



Short Sierra Andujar Trip Report, April 2025

I think that the Iberian Lynx is one of the world's most underrated cats.

Like, it was critically endangered with <100 cats left by 2002. Nowadays, people go out to Sierra de Andujar and pretty much everyone sees it, so it becomes a "checklist" species. But it's a fucking cool-looking cat!

Since I've been to Spain, and it's an easy country to visit with a family, I always left this one for when I'm "in the area". In April of 2025 I decided to finally visit Spain to buy a new thermal scope and visit Sierra de Andujar for 4 nights. We stayed 2 nights at Gato Clavo, and 2 in the town of Andujar, since Gato Clavo was booked for those dates, and also a nice hotel in Andujar would balance the fairly simple Gato Clavo accommodation for my wife. Traveling with a non-mammalwatching wife and a 2-year-old child is full of compromises and gives-and-takes on how much time we spend actually mammalwatching vs. time spent elsewhere.

The itinerary ended up being like this:

Apr. 9: Fly to Madrid, rent a car and drive straight to Gato Clavo. Join the hide (late*)

Apr. 10: Morning and Afternoon sessions in the hide, in-between: Sierra Andujar with the family

Apr. 11: Drive to La Cimbarra Falls near Parque Natural de Despeñaperros for hiking then to Andujar city for rest of the day. Night drive towards Mirador del Coscojar in Parque Natural Sierra de Andujar

Apr. 12: Morning to La Lancha Dam through **JF-5004****; Afternoon around Presa de El Encinarejo. Night drive to La Lancha (rained out).

Apr. 13: Drive back to Madrid... the rest of the trip has no mammalwatching.

* The hide in Gato Clavo has strict entry and exit times. More on that later.

** JF-5004 is the main road for wildlife watching in Sierra de Andujar. I missed that in my homework...

Below is a very simplified map which indicates the main points that we visited:

Gato Clavo, Presa de El Encinarejo (where otters are often seen, i.e. “otter point”) and The JH-5002 which turns into JF-5004 to La Lancha dam, which is the main road for wildlife and lynx viewing in Sierra de Andujar.

According to iNaturalist, there are substantially fewer mammal observations along the A-1677 road to the park and viewpoints, in comparison to the JF-5004 road. It’s also because the A-1677 road has much more forest cover than the more open woodland along JF-5004, which enables looking out over large open areas.



A little about Gato Clavo:

Generally, it's common knowledge that lynx viewing is best in the winter months. But in Gato Clavo, viewing is great year-round with >70% chance on any given day. In fact, while I was there, there was at least a single lynx sighting during every hide session for at least 5 consecutive sessions, and at least a single lynx sighting a day every day for the past week or

so. They currently have 3-5 individuals visiting, according to Antonio Rodríguez - owner of Gato Clavo and long-time lynx researcher.

An anecdote is that the Russian couple who I met at Gato Clavo met a guy who spent a total of 30 hours at the hide before seeing his first lynx, so there's that.

From my experience, the cats' activity times can vary drastically from one day to the next, so there's nothing to do except sit, wait, and be optimistic. When the cats showed up, at least once, they got really close to the hide itself (within a few meters). One female successfully hunted 2 separate rabbits in broad daylight around 18:00 right in front of the hide the day I arrived, which I missed by 20 minutes. Whereas the next evening, no cats showed up until 21:30.

To complement the hide hours, there's a 24/7 live YouTube channel for the camera above the hide, that moves back-and-forth to cover the entire viewable area from the hide: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NVRNNzliI4>

It's also projected most of the day on the TV in the shared living room of the accommodation.

Hide session times are strict, and you are locked in. Leaving early can sometimes be arranged, but arriving late is frowned upon. However, due to special circumstances, I was allowed *some* grace (more on that later). This is courtesy of Tirso, and I would try to avoid requesting such changes if I come back in the future.

The lodge itself is lovely and comfortable, but note that there are no meals provided, so it's a self-catering lodge. A fully equipped kitchen with appliances, silverware, fridge, coffee machine, etc. make it great for making your own meals. There is also a limited choice of restaurants around the reserve (with the best-known option being Los Pinos).

Overall, it's a super positive experience, both Antonio and Tirso were extremely professional, nice and accommodating, and the cats were a blast. So, I recommend it! Credit to Alon Cassidy and Charles Foley for recommending this place to me.

Daily Account

Day 1 (9-Apr-2025): This was my third time in Spain, but first for mammalwatching, and first as the "responsible adult" (not with my parents). So, it hadn't occurred to me how, from de-boarding the plane to car rentals, everything was slow as fuck!

