



In search of the Iberian Lynx

16-22 Feb 2026

Donada National Park area and Sierra de Andujar

Starling Tours (Belgium)

Guide: Jan Kelchtermans

SUMMARY: My first visit to Spain was a memorable one. By my standards, the trip was a great success with 9 different lynx spotted over the seven days (including one a few meters away). I discovered an easy location to find Iberian mole. Heavy rains in the weeks before our arrival left rivers still at flood levels and some back roads still impassable during the tour. Our guide was fantastic and helped us locate 12 species of mammals and numerous species of birds (I only kept track of new birds on this trip).

A. Good location for Iberian Mole: A small park called La Fuente Vieja in Aznalczar. I am sure there are many locations, but this was close to our first hotel.

B. Great guide: Jan Kelchtermans is a familiar name on this website but this was my first opportunity to participate in one of his tours. Jan worked tirelessly to get us in front of wildlife all day, every day. He drove. He arranged all lodging and meals. He was often juggling three languages in a single conversation (I know, many people are multilingual but it is a skill nonetheless and worth noting). I cannot wait to travel with him again.



Quality of sighting key: SS = Single Sighting, MS = Multiple Sightings / SI = Single Individual. MI = Multiple Individuals / Photography rating assumes basic competence and a telephoto lens P0 = No reasonable chance to capture an image, P1 = Reasonable chance to capture an image of low quality due to distance, lighting, etc that shows at least some identifying characteristics, P2 = reasonable chance to capture an image of “usable” quality that is well lit and shows identifying features, P3 = Reasonable chance to capture one or more image of high quality with good light and close distance

Species	Quality of sighting	Notes
Iberian Mole	MS/MI/P1	Uncovered holes
Western European Hedgehog	SS/SI/P2	Found by thermal
Rabbit	MS/MI/P2	
Brown Rat	SS/SI/P1	Found by thermal
Common Pipistrelle	SS/SI/P1	
Egyptian Mongoose	SS/SI/P0	
Red Fox	SS/SI/P2	
Iberian Lynx	MS/MI/P3	9 individuals seen
Wild Boar	MS/MI/P2	
Mouflon	MS/MI/P2	
Iberian Ibex	MS/MI/P3	
Red Deer	MS/MI/P3	
Fallow Deer	MS/MI/P3	

Most public schools in the United States close for a week in February and I was fortunate to find a wildlife tour that matched those dates perfectly. As I am set to retire in June, hopefully this is the last time work will restrict my travel options! I booked a week long tour through Starling Tours with the main goal of finding Iberian Lynx. The tour was split with roughly half the time in and around Donanda National Park and the other half in the Sierra de Andujar region. These are the typical locations I see advertised in tours and I hope this trip report can add a little to the numerous others found on this site.

DAY 1 (16 Feb): I arrived a day early and checked into the Hotel Lince in Aznalczar. I spent most of the first day adjusting to the jet lag and recovering from a busy work schedule in the weeks before. But the following day (Monday, 16 Feb) I decided to get out and try to find a trail I spotted on Google Maps that ran along the Guadiamar River. It was a short walk from the hotel and I found an access point (read: hole in the fence) at a small green space called La Fuente Vieja. If you go, you will find picnic tables, mowed lawn and many mole hills in the sandy soil. Rather than going to the trail, I stayed in the park.

I found a convenient spot to sit and opened a few mole hills. As I was waiting, a woman started yelling to me in Spanish. I could only make out two words: “dog” and “field”. Since she was walking a dog, I guessed she was telling me she was going to let her dog off leash. So I smiled and waived. She yelled to me again so this time I waived my hand around in a circle and asked “Perro? Si, Si!”. Well, that was not correct apparently because she kept yelling. I was certain I was in an unfenced public space so I didn’t think I was doing anything wrong, so I yelled “No habla Espanol.” and turned back to the mole hills. She walked all the way down the slope to yell at me again in Spanish, but this time closer. I was a little miffed now and probably shouldn’t have been. I was a guest there and probably should have pulled out my phone and cordially tried to engage in a translated conversation, but I was annoyed and just shrugged at her. She then asked me if I knew what perro meant. I said “Si” and pointed to her dog. Let him loose I thought. Finally she made a dismissive noise and turned and left. When I turned back, all of the mole hills were repaired.

