

Trip Report – Spain. January, 2026.



Spain is a hard country not to like. The scenery and climate are beautiful, the people friendly and outgoing, and the wine is cheap. Perhaps because of these factors, our recent trip to Spain focused as much on art and culture as it did on wildlife, making for a great trip but a somewhat abbreviated species list. Likewise, you'll find this report a bit light on photos. I took very few, and many of them were terrible.

The first species seen was a House Mouse in the Vancouver Airport as we were awaiting our flight. It popped out of a small hole in a pillar and proceeded to run back and forth around the waiting area several times, to the delight of some and the consternation of others.

We made a stop in Montreal to visit our son, then continued on to Madrid the next evening, arriving early on a grey Monday morning. After checking in, we walked around Park Retiro, stopping for churros and chocolate. An afternoon nap turned into a five-hour sleep. Fortunately, this being Spain, all restaurants were open when we awoke late in the evening.

That night neither of us slept well, so we ended up sleeping in until 2:00 pm, which put a significant damper on the day's sightseeing. We walked around the Royal Botanical Gardens, enjoying the largest colony of Monk Parakeets in Europe, then caught the free admission period at the Prado. Two hours allowed for a tour of the main floor only, followed by tapas and a resolve to get up earlier the next day.

The next day we were in total tourist mode, visiting the Reina Sofia, the Thyssen and walking out to the Grand Palace to watch the sunset, while the day following found us back at the Prado and then on to the Museum of the Americas.

We took the high-speed train to Valladolid, a beautiful and historic city but perhaps most noteworthy to the mammal-watching contingent for being the home of Carlos Bocos, wildlife guide extraordinaire. After a pleasant walk from the train to our apartment on the main plaza, we wandered over to Carlos's house to meet Ana, his partner, and Guzman, their three-month old son and latest addition to the mammal-watching fraternity. That evening the five of us headed off for a drive through the Duero Valley. European Rabbits were present in a traffic circle on the edge of town as predicted, then we were quickly in the countryside. We saw a group of three Western Roe Deer, a pair of Red Foxes and several Iberian/Granada Hares. We had a distant view of what appeared to be a Wolf, but never saw it clearly enough for confirmation, in part because it started to rain. Wood Mouse/Long-tailed Field Mouse, Algerian Mouse and Common Vole rounded out the night's sightings.

We headed out to a couple of old mines the following morning. The first one was an old gesso mine, which made for slippery walking, worsened by the lack of bats within. The second mine contained four species of bats, Schreiber's Long-fingered Bat, several dozen Greater Horseshoe Bats, two Lesser Horseshoe Bats and a Grey Long-eared Bat. It was snowing when we left the mine, a situation that occurs perhaps once every two years in Valladolid and was likely attributable to the appearance of Canadians in the area.





We went for a walk along the Canal del Duero that night, some 10 or 20 km outside Valladolid. A Southwestern Water Vole was sitting on the bank edge at the start of the walk, providing brief but clear views. This was followed by sightings of European Rabbits, Western Roe Deer, two Wood Mice and an Iberian Hare. An animal was seen running along the bank at one point, too briefly to be identified. We heard a couple of gunshots which Carlos attributed to the opening up of hunting for Wild Boar in an attempt to stop African Swine Flu, although one wonders what else might be getting shot at. We arrived back in town by 11:30 pm.

The following day was largely devoted to museums and art galleries, although we did walk through Campo Grande Park, seeing a couple of European Rabbits and a Eurasian Red Squirrel.

Just before going to bed that night, I read that there had been a train derailment south of Cordoba. Thinking, "I hope that doesn't affect our plans", I drifted off into an uneasy sleep.

I awoke to the news that the derailment had been far worse than I feared, with over 40 mortalities. At the train station, we were told that all trains in Andalucia were cancelled for the foreseeable future and that the day's buses were also fully booked. The train from Valladolid to Madrid was still operating, so I spent the trip checking options and booked a vehicle with National Car Rental at Madrid airport. We cancelled our train tickets to Cordoba and metro-ed out to the airport, where I was asked by the rental agent how I had been able to book a car, as they were being told to cancel all bookings made that morning due to the surge in demand. After some back and forth, we were told he would see what he could do for us, which turned out to be offering us a "luxury car" at a higher price. As I had booked an SUV this wasn't really ideal, so eventually we settled on the proffered car for the previously-agreed to

price. The luxury car turned out to be a Cupra Leon with a couple of huge scratches on the sides, a bit low-slung for the dirt roads of southern Spain, but excellent on fuel thanks to the hybrid engine. Somewhat exhausted already, we left Madrid, circling the city and then heading south to Andujar. We arrived in Andujar about 4:30 pm, stocked up on groceries at Carrefour, and reached Gato Clavo just after 5:30 pm.

