

DIARY OF VISIT TO SOUTHERN SPAIN

IN SEARCH OF THE

IBERIAN LYNX



RICHMOND AND TWICKENHAM RSPB LOCAL GROUP

IN SEARCH OF THE IBERIAN LYNX.

11th to 15th JANUARY 2016

DAY 1 :

The eight members of the Local RSPB Group on the trip made their individual way to the City Airport to meet up before completing the usual pre-flight procedures and then await the call to board the aircraft for the flight to Spain. There was a short delay to take-off before the approximate two hour forty-five minute flying time to Malaga Airport where on arrival the weather was sunny and warm. After passport checks and collecting our baggage we met Josele and after boarding the mini-bus we commenced the journey north circa 13-45 hrs local time (one hour ahead of GMT) for the first scheduled stop at a lake to look for White-headed Duck. During the circa two hour drive the weather had turned wet and during the drive up the track to the lake car park the mini-bus became stuck in a muddy section when, with much pushing, we managed to free the vehicle to allow Josele to continue the short distance to the carpark before turning round to head back to us before returning to the main road to continue our journey north, having decided to abandon the search for the duck. Regrettably, the bus became stuck in the mud again and this time despite our efforts we could not free the vehicle. Without going into full details, the bus was dragged out of the mud by cable and winch of a second rescue vehicle (the first one having also become stuck), before travelling to a hotel which Josele had managed to book us into for a one night stay where we arrived a little before 21-00 hrs.

DAY 2 :

The rain cleared overnight and the day dawned foggy which cleared to give a sunny day. After breakfast we continued the journey north to our destination the hotel Los Pinos in the Parque Natural Sierra de Andular where we arrived mid-morning. During the journey birds seen included White Storks on their nests at the top of electricity pylons !. Having dropped our baggage etc. in our respective rooms we boarded the bus again to travel to an area in the park to commence the search for our quarry. On arrival many other watchers were already present, their vehicles parked along long stretches of the road which allowed un-interrupted views across a large expanse of a beautiful valley and apparently the 'home range' of a female Lynx. With so many watchers it was not surprising that at last someone spotted a Lynx but by the time many of us reached the spot the Lynx had disappeared amongst the boulders and trees etc. but at least we knew one was present. However, it was not long before the Lynx was seen again and by late afternoon when we left we had all enjoyed several, if distant, views of this beautiful highly endangered mammal. Before we returned to the hotel we continued along the road to the dam at La Lancha and spent half-an-hour or so here but birds were few but a family party of Long-tailed Tits were seen. Other bird species seen during the day included stunning views of a pair of superb Spanish Imperial Eagles, Black Vultures, Griffon Vultures, Azure-winged Magpies (mostly around the grounds of the hotel), Great Grey Shrike, Green Sandpiper, Water Pipit, several Black Redstarts, and both Sardinian Warblers and Blackcaps. Tonight we sat down to an excellent dinner washed down with copious quantities of wine in celebration of the success of our first Lynx watch.

DAY 3 :

The day dawned sunny but with a cooling light wind but as the day progressed it became warmer. After breakfast it was back to the same area of the reserve we visited yesterday to search for Lynx again as we had been informed that a male had been seen mating with the female early this morning !. It was early afternoon before the female Lynx was seen and we all enjoyed excellent, but again, distant views of her stalking a Rabbit but regrettably when she pounced at the quarry she disappeared behind a large bush. She was spotted shortly afterwards sitting in the shade of a tree but we could not ascertain whether she had been successful in her hunt. During the day we had good views of two Mouflons and also Red Deers. Birds seen during the day included two immature Spanish Imperial Eagles and two groups of vultures comprising mostly Griffon Vultures but also two or three Black Vultures feeding on carrion, Dartford Warbler, Iberian Green Woodpecker and Crag Martins. Mid afternoon we returned to the hotel for a short break before travelling to El Encinarejo in the park area. Josele dropped us off about a kilometre or so from a dam and whilst Josele drove the bus down to a car park next to the dam we continued on foot along the road looking for birds. Few birds were seen but several extremely long 'strings' of Pine Processionary Moth Caterpillars which must have numbered several hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of individual caterpillars large numbers of which were squashed by passing vehicles as the insects in unbroken long lines crossed the road !. A Hoopoe was seen by at least two of the party as we approached the dam and during our stay at the dam birds seen included several Chiffchaffs feeding on small flying insects, both White and Grey Wagtails, a Southern Grey Shrike, Rock Sparrow, Sparrowhawk and a splendend Kingfisher. As dusk was falling and shortly before we left we all enjoyed watching an Otter searching for food in the river. Tonight we again sat down to a splendend dinner washed down with more excellent wines after another very rewarding day out wildlife watching.