I told my daughter this story and she suggested maybe the woman was asking if I had a dog off leash someplace. A good idea that did not occur to me at the time. Anyway, I reopened the holes, apologized to the moles for making them work again and kept my eyes glued to the entrances. Soon enough there was a flicker of movement and I got a good view of what I think were two different moles at two different openings as they moved to repair the damage I caused. According to all the resources I have consulted, I only have one real option for species in this area: **Iberian Mole**. It was during this second round of repair that another resident with a dog showed up on this scene. This time, it was a school girl that I thought was a bit too young to be talking to strangers. She smiled at me and said a few

sentences that I missed except for the word “topo” which means mole. I spent about 15 minutes chatting with her about school, her dog and the recent flooding, all with substantial help from the Google Translate app. She assured me that going through the hole in the fence was fine to do to access the trail. So when she headed home, I went down to the trail and encountered a bat hunting over the water. I spent about 30 minutes trying to photograph the bat and managed a few focused photos. I was convinced it was a pipistrelle but could not determine species.

Speaking of bats, there were numerous bat boxes mounted around town but all that I checked were empty and had no obvious scat below them. We did find a **Common Pipistrelle** later in the week, so I do have that species on the trip report.

The schedule called for us to do a short pre-dinner drive to search for lynx, but one of the flights was late so the other participants and driver/guide did not arrive until after dark. So we switched the plan to spotlighting after dinner. I should mention that the food on this trip was amazing. Thanks to Jan our guide for selecting some excellent lodging and restaurants!

Jan and I had thermal imagers, so I got a front seat in order to poke the camera out the open window. We did not spot a lynx, but had a nice variety of other mammals including **Rabbit**, **Hedgehog** and **Brown Rat**. Since rabbits are the main prey of lynx, that was an indication we were in the right area.

DAY 2 (17 Feb): Jan scheduled us for a 7:45am departure to put us where we needed to be for the 8:00am sunrise. As I read through the recounting of our morning in my journal, there is a line that effectively says I cannot wait to see what the rest of the week will bring!!! Turns out, the highlight (for me) came before lunch on our first full day.

From my journal – *“Sometime after 9 we rounded a bend to see a woman with a spotting scope and what were obviously two clients all looking in the understory of some young pines. Indeed, they had a lynx! We set up our 2 scopes and the cat was fairly close but with sticks in the way and her back to us. But at least it was something.*

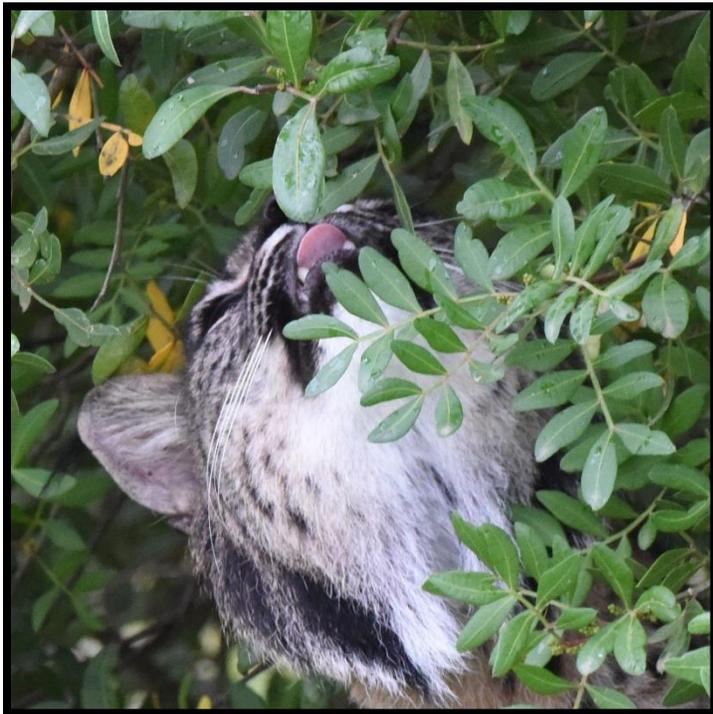
The guide came over and told us she knew this cat’s habits and has followed her for years (I forgot the cat’s name, but it is the female near the bridge). I thanked her for being kind enough to share the location. They left and we continued to watch. About 10 minutes later, the lynx got up and stretched before walking through the trees towards the river. We mirrored her path along the road and Jan had us scoot ahead and set up near the bridge.

