last sighting at around 11:45. I continued scanning the valley through my telescope and found a group of seven Mouflon, all rams lazing on a hill slope - a bit distant but very nice to see all the same. Around lunchtime we drove down the valley road to the dam and tunnel and ate our lunch and found a female Spanish Ibex on the rocky hillside not far from the dam. We checked the tunnel again and found seven bats - five Schreiber's and two Daubenton's - well we think they were Daubenton's but aren't sure.

At 14:00 we drove away from the dam and slowly made our way along the La Lancha road, turned left at the La Lancha/Los Escoriales junction and drove a couple of roads in that area for an hour or so. We saw good numbers of Red and Fallow Deer but no other mammals. At 17:15 we drove the Los Escoriales road looking for Lynx but with no luck. As it was snowing by then we decided to keep driving and have a beer in the Los Pinos.

That very afternoon Mercedes, the host from Villa Matilde, who had taken a group of French wildlife watchers out for the day came across a Lynx on the La Lancha road near the bull fields.



Myotis Bat sp above, Schreiber's Bats below, Embalse del Jandula tunnel.





Seven ram Mouflon - very distant!

Friday 20th. Weather: Cold early with cloud, warming up later with some sunshine.

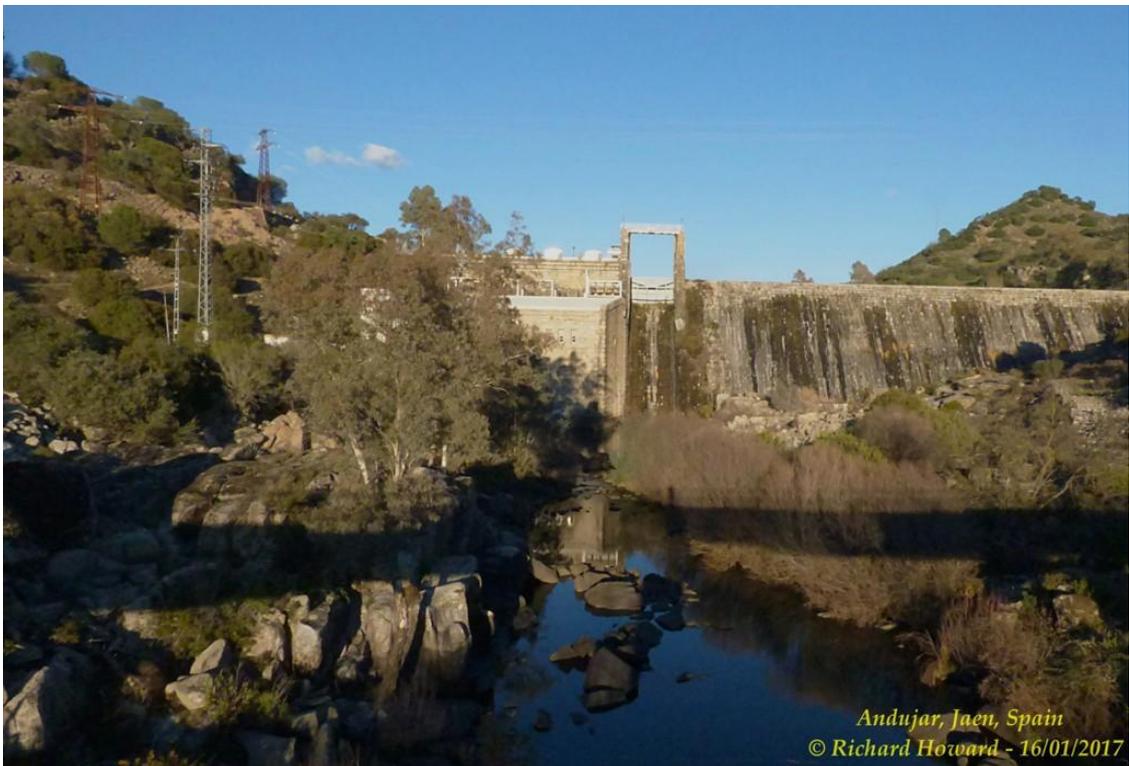
Drove the Los Escoriales road 04:25 - 05:15 spotlighting with a torch/flashlight but all we saw were Red and Fallow Deer and a Wood Mouse. Before long it was time to drive the three hours or so back to Malaga Airport for our flight back to Southend.



Red Deer stag.



Embalse del Jandula dam.



Embalse del Encinarejo dam, Rio Jandula site.

Mammal List January 2017

Schreiber's Bat

6 on the 14th and 5 on the 19th, Embalse del Jandula tunnel.

Myotis Bat sp

3 on the 14th and 2 on the 19th, probable Daubenton's Bat but *Myotis escalerae* (Natterer's Bat type found in Spain) cannot be ruled out, nor can, although unlikely, *Myotis capaccinii* (Long-fingered Bat), Embalse del Jandula tunnel.

Eurasian Otter

2 on the 16th and 1 on the 17th, Rio Jandula.

Iberian Lynx

6 sightings in all - 5 La Lancha on the 14th, 17th, 18th (2) and 19th. 1 Rio Jandula on the 16th. Our sightings involved 4 different Lynx at least.

Wild Boar

2 on the 15th, La Lancha

Fallow Deer

Seen every day - Los Escoriales, La Lancha, Rio Jandula.

Red Deer

Very common seen every day - Los Escoriales, La Lancha, Rio Jandula.

Mouflon

All sightings from La Lancha view points. Group of 6 on 14th, singles 18th and 19th plus a group of 7 on the 19th.

Spanish Ibex

3 on 15th and a single on 19th all in vicinity of Embalse del Jandula dam.

Rabbit

Abundant at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra. A few seen most days La Lancha & Rio Jandula.

Wood Mouse

Los Escoriales road - 2 on 14th, 1 on 20th.

Bird Highlights

White-headed Duck, Red-legged Partridge, White Stork, Greater Flamingo, Griffon & Black Vultures, Golden, Spanish Imperial, Short-toed & Booted Eagles, Red Kite, Common Buzzard, Common Crane, Tawny & Little Owls, Hoopoe, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Crested & Wood Larks, Crag Martins, Blue Rock Thrush, Sardinian & Dartford Warblers, Firecrest, Iberian Grey (Southern Grey) Shrike, Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpie, Raven, Hawfinch, Cirl Bunting.



Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpie

Reptiles

On the 16th we watched 2 or 3 Wall Lizards on rocks by the dam car park at the Rio Jandula site. One of the Spanish guys who was knowledgeable on the current status of Spanish Wall Lizards told us that it was a recent split from other Wall Lizards and endemic to the Sierra Morena - so has been named the Sierra Morena Wall Lizard.



Sierra Morena Wall Lizard

Butterflies

Small Heath, Small Copper, Clouded Yellow, Red Admiral.



Small Heath



Above and below - Lynx habitat along the La Lancha road.



Trip Report by John Wright

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