

**February 2023**

## **Iberian Lynx EXTRAVAGANZA**



### **Intro: what's in a name?**

That many Iberian Lynx have been given names is a fact that arose from the strict need to protect the species from extinction at the time. After all, around the year 2000 there were not a 100 individuals left in the wild; about 60 in the Sierra Morena mountains and about 30 in the vicinity of the Donana National Park (NP). Both were the only two remaining relict populations where the Iberian Lynx managed to survive.

Wild lynx were captured, breeding centres set up and breeding programs started. Females and males were named, ditto the animals that were subsequently reintroduced and, to this day, are still being reintroduced. Recently in Granada and Murcia.

Naming the animals is something that also happens with kittens that are photographed by researchers through camera traps during field surveys. Once the animals have been photographed several times from both sides and the spotting patterns are clear, they are given a name. Afterwards they are added to a general database in which all data of the entire population is processed. Kittens born in 2022 got a name starting with the letter T; kittens born this year (late March – early April) will be given the letter U. A bit in accordance with the

working method of the Western European wolf database. How long people will be able to follow this up is a questionable. After all, the total number of lynx is currently around 1350 to 1400 individuals. When the last Life Lincé Project bears fruit, the total number could rise very quickly. After all, the aim of the sixth European-funded project is to connect all large areas that now have decent populations of lynx in the wild. Let's hope they lose count soon!

### **Saturday 18 February - encounter 1**



It is evening when we begin the last area of the destination: the eight kilometer long, well-known gravel road towards the dam of La Lancha in the Sierra Morena mountains near Andujar. In the past 15 years, the adjacent, vast private area of Los Escoriales has become a world-renowned location for the observation of Iberian Lynx.

Around the turn of the year, in 2023, crowd scenes are not exceptional and are in fact quite normal. This is because of the many wildlife travel agencies that stay there with clients looking for the Iberian Lynx. Moreover, the number of local enthusiasts is also growing. Year after year we see more and more local Spaniards here who, especially from a photographic point of view, visit the region to spot the Iberian Lynx. That is not surprising since January/February is the mating period of the lynx. The animals are then much more mobile, often active during the day and are vocal.

For years we preferred to visit La Lancha either in February or late October - early November. The mega bustle of all the agencies is then absent and the lynx are, of course, also there. All year round actually.

The high number of rabbits around the year 2010 is now something of a bygone era. This is because of rabbit diseases such as myxomatosis. It seriously affected the rabbit population over the years. But they are still there. And where there

are rabbits, you will find Iberian Lynx. It's that simple. Even now that is still the case.

On recent visits to the area (November 2021 and February 2022), it was mainly Rafiki, a young male lynx, who stole the show. He regularly turned up near the road towards the dam. This especially in the vicinity of the three last viewpoints that have been built recently to observe the lynx.

This year a female named Margaza stole the show, together with her young from last year (Taraj and Tami). The core area of this eight-year-old female is situated just on the bend where, after bumping five kilometers on the famous gravel road full of potholes, you get an overview of the valley . The amount of parked cars is a good indication to know where she was seen recently! Even now we stop there for a while.

However, we decided to continue to my favourite spot a little further down the road. Since 2009, I have personally discovered and photographed most of the lynx from vantage points four and five.

We also scored a lynx here this time. With my binoculars mounted on my tripod, I quickly discover a lynx while scanning. It is seated on its haunches, between some bushes on the opposite slope. A bit surprised by this observation, we quickly walk to the car where the telescopes are still stored. Given the size of the animal and its garish whiskers, it is likely Odon. A well known, territorial male. It takes until dusk for Odon to become active. Typical, in accordance with the behavior of a house cat, is how such an animal first stretches and yawns a few times before going on its way.

A few local Spaniards without very good optical equipment have now gathered around us. Their glances through the telescope provide a lot of joy, jollity and yes even emotion. Feelings that I fully recognise and like to observe in others!

It is the third time that we immediately succeed in finding a lynx at the start of the trip. Not suspecting that this is the start of a series of eight different lynx sightings eight days in a row. This first sighting is a good reason to raise a glass! Something that happens a little later at the bar of Los Pinos. Viva Espana!