When they built the bridge, they raised the road so it had good clearance. We all got down so that only our heads were above the road grade. This meant the lynx was hidden from our view.”

It only took about a minute for me to start thinking that the lynx may change directions so I started scanning to the left. Almost as quickly, I heard the sound of rapidly deployed shutters and turned to find the lynx up on the road, exactly where Jan told us it would be. She eyed us up a little and then walked away from us and over the bridge. She spent some time at the downstream edge of the bridge and I assumed (correctly) that she was scent marking. She then disappeared over the edge of the bridge. We hustled over but the lynx was no where to be seen.

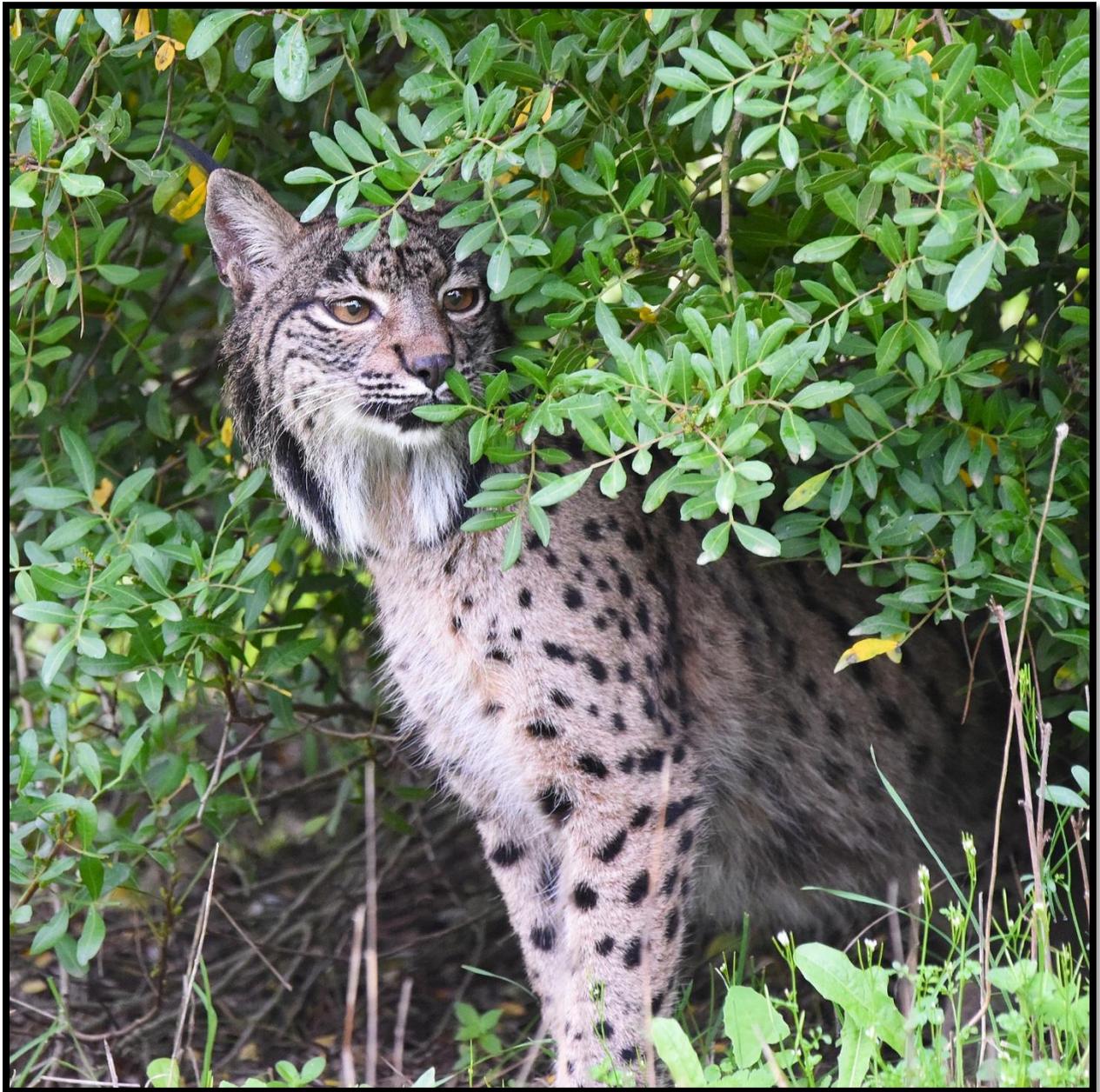
Fortunately, there was a man out walking who watched the lynx take cover in a nearby bush. Perhaps we would have found the lynx on our own in the beginning and perhaps we would have found her hiding in the bush. But it was nice of both of these people to take the guesswork out of it for us and share information.

