

Spain and Portugal, 26 Dec 2019 – 9 Jan 2020.

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Browsing trip reports on mammalwatching.com (my favorite way of self-torture for hardening the spirit), I noticed that there were none from mainland Portugal. So I talked my wife into going there for the winter break; we brought along my daughter and in-laws to make it more entertaining, so all mammalwatching was done at night or at dawn. We spent a few days in western Spain as well. Despite excellent weather I got only 31 species; goodies included Morisco roe deer, Pyrenean desman of the rarely seen western subspecies, Iberian shrew which I missed in 2014 despite much effort, and the recently split Portuguese field vole, the latter two seen within 40 min from each other. We forgot my camera and all flashlights at home, so I have no mammal photos except those taken with my phone. New moon was on December 26.

Spain

The weather was dry and cold in Spain, with strong temperature inversion in the interior (-2°C at night in Avila but +4 at 1700 m in Sierra de Gredos). Night drives and thermal scoping in fields, pastures and open woodland were remarkably devoid of mammal sightings.

Avila: There are small colonies of **Mediterranean pine voles** in steeper portions of grassy slopes below the city walls, the best one at 40.659619N 4.704030W. Park across the street and watch the slope until you spot a vole; there is street lighting. A thermal scope helps. I saw one at 1 am after 2 hours of watching. About 15 min from the city, I found fresh **genet** tracks on frost-covered road in Arroyo Cardiel (40.749241N 4.739948W, a known site for eagle owls), and a few **wild rabbits** along the road between there and Avila.

Sierra de Gredos: A **Pyrenean desman** was swimming under the bridge in Hoyos del Espino (40.338612N 5.172614 W), but I didn't have a red light so it disappeared quickly. Two **Spanish ibex** were sleeping at night across the river from Platформа de Gredos parking lot (40.276008N 5.231964 W), but climbed over the ridge and disappeared at first light. At sunrise I glimpsed a **snow vole** about 500 m up the trail. Briefly saw a **red squirrel** in the pine forest in on the way back.

Parque Nacional de Doñana: I spent a few hours driving and walking around the small section of the park on the eastern bank of Guadalquivir (note that due to lack of bridges the only way to get there from the western bank is via Seville, ~250 km trip). Mammals were a bit thin compared to July 2014 (see my [trip report](#)). In Pinar del Algaida (entrances at 36.879401N 6.285634W and 36.846527N 6.315316W) there were lots of **wild rabbits** and **wood mice**, plus some **badger** tracks. I also saw a **Norway rat** at night near Observatorio de Aves Salinas de Bonanza (36.875851N 6.343597W).

Parque Natural de la Sierra de Grazalema: after unsuccessful attempt in 2014, I succeeded in seeing **Morisco roe deer**, a distinctive lineage and a possible split, in Garganta Verde (36.807556N 5.391392W). It is a small, delicate, short-faced, gazelle-like deer with many differences from other races; the core population is in nearby Parque Natural de Los Alcornocales. There are Spanish ibex, Iberian lynx, wildcats and bat caves in the eastern part of Sierra de Grazalema, but I didn't have time to get there.

Parque Natural de Cornalvo near Merida was highly recommended by a local naturalist, but I found it a bit disappointing: it's mostly overgrazed pasture with lots of fences, dead-ending dirt roads, locked gates not shown in Google Maps, and loose shepherd dogs. There were some abandoned houses, but all had roof tiles removed so weren't good for bats. In half a night of driving and walking I saw one **wood mouse** and one bat chasing winter moths around a street light (at +3°C!) – a **meridional serotine** judging by its sonogram.

Parque Nacional de Montfragüe: Just like in 2014, I was in a hurry and couldn't explore this wonderful place properly. An **otter** was fishing in the evening below Portilla del Tietar viewpoint (39.857041N 5.959788W watch also for eagle owls); **red deer** were common after sunset along the road to the viewpoint from the central area of the park. Lots of **boar** tracks and **stone marten** scat on the trails. The road from Caceres to the park had **Granada hares**.

Portugal

Warmer and greener than Spain, Portugal was still cold and dry, with night temperatures around 10°C on the coast but down to -3 in the mountains.