### **Sunday 19 February - meeting 2 and 3**

At dawn we are already set up near viewpoint four. The stored provisions from the day before are used for breakfast and later for lunch. Staying indoors in an

area where lynx roam is something that you should limit to the essentials here. In practice, this results in a search for lynx from dawn to dusk - and it never gets boring. The spring song and courtship of many bird species is a delight to the ear and eye: The yodelling and fluting flightcall of Wood Larks, the powerful descending klu-klu-klu-klu-klu call of the Iberian Green Woodpecker, the lovely chattering and squeaking sounds of the Iberian Great Grey Shrike, the chirping and jingle like glass splinters made by displaying Serins, the Spotless Starlings imitating the call of Golden Orioles, the sudden startlingly loud burst like a stuttering engine of the Sardinian Warblers and the deep, slightly goose like gakh of the Spanish Imperial Eagles displaying in the sky above us. Just marvelous to watch and hear!



The most striking call actually is the one produced by the Great Spotted Cuckoos chasing the magpies in the area. The aggressiveness of the many magpies clearly shows that Great Spotted Cuckoos prey on their nests and imminent clutches. After all, together with Azure-winged Magpies, it is both magpie species that the Great Spotted Cuckoo parasitises on.

In addition, the territory of Los Escoriales is teeming with other mammals: Red Deer, Fallow Deer, Mouflon and Wild Boar. Mouflon are of semi-wild origin, but there is one ungulate that is one 100% wild: Iberian Ibex. Where you used to have to descend a bit further to rocky slopes around the dam itself, you can now also see them from the viewpoints that offer a view over the valley.

At this time of the year, the females are separated from the males; you rarely see them together. In other words, you will find a herd of males or females accompanied by young animals.



But back to the main goal here: **Iberian Lynx**.

It is also important to be in contact with spotters at the other vantage points in the area. The speed with which residential lynx move through the landscape is sometimes astonishing. Before you know it, they have passed two or three vantage points during their hunting trips.

Gesticulating and movement back and forth near the first vantage point ensures that tripods are folded together and put away. In no time at all we are parked up at the scene of the action. Margaza and her two cubs appear to be starting their morning walk. Unfortunately, they do not do so through open terrain and also move independently of each other, which makes observation difficult.

The only one of the lynx trio that appears to be visible at times is Taraj. It is striking how small this young male of 11 months is compared to his sister. Like a mouse, he sneaks through the area, making as much use as possible of the bushes and ground contours during his movement so as not to be noticed.

A Spaniard related to a local ecological tourism agency is in possession of a thermal camera. He manages to spot Taraj again and again when he has disappeared from sight. Unfortunately, the gang of thirty-five spotters present causes a disturbance.

Taraj is clearly not pleased with all the commotion that ensues when he is rediscovered. Time and time again, he immediately flees when people move on foot.



Obviously the lynx hates it! Fortunately, we are experienced enough to handle the situation. Staying ahead of the animal is an important and something not to lose sight of.

Once the sun is slightly higher on the horizon and the temperature starts to rise, Taraj prefers to retreat to a bush. This brings the second observation of the trip to an abrupt end. Attention slackens, people drift off and cars leave. We decide to have lunch a little further on.

In the afternoon, four young Spaniards pick up Taraj again from the second vantage point. Taraj has left his hiding place and is walking again. He does this again in such a way that he is hardly detectable. In any case, it is difficult to explain to third parties where an animal is located in a hilly landscape dotted with rocks, bushes and trees. Especially if the animal keeps on the move. In any case, its camouflage ensures that the animal literally blends into its surroundings.



Fortunately, we can rely on years of experience of the area and with this cat. This turns out to be a huge advantage. Once again we can observe the animal superbly through binoculars and telescope! Two good sightings in one day,

something we can live with. At nightfall we leave the valley to raise a glass to another excellent day!

#### **Monday 20 February – encounter 4**

Despite excellent weather conditions (no wind, overcast and cool weather), the morning is one that passes quite calmly. Birds are somewhat less active and there is no trace of lynx.

After two or three days in the area, we now also know who the weekend tourists here are, the voyeurists and the multi-day visitors.