Gato Clavo, mentioned previously on [mammal-watching.com](http://mammal-watching.com), is a lovely rural farmhouse with rooms for rent and a hide which overlooks a small valley. Captive rabbits are released here to attract Iberian Lynxes, allowing for great photographic opportunities. Based on the ease with which people had seen Iberian Lynxes in the park, and given that not all members of our expedition wanted to sit in a hide all day waiting for something that might not appear, we decided we would try to find a lynx out in the wilds and not at the hide. Clearly Tomer's two-year old son is better at spotting wildlife than I am. After a walk around the grounds and dinner, we set out for a night drive. We found a Red Fox and an Algerian Mouse in the area close to Gato Clavo, then drove down the A-1677 to the JH-5002 and JH-5004 roads. Red Deer were present in large groups in the woods and we had a brief view of the hind end of a European Badger disappearing under a fence into the undergrowth. A single Wild Boar appeared, then several groups of them, followed by Fallow Deer, including some stags with impressive antlers. We turned around just short of the Jandula Dam and were back by midnight.



After a bit of a sleep-in we walked around the yard, but saw only a European Rabbit. We drove to the La Lancha Dam and went for a walk, seeing a remarkable number of Griffon Vultures. Back to the lookout points, we chatted to a Spanish chap while the mist cleared. Looking down the hillside, we saw a group of five Iberian Ibex and walked down the road to try to get closer to them. After a picnic lunch, we drove back, seeing Red Deer and Fallow Deer along the way. We then drove to Presa de El Encinarejo and eventually saw a Eurasian Otter swimming around. It posed briefly in the shallows at one point, but I wasn't quick enough to get a photo. After dark, a Red Fox was seen walking around, after which we drove back to Gato Clavo.





We left at 7:00 the next morning, seeing the usual suspects – a single Wild Boar, lots of Red Deer and a few European Rabbits. The highlight of the morning was a distant group of a dozen Mouflon. The area was busier today than the previous day. A French group was observing a rabbit, while a large group of Brits stared at an Imperial Eagle. What that says about national characteristics I'm not sure, although the French group might have been discussing potential recipes for the rabbit.

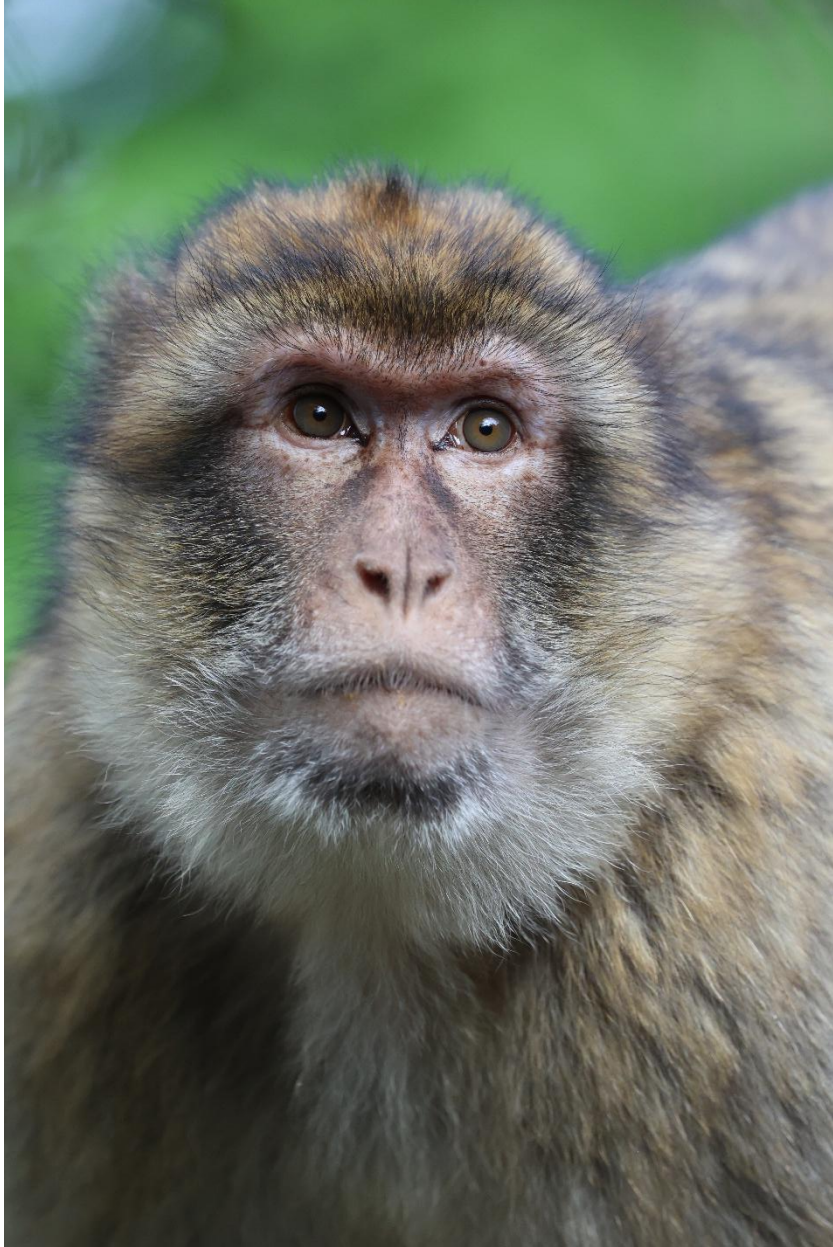


We returned to Gato Clavo for lunch and received word that we could stay an additional night as requested although we had to switch rooms. The folks who had spent the morning in the hide saw an Iberian Lynx catch a rabbit. We saw rabbits unbothered by predators. That afternoon, we drove to the lower dam but it had started to rain and the visibility was poor. We left about 5:00 pm after having seen one Red Deer and no otters and drove into Andujar to replenish supplies. When we returned to Gato Clavo, we had to switch rooms yet again for reasons which were never made clear. Each room was smaller than the previous - another night and we might have ended up in a broom closet.