DAY 4 :

Today the weather started sunny but by late afternoon it became increasingly overcast but remained dry. After breakfast we spent half-an-hour or so walking around the grounds and surrounding areas of the hotel during which Roger saw the first Hawfinch of the trip, a species which Josele had told us was regularly seen here. First visit of the day was the monastery of Virgen de la Cabeza which had been clearly visible in the far distance from where we had been watching the Lynx etc. During our walk around the outside of the monastery and part of the town which has been built to accommodate the many thousands of pilgrims who attend the annual religious festivals, birds seen included Hawfinches, Serins, Blue Rock Thrush, Meadow and Water Pipits, Thekla Larks and several Black Redstarts. Returning to the hotel for lunch we then had an hour or so to do our own thing. Two or three of the group explored the surrounding areas of the hotel again during which a Hoopoe was seen a couple of times but no further sightings of Hawfinch.

We arrived back at the Lynx watching area circa 15-15 hrs. but it was not until 18-40 that at last a Lynx was spotted and this time it was the male. We had good views of him as he slowly made his way down a sandy track and whether it was because he either heard us or perhaps caught our scent, for whatever reason he turned off the track and disappeared amongst the rocks, we then returned to the hotel. Back at the hotel we later learned that he reappeared but by this time it was almost dark and it was only his outline that could be seen against the light colouring of the sandy track.

This evening, our last in Spain before flying back to the UK tomorrow, we again enjoyed an excellent dinner and several bottles of wine.

DAY 5 :

The day dawned wet and foggy for our drive to Malaga Airport. We left the hotel at 09-00 and arrived safely at the airport circa 12-30 after a half-an-hour comfort stop en-route. Having said our farewells to Josele and thanked him for another excellent trip, we completed the baggage and security checks and then waited the call to board the aircraft. The aircraft took off more or less on time and after a somewhat bumpy flight, we safely landed at the City Airport shortly after 16-00hrs. After passport checks and collecting our baggage we awaited our respective mini-cabs followed by a slow drive back through the heavy London traffic to our respective homes.

So ended another most enjoyable and very successful foreign trip.

Participants :