Reserva Natural da Serra da Malcata: a plateau mostly covered with planted forests (90% pine). Night driving wasn't effective (just one **Granada hare** at the lower edge of the reserve), but selectively walking through non-planted hardwood patches and shrubby clearings at higher elevations worked better: in four hours I saw a **roe deer**, a **Portuguese field vole** (at 40.262918N 6.950101W), a few **wood mice**, and an **Iberian shrew** (at 40.280747N 7.000612W, IDed by color and snout shape). On muddy roads there were very few tracks: mostly **roe deer** but also **stone marten** and **badger**. The reserve was created in 1981 for Iberian lynx, but it might be extinct there. Other mammals reportedly present are wildcat, genet, red fox, wild boar, and red squirrel. Bring a small car: in some villages even the main street is very narrow.

Parque Natural da Serra da Estrela: the highest mountain range in Portugal (up to 1993 m), is said to have 49 species of mammals, including Pyrenean desman, southern water shrew, wolf (sporadically), otter, and wildcat. I drove through it during the day, and saw only a **least weasel** crossing the road.

Parque Natural das Serras de Aire e Candeeiros in the coastal range has numerous caves with colonies of Mediterranean horseshoe bat, Geoffroy's myotis, common bentwing and other bats. There are also wildcat, genet, mongoose, badger, boar, etc. I spent a night driving and walking around and saw a **greater white-toothed shrew** (39.448N 8.925326W), a **Mediterranean pine vole** (39.554237N 8.838952W), and a few **wood mice**.

Parque Natural Sintra-Cascais is just half an hour from Lisbon. Much of it is private land, but many houses are abandoned; the one at 38.787149N 9.428764W had **lesser horseshoe bats** on the upper floor and an old **garden dormouse** tail in a side shed. The best place for bats is Quinta de Regaleira (open 9:30-5), a park with a network of underground tunnels where many bat species have been recorded over the years ([list](#)). I spent a couple hours exploring the tunnels but found only one **Daubenton's myotis** near the exit from the bottom of Initiation Well (38.794595N 9.396745W). There's no parking at the park entrance; walk from Sintra train station (20 min) or use public transportation. Elsewhere in the park, I saw a **badger** near Lagoa Dos Mosqueiros (38.784689, -9.426344), a juvenile **hedgehog** at Santuário da Perinha parking lot (38.769301N 9.458829W), a **wild rabbit** near the Santuário, and **Lusitanian pine vole** along the trail to it from the parking lot. Also present in the park are Iberian shrew, least weasel, and genet. Avoid driving around during the day (traffic is terrible); at night watch for various newts and for fire salamanders (exceptionally beautiful in this area). Cabo da Roca (38.780410N 9.498997W) should be good for seawatches although I didn't see any mammals in the ocean; at night there was an **Algerian mouse** along the access road.

Reserva Natural do Estuário do Tejo, also near Lisbon, is mostly a bird reserve, but it appears to be good for **polecats** (just as Ebro Delta on the other side of Iberian Peninsula). I saw one animal and some scat along the access road to the visitor center (38.849898N 8.974033W). There were also **southern water voles** there.

Parque Natural Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina in the southwestern corner of Portugal is probably the best place in the world to see **Cabrera's vole**: I saw four in one night by exploring the gullies leading to beaches such as Praia do Terreiro (37.046196N 8.978254W, accessible from Valle Santo, 37.048401N 8.966929W). The road to Valle Santo from 37.027528N 8.971507W had lots of **Mediterranean pine voles** (mostly on the outer sides of the roadbed, but also in open fields) and a herd of 20+ **boars**; look also for little bustards during the day. **Wood mice** were easy to see at night on the slope below Fortaleza do Beliche (37.027074N 8.982680W). Budens-Pedralva Road was good for night drives: I got an **Algerian mouse** (37.102069N 8.831768W), two **Granada hares** chasing each other (37.113272N 8.843894W), and found a few **badger** tracks and some **Spanish mole** molehills. Caves at Monte Clerigo Beach (37.344248N 8.850526W) had hibernating **Mediterranean horseshoe bats**. Cabo de São Vicente (37.023390N 8.995806W) and Cabo Sagres (36.994027N 8.947167W) are excellent lookouts where common, bottlenose

and striped dolphins are sometimes seen. I didn't see them there, but spotted a herd of **bottlenose dolphins** from another lookout farther east, Praya Mesquita (37.087390N 8.416286W). Dolphin-viewing tours are run in summer from Sagres, Salema and other coastal towns; they mostly target bottlenose dolphins, but sometimes get common dolphins and killer whales. The park is known as the only place in the country where otters live on the seashore; there are also mongooses and stone martens.

