

# Andújar

26 - 28 May

*Lonnie Bregman*



*Adult female Iberian Lynx taking a nap*

Parque natural de la Sierra de Andújar is of course famous among mammalwatchers nowadays for being the best place in the world to look for the Iberian Lynx. I had already visited the area twice before, last November with my brother Danny and last January with Diedert Koppenol, Wouter van der Ham and Wouter Monster. This had resulted in two sightings, both in January. However, one sighting was very distant and the other one was quite brief, so there was still room for improvement. Apart from the lynx there are plenty of other reasons to visit Andújar. It is a beautiful place that holds lots of wildlife in general. You can see a wide variety of other mammals, birds, reptiles and insects here. As I was still living in southern Spain and had a free weekend, I decided to give it another go.

## Accommodation

The classic accommodation is Los Pinos (<https://www.complejolospinos.es/>). It is ideally located for conducting searches for the lynx and there is a nice restaurant. It is also possible to have breakfast and to arrange packed lunch here. The quality is good and the costs are decent. I paid €38,50 per night for one person and I got two two-person bedrooms and a bathroom for that. For dinner in the restaurant I paid about €15 to €20, including drinks and tips. Virtually none of the people working here speak English, but this is a problem across the whole of Andalusia. They respond quickly per email. There is no WiFi in the rooms. The nearest supermarkets are located in the town of Andújar and take between 15 and 20 minutes to reach.

## Locations

There are two main locations to look for the lynx. Both of these have been well described in a [trip report by Lee Dingain](#) from 2010, which is a must-read to prepare for this trip. I won't repeat everything here, but I will give a brief summary and add some extra information like GPS coordinates.

### JF-5004 to La Lancha

This is the most reliable place. It consists of a stretch of road up in the hills from where you have a good view over the valley to the west. There are many watchtowers, but you can just scan from the road as well. Scanning this valley does not only give you a chance for Iberian Lynx, but also for other mammals such as European Rabbit, Red and Fallow Deer, Iberian Ibex, Mouflon and Wild Boar. Sometimes lynxes are also seen on the road itself, or crossing it to the upper part of the hill. The road stretch with the good view starts roughly at (GPS 38.205835, -3.951747). Bear in mind that the JF-5004 is for a large part covered with potholes, which makes it a somewhat long and annoying drive.

### Encinarejo Trail

The Encinarejo Trail is a road that runs parallel to the Jándula river and ends at a dam. Sightings in this area are less frequent, but if you do see a lynx here it will probably be closer than at the JF-5004 and there is a better chance that you will be alone. The first vantage point that is described by Dingain is a high point roughly halfway down the trail (GPS 38.1575, -4.0021). However, the view is not that good and I haven't heard much about recent sightings from here. The other vantage point is a platform on the left side of the dam at the end of the road (GPS 38.1649, -3.9940). As far as I know, lynxes are mostly seen in the vicinity of the bridge that can be seen from this platform. They also sometimes cross it. The river is good for Eurasian Otter, especially at the end of the day.

## Day-to-day report

### 26 May

After checking in at Los Pinos I arrived at the vantage points on the JF-5004 at 17:00. On the way I already spotted my first **Red** and **Fallow Deer**. I drove straight to a vantage point I knew to be quite reliable (at least this year) near the end of the good road stretch. This is where we had our lynx sightings in January and I was aware that currently there was an adult female with three cubs residing in this area. This vantage point is located at (GPS 38.2134, -3.9614).

From here you look out over a dirt road down below and a rocky slope in the distance behind it. When I started scanning it was very hot and light conditions were poor. The lynxes we saw in January both were on the slope in the distance, so I mostly scanned there, even though it was hardly visible due to the sun. The dirt road was much better visible and much closer, but it is also a small area so you would have to be very lucky for them to turn up there, right? I left it mostly to the Spanish people who were also present. While scanning I saw my first **European Rabbits**, more **Red Deer** and on the rocky slope a pair of **Iberian Ibex**. At 20:30 one of the Spaniards walked by and we had a little conversation about how we hadn't seen the lynx yet. He said yes, but now was the best hour so maybe we would get lucky. He went to scan from the next corner. Sure enough, a little while later he walked past me again, a little faster this time and only saying the words "Follow me."