The first category of people are largely local Spaniards who regularly come here to look for Margaza and company. Something I'm downright jealous of - being able to go out weekend after weekend armed with optical equipment on the trail of the lynx. Spaniards can! Also for Brown Bear and Wolf too in other regions.

The second category of people are of the type who come to get some fresh air in lynx country. They park the car at one of the viewpoints, stare around, stroll a bit up and down the road with or without binoculars, and then drive on towards the dam where the same scenario unfolds. In practice, this results in a two-part (back and forth), noisy dust cloud that makes no contribution at all to spotting lynx. This also applies to the passing mountain bikers and fishermen who (with their four-wheel drive vehicle, trailer with a boat on it) make their way to and from the lake. It is really advisable not to arrive here during the weekend.

The third category, like us, are passionate lynx spotters. Most often, interaction with these like-minded people often leads to enthusiastic, enriching conversations that regularly result in the exchange of mobile phone numbers. An added value in any case when you are positioned at different strategic vantage points. During the current visit, the exchange of telephone numbers takes place with a man called Oscar and a man called Alex. Oscar is a retired and passionate Spanish photographer who has visited La Lancha several times to spot and photograph the lynx. Alex, on the other hand, is a German biologist whose photographic angle brought him to Andujar in search of lynx. The exchange with them will benefit us later...

After having lunch again near the mirador a little further towards the dam, we decide to continue to the Jandula river. This is the second most famous place in the area for lynx spotting. It turns out to be a masterstroke!

Once there, we first stop near the famous white blocks that give a view of the private domain of Encinarejo. The estate appears to have been bought quite recently by a South African whose plans for the development of an ecolodge are well advanced. Apart from the lynx present, he also introduced a herd of wisents (European Bison) in the area to boost the safari content of the area. We don't see lynx (yet), neither the wisents. We do spot a foraging European Otter in the still water of the river.



Once it retreats to a bank hole under a thicket of overhanging shrubs, we continue towards the dam and the bridge. More specifically, we wait on the rocky outcrop from where, in February of last year, we observed and filmed another otter fishing nearby.



Against all odds, it is an Iberian Lynx and not an otter that suddenly appears on the scene. On the other side, suddenly, completely out of nowhere, a sturdy lynx stands on a rock. The animal must have been sleeping there all along. The territorial, natural behavior the animal exhibits is to lick paws and claws. Then the lynx marks a rock with its cheeks and it urinates, with its buttocks in the air, another rock.

Moreover, with its hind legs flat on the ground, it scrapes up some loose sand. That, too, is typical of marking by territorial male felines.



Afterwards we can follow the animal as it continues its journey along the fence that runs parallel to the Jandula river bordering the private domain of Encinarejo.



Our happiness just doesn't stop! For the third day in a row we witness Iberian Lynx in the area just doing their own natural thing! What a journey so far!

## **Tuesday 21 February – encounter 5**

Lynx-wise, this is the least productive day of our four-day stay in Andujar. Yesterday's cool temperatures have made way for open and pleasant spring weather. Birds are chirping again. Different types of butterflies are also noticeable.

At dawn we are back on the rocks near the Jandula river. Two otters are present, but there is no trace of Haz (yesterday's nine-year-old lynx). Even a short walk on the opposite estate, which can be reached via a gate on the other side of the bridge, does not yield a cat.

Then back to La Lancha! After a territorial pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles show their courtship flight noisily in the airspace, they settle in the crown of a Holm Oak. After copulation there, one of the two individuals chooses to reconnoiter the airspace. This time not to show off, but to drive off a Griffon Vulture, which floats in, from its breeding area. Downright spectacular!

Expelling the Griffon Vulture, however, turns out to be a measure for nothing. After all, in no time at all a warm air bubble ensures that a cloud of Griffon and a few Cinereous Vultures have taken over the entire airspace. This above the valley in which the Holm Oak with the mating, local pair imperial eagle is located. In no time at all the two adult Imperial Eagles are hanging in the thermals in the warm air bubble. No more quarreling.

Later in the day we see one of the two adult birds flying over with a rabbit in its talons. This is, as for the Iberian Lynx, the staple food of this eagle; an endemic species of the Iberian Peninsula.