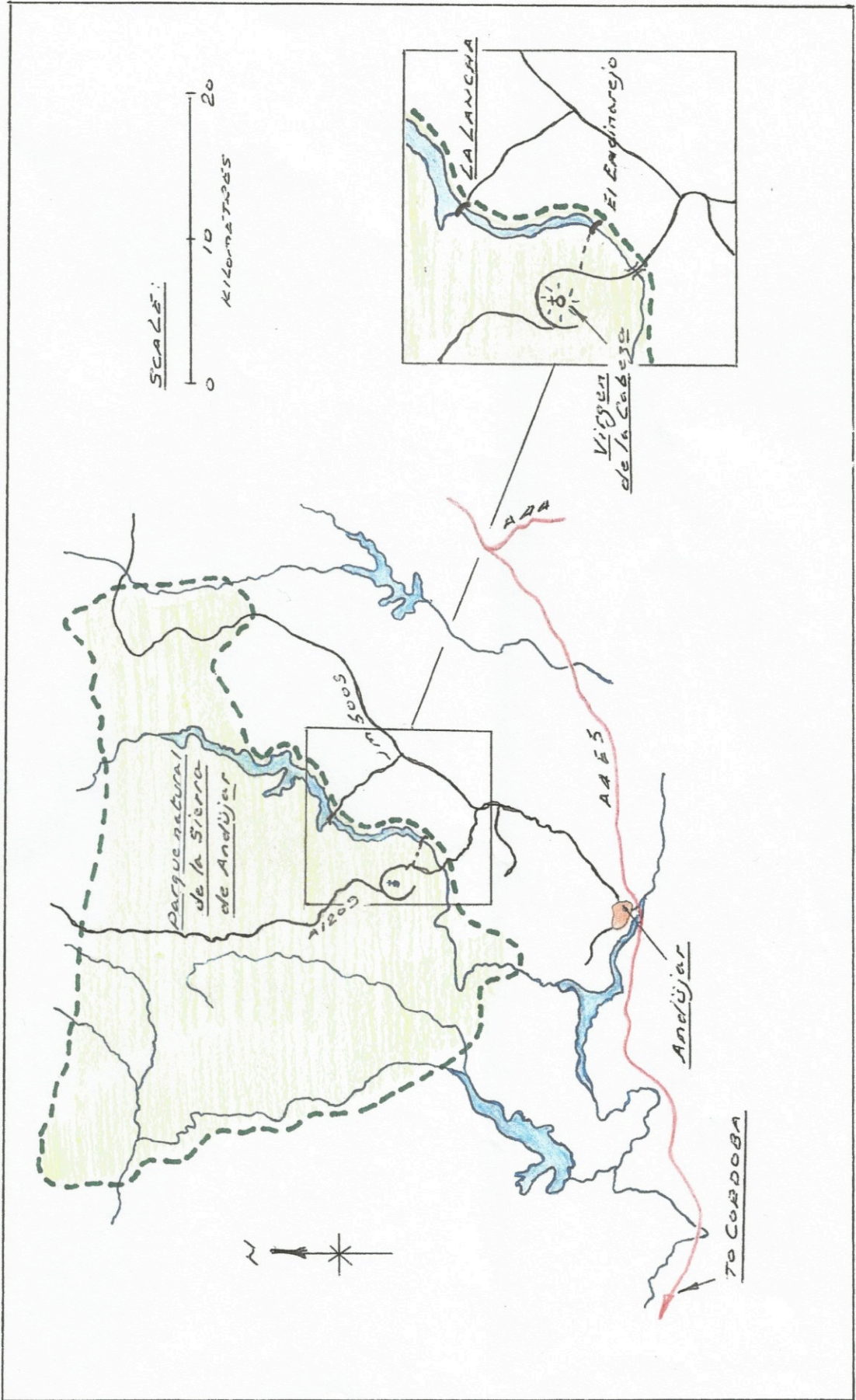
Organiser, leader and mini-bus driver : Josele J Saiz, Boletas Birdwatching Centre.

Members of the Richmond and Twickenham RSPB Local Group :

David and Susan Broadley
Diana Housley

Jane Rowse
Roger and Imogen Theobald

Kathy Buosy
Bill Kilby



SYSTEMATIC LIST

BIRDS :

Great Crested Grebe
Great Cormorant
Cattle Egret
Grey Heron
White Stork
Shoveler
Griffon Vulture
Black Vulture
Spanish Imperial Eagle
Marsh Harrier
Common Buzzard
Sparrowhawk
Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine
Red-legged Partridge
Coot (h)
Green Sandpiper
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon
Collared Dove
Little Owl
Tawny Owl (h)
Hoopoe
Kingfisher
Iberian Green Woodpecker
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Thekla Lark
Crag Martin
Water Pipit
Meadow Pipit
White Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Winter wren
Dunnock
Robin
Black Redstart
Stonechat
Blue Rock Thrush
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Blackbird
Blackcap
Sardinian Warbler
Dartford Warbler
Chiffchaff
Goldcrest
Firecrest
Long-tailed Tit
Crested Tit (h)
Blue Tit
Great Tit

Southern Grey Shrike
Azure-winged Magpie
Common Magpie
Western Jackdaw
Red-billed Chough
Hooded Crow
Common Raven
Spotless Starling
House Sparrow
Rock Sparrow
Common Chaffinch
Common Linnet
European Goldfinch
European Greenfinch
Eurasian Siskin
European Serin
Hawfinch

Note :

Names used above and listed in
the order adopted for the Collins
Bird Guide, 2nd Edition.

MAMMALS

Iberian Lynx
Mouflon
Fallow Deer
Red Deer
European Rabbit
Otter

BUTTERFLIES

Clouded Yellow
Painted Lady
Small White