Of course, I did... and there it was: a beautiful adult female **Iberian Lynx** sleeping in full view on top of a rock, just behind the dirt road. As if that wasn't enough, a few moments later three adorable lynx kittens turned up on the dirt road itself. They were playing endlessly while the mother seemed to take a well-deserved break from parenthood. After a while, I saw the mother wake up and for a moment look me straight in the eye. The kittens then joined her, climbing on top of her and playing with her tail, the mother giving them the occasional loving lick. The whole spectacle lasted for about an hour, until light faded and they got up and disappeared behind the rock. It felt like I had been watching a real life BBC documentary. Simply amazing. On the way back I encountered two male **Mouflon** on the road. There were possibly also some females or immature animals, but I didn't get a good look at them because of the dark.

After a typically Spanish late dinner, I decided to do a night drive in search of Iberian Hare. There were some recent sightings on Observation.org along a road to the southeast of Los Pinos. I drove the road, which led through some orchards, to the furthest sighting (GPS 38.0745, -3.9348) and back. I didn't see any hares, but there were some **Rabbits**, two **Red Deer** and I got a brief glimpse of a **Garden Dormouse** in my torchlight. I went to sleep at about 2:00.





*Three adorable young lynxes playing on the dirt road*

### 27 May

Since I got home late the night before and I had already seen the lynx so well, I didn't get up too early and slowly made my way up the JF-5004 watching birds. On the way I saw **Red and Fallow Deer** again. When I arrived at the same spot of the day before at about 9:00, there were already people standing there watching the family of **Iberian Lynx** again. They had just gone out of view, but it didn't take long before they reappeared on the dirt road. They laid down in the shades on the side of the road, the youngsters again playing non-stop and eating leftovers of a Rabbit. After some time the mother got up and descended behind the road, leaving her young seemingly a bit confused at first but following her eventually. The mother came back once more that morning, walking over the dirt road with a freshly caught Rabbit in her mouth. On the rocky slope behind the dirt road there were **Iberian Ibex** again, this time five individuals. At 11:00 I moved on to the La Lancha dam at the end of the road, where I did some birdwatching. Meanwhile it was getting pretty hot so it wasn't long before I decided to return to my room to have a siesta.

After doing some groceries and filling up the car in Andújar, I went to the Encinarejo Trail to search for Otters. The atmosphere down by the river was very serene and there was a lot of wildlife like birds, turtles and dragonflies. I also saw a few individuals of the cool Ocellated Lizard, one of Europe's largest lizards with beautiful blue spots on the sides. When the final hour of daylight broke, I went to a large flat rock on the riverbed about 200 meters before the bridge at the end of the trail. In November me and my brother had seen an Otter from this

rock also at the very end of the day. I waited for a while and then, just a few minutes before sunset, a **Eurasian Otter** very calmly swam by along the opposite bank, just as it did the last time. It caught something and ate it in front of me, and continued its way towards the bridge. The rock I was standing on is located at (GPS 38.1630, -3.9962). When it was dark I drove around for a bit to look for animals, but I didn't see anything interesting. I stopped at the dam and spotted an **Otter** from the bridge with my torch. Maybe there even were two of them, but I was not entirely sure.

