

Iberian Ibex in Gredos, August 2022



Last August I spent 3 days hiking in the Sierra de Gredos, in central Spain. It was not a mammalwatching trip, but since we saw **Iberian Ibexes** easily every day, I decided to compile this short report with tips on how to see them in the area.

The **Iberian Ibex** found in Gredos is the **Western Iberian Ibex** (*Capra pyrenaica victoriae*) and it is a different subspecies than the one occurring in Southern Spain mountain ranges. It is endemic to the mountains in central Spain (Sierra de Gredos and Sierra de Guadarrama), but it has been introduced to several locations in the Cantabrian Mountains and Portugal as a replacement for the extinct subspecies *lusitanica*.

Access

The gateway to Sierra de Gredos is the town of Hoyos del Espino in Avila province, a two-hour drive from Madrid. We stayed in the camping there, which was cheap and nice, but I imagine there will be many other accommodation options in the town and surrounding villages. Getting to the mountain is straightforward. The road AV-931 starting in Hoyos del Espino leads to a place called “La Plataforma”. This is a big parking located at an elevation of 1780m, from where many hiking routes start. The most popular one is the trail to the “Mirador de la Laguna Grande de Gredos”, a 3km hike with

a few steep sections that should be doable for anyone with basic fitness conditions. Beware, in summer and the weekends the parking gets full, and no more cars are allowed to drive up the road, so it is important to get there early in the morning.

Watching the Ibexes

Watching the **ibexes** is virtually guaranteed. They are often spotted in the parking itself, but for better sightings I would recommend climbing a bit up the mountain. They are habituated to the people, so the quality of the sightings is extraordinary. In the mating season, from November to January, the big males go against each other, and the photographic opportunities are very good.

We only drove to the “Plataforma” one of the days and already saw two juveniles in the parking lot. We climbed to “Pico Morezón”, further up than the “Mirador de la Laguna Grande de Gredos” and saw overall around 50 **ibexes** during the hike. Most of them were seen between 1900-2000m of altitude, in broom woodland.



The other two days we made routes in different parts of the range, once to the “Puerto del Peón” and the other one to “Alto de Castilfrío”. We saw **ibexes** both days as well, but since the hikes started at a lower elevation, we spent less time in **ibex** habitat. The hike to “Puerto del Peón” starts in a small parking located in the 6th Km of the AV-931 road. It is a long hike and we didn’t see any other person in all day, so it is a good

idea to use the GPS. Once again, when we reached the 2000m elevation, the **ibexes** seemed to be all around the place. The only other mammal we saw were domestic cows, but I imagine early morning starts in the area, specially in the lower parts will yield more common mammals such as **Foxes** or **Roe Deers**. Finally, the last day we hiked to the “Alto de Castilfrío” starting from the “Puerto de Tornavacas”, in the border with Extremadura. This was our longest and hardest hike, and we saw the **ibexes** again, although in smaller numbers than in previous days.

Considering we saw the **ibexes** every day and in different areas, I believe they will be equally easy to see in other points of the Sierra. However, the most accessible point to gain enough elevation is the “Plataforma” as it can be accessed by car. As far as I know, this **ibex** population extends to the mountain ranges above Madrid (Sierra de Guadarrama), but I don’t know about any specific places nor how easy they can be to see there.

Other wildlife

Apart from the **ibex**, Sierra de Gredos is home to some other interesting wildlife. The target birds are the **Bluethroat**, the **Ortolan Bunting** and the **Red-tailed Rock-Thrush**, that can easily be seen in spring from 1700m on. We saw the three species but none of them particularly well. The other big target is the strikingly beautiful **Cyren’s Rock Lizard** (*Iberolacerta cyreni*), an endemic lizard that is easy to see sunbathing in the rocks.

Lander