And also the lynx sighting of the day is related to the sighting of a Spanish Imperial Eagle. Where a juvenile individual first flies low through the valley, its landing on the ground a bit higher on the slope is particularly remarkable. Upon closer examination, it appears that, at the place where the young eagle has landed, there is also a group of noisy magpies. The way they are alert and focus on the vegetation below them clearly indicates that something is going on.

Scanning from a boulder, we suddenly see movement in the dense undergrowth under the tree. A brown-orange coat with black spots, white whiskers, tassels on the ears and a short black-tipped tail make the identification easy: the fifth sighting on our trip of an Iberian Lynx! The lynx most likely consumed a rabbit or other prey. The prey, or at least remnants of it, must also have been the reason why the immature Imperial Eagle had landed there moments earlier.

The specific location as well as the size of the animal suggest that this is most likely again Margaza, the well-known resident female. Unfortunately, the dense vegetation prevents the lynx from being relocated afterwards. Moreover, it is already late at night. It's getting dark. A silent meow also suggests that Taraj and/or Tami are also nearby. We decide to give the animals their rest.

With this fifth sighting we have so far succeeded in getting a sighting of a lynx for the fourth day in a row. Something that can't be taken for granted!

### **Wednesday February 22 – encounter 6**

Today we decide to do something different, we plan a visit to a private area. Because the biggest downside of all that searching for the lynx of La Lancha is you do it continuously from behind a fence. Something that is not always pleasant at times, especially from the vantage points.

The private areas do not only offer an exclusive feeling when it comes to searching for lynx. It is also an opportunity to see different animals than those that are around La Lancha. We more or less know those.

Sitting on some rocks behind a farm, this time within the fence of one of the vast farmlands, we scan around 4:30 pm down a hill consisting of countless rocks with Holm Oaks and scrub. Alex, the German from La Lancha, joins us during the excursion. In this lynx session he sees a link with a kind of similar-looking hills in Rajasthan, India. The only difference is the cat species itself: in India, leopards are the main bird to shoot instead of lynx.

Grazing of the area by the cattle present clearly leaves its mark. The domain looks less wild compared to the estate of Los Escoriales. Still, it is quite pleasant to stay here. We are immersed in it all alone. Moreover, not a single vehicle passes us. As a result, we are spared from residual dust clouds that would otherwise attack our optical equipment: binoculars, telescopes and cameras.

The continuous calling of several Great Spotted Cuckoos in the area is impressive. Hoopoes, Little Owls, Spotless Starlings, Azure-winged Magpies and Rock Sparrows are also very vocal. It gives that typical, Mediterranean spring feeling more shine!



When scanning, the discovery of two partridge hunters causes quite a stir. After all, with a decoy in a cage and shotgun on their shoulder, both hunters are looking for a suitable location to do their thing. Fortunately, the lynx mound is huge. We also know that Iberian Lynx can endure quite a bit of disturbance from humans. So we're not too worried. We also know that quite recently up to four lynx were seen hunting together here!

After an hour of scanning, we suddenly hear the sound of a lynx calling. Where we initially hear the call only a few times briefly, it soon becomes more regular. In addition, the call also sounds louder at times. It is clear that the animal in question is either turning its head or that it is moving. When we discover the animal, it almost immediately rushes to a bush to catch a rabbit. Sitting on its haunches and with a choking rabbit in its mouth, everyone has the lynx in their sights pretty quickly! A truly sensational discovery and sighting!

After the lynx had choked the rabbit, it lays down to eat the lagomorph. Agitated magpies and Great Spotted Cuckoos provide a unique Iberian-looking decor! Blessed!

Once the rabbit had been completely eaten, the lynx stands up again and starts calling loudly. Unbelievable! It is clear that this is a young female calling for a mate. We have also witnessed this kind of vocal mating behavior in the past (February 2009, February 2013 and February 2020). Also this year the mating period of the lynx is not over yet!

After its call for a mate the animal decides to rest for a while. This for digestion of its consumed meal. A little later we see the animal drinking from an artificially constructed lynx drinking pool. It then continues down the hill that borders the open area where the rabbits are. Once there, sitting on a large rock, the lynx starts calling loudly. Since there is no immediate response from a nearby male, the animal decides to curl up and doze off.