After dinner I went for another nightdrive to look for hares. This time I went to Los Escoriales, the farm that is located at the intersection where you turn left from the JH-5002 unto the JF-5004 on your way to the vantage points. I had read in a [trip report by Sjeff Öllers](#) that if you continue straight on this intersection, the next few kilometers would be good for Iberian Hare. On the way I encountered another two male **Mouflon** on the road, in addition to the ever-present **Red** and **Fallow Deer** (especially at night). Right on the Los Escoriales intersection there was an adult female **Wild Boar** with a very small young. I continued straight for a while, stopping a few times to scan the fields with my torch. This resulted in two more **Wild Boars**, but there was no sign of any hares. The vegetation in the surrounding grasslands also seemed a bit too high for a hare to be easily spotted, so maybe late spring isn't the best time for finding them in this area.

## 28 May

I started the day even later than the day before. After checking out I went back to the same road behind Los Escoriales to see if I could find an Iberian Hare in the daytime then. It was already quite hot so my chances didn't seem particularly high, but around noon I did see two **Red Foxes** crossing the road just in front of my car. I think they might have been juveniles. This welcome tick to the mammal trip list set the total to 10, which seemed like a good moment to go back and start the 4 hour drive back home to Algeciras.

## **Epilogue**

All in all it was a very successful trip, I even left one day earlier than I had planned for. I had seen the lynx much better than I could have hoped for and finding it was relatively easy. In addition, I was able to spot most of the larger mammal species that are possible in this area. The only one I really missed was the Iberian Hare (which I finally saw well the next day near Seville). Winter is the most popular time for people to come here and search for the lynx as it is the mating season, but going in spring is definitely recommendable too. There was clearly much more wildlife activity in general than during my previous trips. Moreover, it is much quieter with people, although you still bump into the occasional lynx fanatic once in a while. If you do go in spring, I would say that it is probably better to go a little earlier, for instance in April or the beginning of May, as temperatures are lower.

## Species list

1. European Rabbit	Common in the area, especially from the JF-5004 vantage points. The Iberian Peninsula is the only place where they are native.
2. Garden Dormouse	Briefly seen in an orchard during the first nightdrive.
3. Iberian Lynx	A family consisting of an adult female and three cubs were seen in the final hour of the day on the 26th and in the morning on the 27th, from the same spot on the JF-5004. Superb views.
4. Red Fox	Two in front of the car at noon on the final day, probably juveniles.
5. Eurasian Otter	One gently swimming by at sunset while I was waiting on the riverbed at the Encinarejo Trail. I also saw at least one from the bridge a little later when it was dark, probably the same individual.
6. Wild Boar	Three sightings and a total of four animals during a nightdrive on the second night near Los Escoriales.
7. Red Deer	Common in the area.
8. Fallow Deer	Common from the JF-5004 vantage points and along the way towards it, but slightly less than Red Deer.
9. Iberian Ibex	Seen on both occasions from the spot where I saw the lynxes. They are regular on the rocky slope behind the dirt road. In January we also saw them near the La Lancha dam.
10. Mouflon	Two adult males were standing on the road in the dark on two occasions: when I returned from the JF-5004 on the first evening and when I was heading to Los Escoriales on my second nightdrive.

## Some interesting birds

Red-legged Partridge	Common along the JF-5004.
Red-necked Nightjar	Frequently heard once it was dark. I even saw three of them feeding in the lights above the Los Pinos restaurant.
Great Spotted Cuckoo	On two occasions I saw a juvenile being fed by Eurasian Magpies, their most popular host species as a brood parasite. Very interesting to see this behavior.

Cinereous Vulture	Two flying overhead on the spot where I saw the lynxes.
Spanish Imperial Eagle	Adult flying overhead on the spot where I saw the lynxes.
Eurasian Scops Owl	One or two calling during my second nightdrive in the area behind Los Escoriales.
Iberian Green Woodpecker	Common in the area.
Iberian Magpie	Common in the area.
Red-billed Chough	A pair at the end of the tunnel on the far side of the La Lancha dam. I think they had a nest.
Dartford Warbler	Singing male on the spot where I saw the lynxes.
Rock Sparrow	A few on the La Lancha dam.
Cirl Bunting	Two singing males on the Encinarejo Trail.



*Male Ocellated Lizard*