There was a very small opening in the bush that allowed us to keep tabs on the lynx. She turned her head, she flicked her ears and when she stood up, I alerted the rest of the group. As luck would have it, I was standing in the perfect spot as she began to step out from cover and into the opening. She paused and lifted her head up to lick some rainwater that had collected on the leaves.



She sat for a moment, half in and half out of the bush. This turned out to be my second favorite photo of the trip for three reasons. First, the eyes are clear and in focus. Second,

the lynx is not looking at me. As a wildlife photographer, I try to not be part of the story. Finally, no one would mistake this for a zoo or captivity photo.



She got on her feet and stepped out of the bush, eyes glued on other, louder photographers and I snapped my favorite photo of the trip. Eyes locked, paw raised and pregnant body emerging from the vegetation.



Jan quickly realized she was going to recross the bridge. Hoarsely whispering in Dutch, he rushed us back to our places on the road bank. Indeed, she strolled back across moments later and walked out of our lives mere meters away.

This was the sighting I had hoped for. They say you get to experience travel three times: imagining it before it happens, living it and then recalling it whenever you wish. I just didn't know that we were not to have another encounter like this for the rest of the trip.

We headed into town for a late breakfast and then drove out to a wetland area with adjacent flooded agricultural fields. Of course, a lynx could show any time but the focus here was birding. I picked up a few lifers including Red-headed Pochard and Marbled Teal. Jan saw an **Egyptian Mongoose** dart across the road while we were all looking elsewhere.

The evening drive was uneventful but spotlighting/thermal imaging gave us our second lynx of the trip as well as a hunting **Red Fox**.

DAY 3 (18-Feb): After our morning drive (Red-legged Partridge), we drove to Donanda National Park. According to Jan, the park itself is no longer a good place to look for lynx due to low rabbit populations. But the birding and history lessons were enjoyable.

We continued in and around the park for the day. An interesting stop was the town of El Rocio. We all agreed it was like stepping back in time to the Southwestern United States. The streets were unpaved and there were hitching posts in front of every residence and

establishment. Apparently there are festivals where the whole place is full of horses and riders. It looked interesting, but I was more focused on the wildlife. We spotted one new mammal, a very distant **Red Deer**. Spanish Sparrow, European Turtle Dove and Crested Lark were three new species of birds. There was a large body of water that hosted some distant birds and close Glossy Ibis and European Spoonbills, among others.

We spent most of the evening watching for lynx near the bridge from yesterday. Bird of the day for me was Iberian Magpie with numerous seen in great light.



No lynx seen today!