With a sleeping lynx in the telescope we leave the area at dusk. Despite the fact that we didn't see several lynx together, we won't soon forget this sighting!

For the fifth day in a row we manage to spot a lynx! Very happy again with this special sighting!

### **Thursday February 23 – encounter 7**

The last morning in La Lancha hits the bull's eye. Our happiness never ends! After all, we witnessed a female lynx calling for her young that eventually unite. A downright magnificent and sublimely beautiful observation. Along with Oscar and Alex we are all strategically positioned in different places with the one goal: spotting a lynx. It is Oscar who succeeds first. He notifies Alex who, in turn, immediately informs us. In no time we are in the car and soon join them.



A quick look through Oscars' 800mm lens helps to locate the lynx. It is Margaza (who else) huddled on a mossy rock. At first she lays there for a long time without moving. Once she wakes up, she starts to call, just like the young female the day before. Not only the volume of her calls (much quieter) are different, its purpose also differs. It is clear that she is not looking for a partner but for Tami and Taraj her eleven-month-old kittens she gave birth to in 2022. Suddenly there is something that alerts Margaza. In no time she sits on her haunches looking around in a very focused way. The way she jumps off the rock afterwards is super beautiful to see. With a few quick, super elegant jumps she moves to the lower

gravel road that meanders through the property of Los Escoriales. Once seated, she assumes a crouching position again. With suspicion we follow the well-known gray 4WD vehicle that regularly drives through the domain of Los Escoriales. It is unfortunate that this is happening right now, coming in the direction on the road where Margaza is located. It is only just before the vehicle appears in Margaza's view that she takes off.

The vehicle passes and Margaza returns to the location near the rock on which she was previously sleeping. Instead of dozing off again, she stretches out over a stump lying on the ground. This is used to extensively sharpen the nails of her front paws causing wood to fly around.

Then there is again something that makes her alert. Again she starts to call. Despite not being audible to us, it is clear that her young are also vocal. A reunion of the trio is clearly in progress! Especially when Margaza, with a focused look, moves down the slope again in the direction of some lower-lying bushes. It is clear that this is the location where her kittens are. Initially out of sight, but soon we see two kittens and an adult lynx who greet each other in an enthusiastic manner. Margaza exuberantly licks her young. The young, in turn, rub against Margaza with their buttocks in the air and tail straight up. The rubbing headbutts of the kittens are also a clear example of the family bond that still prevails between the three members of the family.

Once the greeting is over and the three lynxes are used to each other again, the trio quietly strolls through what is clearly a familiar environment for them. Every now and then they pause to lie down for a long time. After being visible for almost an hour and a half, the spectacle is nearing its end. The trio prefers the cover of the dense shrubbery on a slope lower down the valley. It is the signal to leave La Lancha and proceed to Donana; the second stake out where lynx will be searched for on this trip.



**Overall, this is perhaps the best visit we have ever made for lynx spotting in the Cordillera of Sierra Morena. After all, the frequent observations were very varied, long-term or close-up and we are not even aware that the best is yet to come...**

### **Friday February 24 – encounter 8**



Donana. In the afternoon we go looking for lynx in a completely different habitat compared to Andujar. This time no rocky slopes with Holm Oaks, Lavender or giant Fennel. We are now in a flat area characterised by permanent sand dunes, running dunes, scrub and the typical umbrella pines. And not only the vegetation and the landscape look different. So are the lynx - their fur is lighter in colour and more spotted.

For the purpose of observing lynx, we actually ignore the NP anyway. After all, of the total number of ninety individuals of the relic population here, only eight to nine individuals can be found within the boundaries of the NP. The absence of rabbits the missing link with the lynx. In addition, large parts of the NP are strictly nature reserves. The few access roads are also difficult to drive on because of the loose sand. Many things mean that the chances of success to effectively spot a lynx are very minimal here. Many have returned from here without seeing a lynx.

Only the well-known Caja Royal near the touristic El Rocio offers some possibilities, but that is only when there are rabbits. That is not the case during our visit.