We were on our way from Madrid-Barajas Airport straight to Gato Clavo by 14:00 and reached it around 18:30 after stopping to eat and buy groceries on the way. En-route, I saw

a hare on the concrete underneath an overpass. At first, I thought it was just a “regular” (European) hare, but now I see that from the distribution range, it must be **Granada Hare**.

Upon reaching Gato Clavo, I saw a half-hour-old text from Tirso asking whether I was coming today, because there’s a female lynx hunting a rabbit right in front of the hide. Damn! I had arranged special permission to join the hide when I arrive, and paid for this day and the following day.

Tirso showed us around, we got Alon ready for bed, and I made it into the hide by 19:00. There were plenty of **European Rabbits** hanging out in front of the hide, and they were very



common in and around Sierra Andujar, and around the olive tree plantations on the way. While everyone left at 21:00 as usual, I was allowed to stay until 22:00 but no lynx action was seen that night. It got dark only around 21:00 or so.

Day 2: I woke up early and prepared breakfast for my family using groceries we

bought the previous day. By 7:30 we walked to the hide as it was getting light out. On the way in, Tirso used his thermal scope and announced “Hey, there’s a **lynx** sitting on top of the fence!”. I pulled out my binoculars and indeed, an **Iberian Lynx** was sitting on top of the fence, then jumped down on top of an AC unit, allowing me a single photo in the least natural setting one could ever imagine. Once inside the hide, we got a saw its head peeking behind a tree, and a minute later it walked up a grassy hill and into the forest. Overall, it was a 2–3-minute encounter. Sure, I saw my lynx, but I wasn’t satisfied and wanted more.

Long-story-short, no other cats showed up the remainder of the session, and I left worried. Is this it? The only lynx I get?



I mean, sure, I saw it... But for all the hours sitting in this hide, I want to observe some behavior, I want time to enjoy the features, I want to look at its face and the coat pattern... I really want to be able to soak it in, and not just shoot a couple of record shots. But this would have to wait.

I met with Roni and Alon who were eager to get going after I left them alone for several hours. We drove down the A-6177 road towards Enebro de El Encinarejo, which is the spot where Eurasian Otters are frequently seen. Along the way, we stopped at a nice lookout point that overlooks a rocky hillside where, upon scanning with binoculars, I saw both **Red Deer** and **Iberian Ibex**.



But the otters were a “no-show”. However, Aloni had fun hiking. It’s noteworthy that during this time of the year everything is in full bloom and the scenery is green, lush, colorful with all the flowers, and all-around beautiful.

Before lunch, I drove up to the Mirador Mingorreros, but as it was middle of the day, we didn’t see any wildlife. When I saw “we”, it was mostly me, as Alon was asleep, and Roni took the opportunity to doze off too. We drove back to Los Pinos restaurant and arrived around 14:30. It’s a highly rated restaurant, but perhaps we made a mistake in ordering chicken instead of Jamon. Either way, we didn’t return, since.

We had to fill gas which made us late to arriving back at Gato Clavo. After preparing Alon for the evening, I went into the hide around 17:00 with Tirso’s permission but with the understanding that this was frowned upon by the other hide visitors. This was bad planning on my part, followed by a very generous pass from Tirso. With no time for afternoon coffee or a nap, I barely kept myself awake, staring at the beautiful but empty scene until Tirso showed up at 21:00 to call us back in. Since no cats showed up, he offered everyone to stay an extra hour. Realizing I can’t keep leaving my family in to go alone to the hide, I took the extra hour and decided that this would be it, and I won’t go to the hide again the following day. With a stroke of last-minute luck in the extension hour, around 21:20, I suddenly saw the silhouette of a **lynx** on a log right in front of the hide. It took my eyes a couple seconds to adjust as the natural light was quickly fading and the artificial light was shining on the area. But very quickly I pulled myself together and announced “Lynx!” to the other 4

photographers. They all came, and we enjoyed prolonged views of the animal as it groomed itself and walked towards the artificial pond.



It disappeared for a minute, and then we thought one of the photographers found it in front of a tree all the way on the right... It took a few minutes to realize this was actually a second animal! Two separate lynxes at the same time! Eventually, they walked towards each other and then walked together uphill to the forest. They came down the hill towards us, one



approached within a few feet before retreating due to bird panicking noises that scared it. The entire “show” lasted about 30 minutes. We left the hide very happy with the grand finale, as this was the final hide session for all 5 of us: 2 unrelated couples and me. Granted, they all saw the cat hunting the rabbit the previous day, but enjoyed each encounter, nonetheless.

I was, again, too tired at this point to venture out into the park for a night drive. Plus, my real, main goal was now totally in the bag, and I was satisfied.