DAY 4 (19-Feb): Today we drove to Andujar and a completely different habitat. Hilly with fewer trees than we had in the first half of the trip, it was an interesting change. In the afternoon, we were driving along the road that has several different pull offs for lynx and a man hustling down the road said he had just seen a lynx. We pilled out and only a few of our group glimpsed it going into a thicket to hide. We waited for the rest of the afternoon, but it did not show until just at dusk when, again, only a few of our group briefly saw an adult and a kit cross the road. **Eurasian Boar** and **Fallow Deer** were our two new mammal species for the day. Cinereous Vulture and Iberian Grey Shrike were lifers for me.

Day 5 (20-Feb): Our first stop this morning was to the La Lancha Dam in search of lynx and (more importantly to me at this time) European Otters. However, the recent heavy rains that caused massive flooding the week before our tour meant the river was still raging and the otters were not seen by us (but reported by others later in the day).

We spent some time at the lynx overlooks with no luck and after lunch, headed to a private property with lynx as the main goal. Before reaching our destination, one of the group spotted a pair of lynx not far from the road. Jan reversed the van in time to see mom head in one direction and the young lynx dart across the road in front of us. We had a few more fleeting views of the young one before she disappeared in the brush. Soon mom was

vocalizing in an attempt to reunite the family. We waited for about 45 minutes with only glimpses of the lynx.

From there, we drove to a small house and parked to scan a hillside for lynx. Several lynx were regulars at this location and it did not take long before we spotted a male lynx and a young one at a den site. Although they were at scope distance, we were able to watch the male hunt. We did not see him make a kill but he emerged from the brush with a rabbit in his mouth and brought it back to the den site for the young lynx. Four lynx in short order!

Day 6 (21-Feb): We started the day by heading back to the dam in search of otters. Instead, we had a nice female lynx sighting that was brief but welcome! We spent well over an hour waiting on the otters but I simply could not will them into existence.

We headed to a different location within the Andujar Natural Park in search of **Iberian Ibex**. It was a location Jan knew from experience and involved glassing the dry, rocky hillside. It took a fair bit of time but Jan finally found some for us. They were at “scope distance” and the views were diagnostic, but I had hoped for closer “camera distance” encounters. Soon, more ibex were seen moving and Jan found us a nice male with impressive horns. All told, we spent over an hour here. It was sunny and pleasant but left me wanting a closer encounter. Little did I know how soon that wish would come true.

The eight of us piled into the van to head to a new location. Jan was making his way down the small dirt road and made it about 100 meters when someone spotted Iberian Ibex just off the road in a grassy depression. Now, in our defense, these animals were not visible from our vantage point but it made me smile to think how long we spent scanning a distant hillside with scopes and binoculars to pick out miniscule ibex through the heat shimmer of the day when we had a small herd almost in our laps.

For the next hour, we silently photographed the dozen or so female and young ibex. I was pleased with the results and would easily have spent another hour with these beautiful mammals. I focused a lot of my attention on a small complex of boulders that was in direct sunlight. With proper cropping and a shallow depth of field, it is easy to imagine the ibex below on a rocky crag accessible only after an arduous climb by me, the intrepid wildlife photographer. Reality? I had to crop our van out of this image.



Once Jan dragged us (me) away from this herd, we drove a minute down the road to a small overlook with a pair of picnic tables for lunch. We ate and relaxed a bit, not knowing we had one more ibex encounter just around the corner. When Jan loaded the rubbish from lunch into the van, he found us a nice group of male ibex. They were not tolerant in the least and quickly headed uphill. I managed a few nice photos but had been spoiled by the first herd.



The rest of the day was a mixture of driving and stopping to scan for lynx. As the sun set, we called it quits and headed back to the hotel for our last dinner of the trip. But the mammal gods gave us one last sighting of a lynx as it crossed the road in the dimming light. If you are keeping score, that was lynx number eight for the group, with an additional sighting enjoyed by only a few trip members.

Day 7 (22-Feb): No time for an early morning wildlife search due to early flights. What an amazing trip that fit my budget and my days off from work. And when I say it fit into my work schedule, I mean just barely. After my transatlantic flight and long drive from the airport, I climbed into bed at 3am with the alarm set for three hours later so I could get to work on time. 10/10 would do again!