In addition, the past three years have been extremely dry in Donana. As a result, many swamps and canals are completely dry. Everything looks barren, there is no green vegetation and water can only be found in a few places. For example, the boardwalk near the information centre of El Acebuche these days leads to

birdhides that look out over completely dry marshes. Apart from a Common Kestrel and an Iberian Great Grey Shrike, there are no birds to be seen during our visit. Herons, waders, flamingos, ducks, storks, ibises or swallows: they all excel in their absence. Or how global warming is once again becoming horribly visible here!

To cheer things up a bit and to keep the information center of El Acebuche educational, you can see an Iberian Lynx in a fenced cage here. It is one of the first males to be part of the nearby breeding center that was established in 2013. Since it is no longer useful (infertile) for the breeding program itself and the fact that re-establishing it in the wild no longer offers any added value, the animal is now part of an educational lynx walk that is offered from the information centre. The walk ends with a visit to a walled cage in which the lynx in question is locked up. From educational point of view certainly interesting for the general public, but not for us. We have just too much knowledge for that and we have already seen far too many lynxes in the field.

The shop in the center, on the other hand, is worth a visit. After all, racks are overflowing with lynx shirts, you will find carrier bags with lynx prints, lynx cuddly toys, etc. A series of books on offer are also quite interesting. All this at very democratic prices!

The nearby village of El Rocio is also worth a visit. The access roads (all of loose sand), the many horses with riders, the cozy terraces as well as the authentic buildings make it a pleasant place to stay. You suddenly find yourself in a cowboy village!

Moreover, you can marvel at the birdlife here from the local esplanade. At least if the adjacent swamp is not dry. Fortunately, that is the case with us! Having become accustomed to the many tourists here, many birds can also be admired from very close at times. Definitely a place to visit from a photographic point of view.



The marsh is teeming with birds as we make our way onto the esplanade. Apart from many nice species, we are also cheered up by the first summer guests who have already arrived here. After all, in the shallow water we note and photograph Great and Little Egrets, a lone Squacco Heron, Glossy Ibises, Flamingos, Godwits and large flocks of Shovelers. Four species of swallows already fly above the water: House, Sand, Barn and even a Red-rumped Swallow. In a plot overgrown with reeds and rushes a Reed Warbler is calling. The willow bushes are home to Stonechats, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs! Spring migration of birds has definitely started here!

In the afternoon we leave the NP. Something we actually regret a bit. We wonder aloud where we will find lynx in the adjacent areas. Outside the NP, everything here looks completely artificial. The entire habitat of the lynx is fully used by humanity. We meander through a patchwork of olive groves, greenhouses, meadows, holiday villages and fields ploughed for crops. Despite our disappointment, lynx must be here. Everywhere we notice traffic and information signs that clearly indicate that the Iberian lynx is part of the landscape here.



The many speed bumps, fences and tunnels are also aimed at preventing lynx from falling victim to the heavy traffic. This is a big problem during the summer when beachgoers flock from their holiday homes back and forth towards the coast. Or how everything here is mainly dominated by sun, sea and beach...

We have been told that lynx are relatively tolerant in these types of disturbed habitats. This as long as their main prey is present: rabbits. It doesn't take long before we actually bump into our first lynx here. It is a young animal that is sleeping right next to a dirt road which runs through a recreational forest in the area we are driving through. The enthusiasm that arises in the minibus hardly disturbs the lynx. Not even when the window and sliding door of the minibus are opened. It briefly stands up and stretches, decides to lie down again two meters away. After yawning and staring at us, the lynx closes its eyes, dozes off and

continues to sleep. We are so close to the animal that even the smallest details are visible. The scratching behind the ears has its reasons as some big ticks are visible!



With this top close sighting of this sleeping lynx, the goal of the evening has already been achieved. Nevertheless, we decide to continue to a field where a hunting lynx was seen yesterday. Something that originally wasn't part of our plan. A few photographers are already set up with their telephoto lens when we arrive at the field that is overflowing with rabbits. But no lynx shows up. This is nevertheless a waiting session that lasts until dusk. In my opinion, the photographers are the cause that no lynx show themselves. That Spaniards can be noisy, something that we do not see as a problem and that we have even become accustomed to over the years. So the lynx must be too. However, the fact that a few photographers start to walk around the area independently of each other once night falls, we do find a problem. It is downright disturbing to chase or look for lynx on their way to their hunting grounds. Waiting patiently for a lynx to arrive and then start shooting seems like a much better strategy to us.