Day 3: After a leisurely late breakfast, Roni and I were getting ready when Aloni was felt way too comfortable with the place: he kept going out the main door, and out the gate on his own. It was awesome, since I wanted to bring him to a place like this, where he can freely wonder around in nature. But I also didn't want him to stray too far away. He passed by a pictures of lynx (which are everywhere in the entire



region) pointed and said with excitement “Yinx!”. It was cute, but also a little sad for me, because he was so excited for the lynx, and yet “only dad got to see one”. I tried to explain to him: “do you know that dad saw a lynx?” ... “Yes, Yinx!”. But did he really understand?

The problem is, little bugger was getting so comfortable that at one point I saw him out the window walking outside toward the chicken coup, getting far away, and he's got no fear in him! I quickly got out to chase him. He made it to the chicken coup and started making chicken noises when I notice a large, grayish animal running from behind the coup toward the forest. It took me half a second to realize Aloni just spooked an **Iberian lynx** that was sitting behind the coup! Immediately, I picked him up and said “Look Aloni, it's a lynx!! Do you see the lynx???” to which he responds “Yinx!”. But I still wasn't 100% sure he really saw the animal running away, until it reached some rocks about 20 meters away and climbed them, and Aloni said “Yinx climbing”. YES!!! My 2-year-old son just successfully saw an Iberian lynx – one that he found himself, in broad daylight! It was probably around 9am, and the lynx just sat down and watched us from the rocks. I immediately called Roni on her phone: “Put your toothbrush down, grab the binoculars and come immediately!”

At the end, my entire family ended up seeing a lynx, clearly and in broad daylight. After spending so many hours in the hide, I couldn't believe my son so casually found one, I was ecstatic! Standing there and watching a lynx with my family was my highlight, for sure! Also,

Aloni seeing a lynx at the age of 2 beats me seeing my first wild feline, a jaguar, at the age of 25! You're welcome, Alon. Buy me a beer in 19 years.



We called the other 2 guests to come outside and see the lynx, knowing nobody is at the hide this morning. They appreciated it. About half an hour later, on our way out, after packing our car, I realized I should see if the lynx is still there and snap a couple of pictures using my non-phone camera. Since my shitty Nikon P1000 has become even shittier and has scratches on the lens, I realized none of my photos from the previous night are that good. Luckily, the lynx was still there, dozing off, and I took what came out to be the best couple of lynx pictures of the trip! What a grand finale for Gato Clavo! I immediately texted Tirso, thanked him again and sent him the photos.

The rest of the day we drove to La Cimbarra waterfall, since my son absolutely loves waterfalls, and we don't have many good ones in Israel. He was ecstatic during the entire hike. But the rest of the day was completely mammal-less as we drove directly to Andujar, to our excellent hotel for the next 2 nights, and spent the afternoon strolling the streets of Andujar city. Yes... the things you end up doing when traveling with people you love who are not mammalwatchers.

At night after dinner, I got out at 20:20ish and drove back to "otter point" just before dark, but they played 'no-show' again.

From there, I drove down the A-6177 which turns into A-6178, and spotlit from my window. I completely forewent thermal scoping, which is my favorite nighttime activity (well, that's mammalwatching related...) since driving while thermal scoping on a mountainous winding road with some traffic is not a good idea. During a 2-ish hour session I only saw a bunch of **red deer**, a single **red fox** and a **wild boar** on the way home.

Had I known what I know now, I would have taken the JF-5004 toward La Lancha! That's where more successful mammalwatching is



done with the mostly open terrain and a wide view on the left side of the road (coming from Los Pinos towards La Lancha). I didn't do my homework properly, which is too bad!



Day 4: After a leisurely breakfast, we left the hotel around 10:00. We drove straight to La Lancha dam on the JF-5004, which is when I discovered that this is, in fact, the road for wildlife watching other than otters. Being late in the morning, it was quiet, and the very cloudy sky probably didn't help. Except around 10:45 when Roni pointed out a

small cat with most of its tail missing, at the side of the road. I quickly stopped the car, and we observed a **European wildcat** running away and disappearing into the bushes. I saw it again as it ran from one bushy area downhill to another bushy area with more cover. Based on the location (before the 1st lynx observation platform), behavior and the crappy picture, Antonio Rodríguez diagnosed it with 85% certainty as a European wildcat, acknowledging there are also hybrids in the area. This species isn't particularly common in Andujar, but



Antonio showed me pictures he has taken of wildcats exactly in this area. This was, in fact, the final new species for the trip. But an excellent one for me, as it is my now 17th cat species, with Iberian lynx holding the title as my “newest cat” for approximately 50 hours.

Of course, my excitement was counter-balanced, when I told Roni “I’m pretty sure this is a Eurasian wildcat! It’s exciting because I haven’t seen this species yet!” to which she replied: “Yeah, but it’s the least exciting-looking cat, there’s nothing special about it. It’s like those jungle cats we have back home – not that cool. The lynx was cool.”