The next day was overcast and cool. We drove back to “lynx valley”, seeing the usual species along the way. We did speak to a French visitor who had had a brief glimpse of a lynx from one of the lookout points the previous day, but after several hours we hadn’t seen anything new and so decided to push on to Gibraltar. La Linea, the closest Spanish town to the border, was a bit of a nightmare to drive but a pleasure to walk, so we wandered along the malecon, and had great tapas.

The walk to Gibraltar is perhaps most notable for the fact that one has to cross the airport runway to enter the exclave. After waiting for one plane to land and another to take off, we walked up Engineer’s Way to the Gibraltar Nature Reserve. After a fascinating tour of the Second World War tunnels, we found the day’s true objective a little farther along the way – Barbary Macaques. These primates were introduced many years ago and are the only non-human primate living wild in Europe. The day was warm and sunny and we strolled through town before returning to our car and heading to Coto Donana.



Our destination for the night was the Ardea Purpurea (Purple Heron), an inn in Villamanrique de la Condesa on the edge of the national park. By the time we had arrived it was raining and getting late so we didn't do a night drive. We accidentally slept in the next morning, then drove to El Rocio.

I had read about El Rocio being a picturesque village full of cowboys, so turning off the paved road onto a potholed lane filled with gigantic puddles only to end up at an enormous muddy car park full of thousands of vehicles was a bit of a surprise. I asked the attendant who stated that a fiesta was underway. Although this undoubtedly would have been interesting, we decided to skip it and drive on to the park. A turnoff for El Acebuche beckoned and we arrived at the Coto Donana visitor centre just as a park attendant was due to lead a tour to the Iberian Lynx captive breeding project. He gave one of the

most thorough explanations of a captive breeding project I have heard, then escorted us to an enclosure where a couple of older retired lynxes were resting in the sunshine. Afterwards, we walked several of the trails and had lunch at the park café. A quick visit to the beach and we then headed off to Cordoba.



We last visited Cordoba in 2008. My most vivid memory of the city involves entering an underground parking lot with a 60-degree driveway and about 2 cm of space between vehicles. I was hoping for a different experience this time and it was. It was worse. Apple maps took us into the heart of the city, driving through what appeared to be pedestrian-only streets, just as the city's populace was heading out for a Saturday night on the town. Eventually we found our hotel and I stopped in a disabled parking spot while Tracey checked in. We continued driving to find parking and, lo and behold, a large public parking lot covered in 6 inches of water appeared just on the other side of the river. We took a spot gratefully and headed back to our room before doing a walk around town on the way to dinner.

We spent the following day doing touristy things in Cordoba, which is easily one of the most interesting cities in Spain. We departed around 3:30 pm, and discovered that the parking lot was about two turns away from the A4 highway, something I wish I'd realized the night before. We drove to Torrejon de Ardoz for easy access to the airport the following morning.

A big thank you to Carlos and Ana for their hospitality. Not seeing an Iberian Lynx has given me a great reason to return to Spain. I can almost taste the Jamón Ibérico de Bellota already.

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List of mammal species seen:

1. Barbary Macaque – *Macaca sylvanus*
2. Iberian Hare – *Lepus granatensis*
3. European Rabbit – *Oryctolagus cuniculus*
4. South-western Water Vole – *Arvicola sapidus*
5. Common Vole – *Microtus arvalis*
6. Long-tailed Field/Wood Mouse – *Apodemus sylvaticus*
7. House Mouse – *Mus musculus*
8. Western Mediterranean/Algerian Mouse – *Mus spretus*
9. Eurasian Red Squirrel – *Sciurus vulgaris*
10. Greater Horseshoe Bat – *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*
11. Lesser Horseshoe Bat – *Rhinolophus hipposideros*
12. Schreiber's Long-fingered Bat – *Miniopterus schreibersii*
13. Grey Long-eared Bat – *Plecotus austriacus*
14. Common Fallow Deer – *Dama dama*
15. Western Red Deer – *Cervus elaphus*
16. Western Roe Deer - *Capreolus capreolus*
17. Iberian Ibex – *Capra pyrenaica*
18. Mouflon – *Ovis aries*
19. Wild Boar – *Sus scrofa*
20. Red Fox – *Vulpes vulpes*
21. European Badger – *Meles meles*
22. Eurasian Otter – *Lutra lutra*