But we don't worry too much about it. After all, we just had a super observation. The seventh individual and the eighth encounter on this journey!

## Saturday February 25 – encounter 9

The day starts near Dehesa de Abajo. The swamp, within the NP, is not dry. It is teeming with bird activity. Many species are busy foraging. This with only one goal: to move further north towards the breeding area. The number of House Martins and White Storks is particularly impressive. Apart from the various large, migrating groups, the storks have already occupied almost all nests locally.



Branches to repair the nest are brought in and pairs court before mating. Many birds allow a close approach. It is clear that here too they are used to people arriving little by little. It is the weekend and the good weather clearly lures a lot of people outside.

One of the two target species is found quite quickly from a bird hide: Red-knobbed Coot. One bird with and one bird without a collar. This between the hundreds of Coots floating on the water. Despite searching the large groups of ducks several times, we do not succeed in finding the Marbled Ducks we hoped for. Are they located elsewhere because of the lack of water?

Nice are the high numbers of Red-crested Pochard between the countless Shovelers on the lake. Groups of migrating calling Common Cranes flew overhead. Other migrating birds are Red and Black Kites as well as Marsh Harriers. Judging by the huge road signs, the adjacent sloping landscape must

also be home to lynx. However, given the size of the area, that seems to be a matter of luck. Something that, at least this time, we don't have (yet).

After a visit to the city of Seville we get lucky again. We decide to spend the late afternoon and evening again in the area where we observed the close lynx yesterday. Hardly on the road, we notice a shape in a waste field in our view just ahead of us. When the shape starts to move, we immediately know that we have once again spotted the main target of the trip: Iberian Lynx! But it remains, at least so far, only a shadow. The animal immediately runs away. We just see one of its hind legs and the short black-tipped tail dive into an adjacent ditch.

The car is parked and the ditch is approached in silence. It turns out to be very wide and is full of blackberries and shrubs. The fact that the lynx was here is clearly not a coincidence as rabbit holes can be seen everywhere.

When searching the wide ditch we doubt for a moment whether the animal is still there. Did it run super fast when parking the car and has therefore disappeared from sight? Or, just as it disappeared quickly into the ditch upon its discovery, has the animal moved on to the adjacent pasture?



But that turns out not to be the case. What we then experience is pure magic! The lynx emerges from one of the brambles right in front of us. The next half hour we walk with an Iberian Lynx as it hunts rabbits. Our close presence does

not disturb the animal at all. He cares only about one thing: getting supper. The animal fixes on and inspects all rabbit holes it encounters on its hunting path.



Since having only 400 mm lens with me, I need to keep some distance to get a full screen image of the animal!



We imagine ourselves in Africa where camera crews shoot the same kind of scenes with big cats hunting ungulates! Unbelievable! Crouched for shooting, the animal sometimes passes at two or three meters!



When it makes a turn towards the adjacent pasture, it's time to make way. After all, the animal approaches us head-on, looks us angrily in the eye and raises its whiskers. Goosebumps! Once passed, the young lynx continues its search for supper. The rabbits that shoot away between the vegetation, shrubs and trees, cause him to freeze for a moment and wag his tail. Catching prey effectively is something we don't witness. In the end the lynx also seems too relaxed for that.

When the animal disappears from view, we take the time to catch our breath. We realise all too well that, for the umpteenth time this trip, we are once again witnessing a top-notch nature experience. We are so intensely happy! We tumble from one pink cloud to another!

*With this latest, perhaps best sighting ever, a series of eight days in a row with sightings of the Iberian Lynx comes to an end. In addition to this quantity, we also remember the variety and quality of the observations. Moreover, with the success of Donana, we have a quality supplement to combine with Andujar's lynx! We'll be back next year! That is beyond dispute!*

**Several photo galleries of these sightings can be found in the news section on**

**[www.europesbig5.com](http://www.europesbig5.com)**

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