Thanks, Roni, for amplifying my excitement about my hobby 🥰

When we reached La Lancha dam, it took us a long time to find the ibex. I hadn’t realized I saw them previously, so I really wanted to see them. Finally, as we were getting ready to leave, Alon and I noticed a family of 3 **Iberian ibex** just downhill from us, sneaking out of the



tree cover. Phew, finally! We got Roni who was enjoying the lake. By the time she came, they disappeared and then popped up crossing the dam itself. It was cool to observe this. We hurried back for lunch and a beer in town, not seeing any mammals on the way other than rabbits. But we did see a Spanish Eagle, which is a nice, regional endemic.

In the afternoon, we went back to “Otter spot” near Enebro de El Encinarejo, around 19:00. But after about 40 minutes of waiting, we dipped. I spoke to two groups, both on the bridge and on the rocks a few hundred meters away – both places known for otter observations. Both groups mentioned having been there over an hour and not seeing otters. The couple on the bridge further told us that they tried earlier that morning and the previous day and didn’t see any. Perhaps these couple of days were low for otter activity. Or I was just unlucky. Either way, I still need to see this species.

After a late dinner, I left my hotel only around 22:30 from the town of Andujar towards Los Pinos and then to JF-5004 towards La Lancha again. It took me 40 minutes to get to the start of the good portion of the road, when it started raining. I saw a huge **wild boar** and then suddenly the rain turned into a violent thunderstorm, to a point where there was no point in continuing, and it was even dangerous. I drove another 10 minutes further to see if the storm would pass. It didn’t, so I declared defeat and turned around. On the way back, I saw a big



frog hopping across the road, which I didn't bother to photograph. But then I saw something walking on the road in the rain, which I avoided hitting. Then, a few seconds later, I was like "wait, that wasn't another frog, it was walking on four!" It also didn't move like a rat nor had a long tail. I suddenly thought it could have been a **shrew** or something crazy that decided to come out in the rain, and I missed it due to being tired and dismissive. Oh well, better pay attention next time!

Day 5: This day was spent driving to Madrid and enjoying some sightseeing with my family. The following morning, we flew home.

Trip List:

1. *Granada hare (*Lepus granatensis*)
2. *European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)
3. *European wildcat (*Felis silvestris*)
4. *Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*)
5. Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)
6. Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*)
7. Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*)
8. *Iberian ibex (*Capra cyrenaica*)

* Asterisk next to lifers

Notable Birds:

- Red-legged partridge
- Common wood-pigeon
- Eurasian griffon
- Short-tailed snake-eagle
- Booted eagle
- Spanish eagle
- Common buzzard
- European bee-eater
- Iberian magpie
- Eurasian magpie
- Eurasian blue tit
- Common chiffchaff
- European robin
- Black redstart
- European Stonechat
- Common chaffing
- European serin

Things I Missed:

First and foremost – Eurasian otter, a species I wanted to see that's also technically found in Israel, but critically-endangered and not commonly found anywhere. According to Tirso, it should be “easy” to see, all times of the day, here:

38.16523114719837, -
3.9933211816285237

You can go on the bridge itself, or may be better to



wait on the rocks that are about 200m away, just up the road (circled in red in the picture, taken from the bridge):

The benefit of standing on the rocks is that you can see both this “natural pool” visible from the bridge as well as the one on the other side. Both of them can be good for otters. Some people also see them in the big lake formed by La Lancha dam, but we didn’t get lucky.

Mouflons and Fallow deer – to be honest, because the schedule was a little crammed, we didn’t drive leisurely on the JF-5004 and scan from there. Apparently these two species should be easy. Perhaps if I was able to make that last night drive without getting rained-out I could have added these two species.

European Garden Dormouse – I thought I’d see one by using my thermal scope.. But not being able to use it due to lone driving etc. Pretty much forfeited this speices.

I also hoped to see European Badger and Maten. I’m not sure how common the badgers are, there are not a ton of reports from iNaturalist, but also not a lot of people search at night. And regarding the marten – I got mixed up and thought European Pine Marten exists in Sierra de Andujar, when in fact, it is the Stone/Beech marten that exists there – a species I saw very well on the famous Ladakh Snow Leopard trip with Jon Hall and Charles Foley.

Least weasels occur in the park as well, but I didn’t have a lead at this time. It may be a good idea to get in touch with Antonio and see if he has any current leads before coming.

Small-spotted genets and Egyptian Mongoose occur in the area as well, but I’ve seen plenty of each, and wasn’t looking for them.

I didn’t have time to visit any bat caves, nor did I see any terrestrial rodents (again, with a thermal scope I may have seen some).

Cheers!

Tomer Ben-Yehuda