Rocha da Pena (trailhead at 37.250489N 8.098003W) is a limestone ridge that can be climbed in less than an hour. It appears to be an excellent place for **genets** (I saw two in one night), **wild rabbits** and **wild boars** (both abundant on the summit plateau), and **red foxes** (around villages). On the summit plateau there are caves with greater horseshoe bats and common bentwings, but I didn't have time to look for them.

There are many interesting parks in the north of Portugal that I haven't visited: Parque Nacional da Peneda-Gerês (with populations of Pyrenean desman, Iberian shrew, Mediterranean, greater and lesser horseshoe bats, otter, pine marten, wildcat, and Spanish ibex), Parque Natural de Montesinho (said to be particularly good for Pyrenean desman, with Portugal's largest populations of wolf, otter, ermine and wildcat, and the country's only population of common water vole), and Parque Natural do Douro Internacional (said to have wolf, wildcat, Cabrera's vole, and many bats including Blyth's myotis). All of them border similar protected areas in Spain. Spanish lynx has been recently reintroduced to Parque Natural do Vale do Guadiana in the southeast. A good online resource for Portugal's protected areas is <http://www2.icnf.pt/>.

Species seen

1. Iberian shrew	<i>Sorex granarius</i>	RN Serra da Malcata
2. Greater white-toothed shrew	<i>Crocidura russula russula</i>	PN Serras de Aire e Candeeiros
3. Pyrenean desman	<i>Galemys pyrenaicus rufulus</i>	PN Sierra de Gredos
4. European hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	PN Sintra-Cascais
5. Lesser horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros minimus</i>	PN Sintra-Cascais
6. Mediterranean horseshoe bat	<i>R. euryale</i>	PN Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina
7. Daubenton's myotis	<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>	PN Sintra-Cascais
8. Meridional serotine	<i>Eptesicus isabellinus boscai</i>	PN de Cornalvo
9. Red fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes silacea</i>	Roca de Pena
10. Common genet	<i>Genetta genetta genetta</i>	Roca de Pena
11. European badger	<i>Meles meles marianensis</i>	PN Sintra-Cascais
12. Least weasel	<i>Mustela nivalis vulgaris</i>	PN Serra da Estrela
13. European polecat	<i>M. putorius aureola</i>	RN Estuário do Tejo
14. Eurasian otter	<i>Lutra lutra lutra</i>	PN de Montfragüe
15. Wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa baeticus</i>	PN SW Alentejano e Costa Vicentina, Rocha da Pena
16. Spanish ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica victoriae</i>	PN Sierra de Gredos
17. Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus hispanicus</i>	PN de Montfragüe
18. Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus garganta</i>	PN Sierra de Grazalema
	<i>C. c. capreolus</i>	RN Serra da Malcata
19. Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus truncatus</i>	Praya Mesquita
20. Red squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris alpinus</i>	PN Sierra de Gredos
21. Wood mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	many locations
22. Algerian mouse	<i>Mus spretus</i>	PN Sintra-Cascais, Pedralva
23. Norway rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	PN de Doñana
24. Mediterranean pine vole	<i>Microtus duodecimcostatus</i>	many locations
25. Lusitanian pine vole	<i>M. lusitanicus lusitanicus</i>	PN Sintra-Cascais
26. Portuguese field vole	<i>M. rozianus</i>	RN Serra da Malcata
27. Cabrera's vole	<i>M. cabreræ</i>	PN Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina
28. Southern water vole	<i>Arvicola sapidus sapidus</i>	RN Estuário do Tejo
29. Snow vole	<i>Chionomys nivalis abulensis</i>	PN Sierra de Gredos
30. Wild rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus algirus</i>	many locations
31. Granada hare	<i>Lepus granatensis granatensis</i>	many locations