

Wildlife Photography - in the Spanish Pyrenees

Naturetrek Tour Report

16 - 23 September 2012



Berdún



Sunrise from Casa Sarasas



Aragües Valley



Guarrinza Valley

Report compiled by Sergio Padura
Images courtesy of Stephanie Greenwood



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Leaders: Sergio Padura Photographer leader
Chris Murphy Naturetrek naturalist

Participants: Jenny Pardington
Alan Coton
Stephanie Greenwood
Gill McEvedy
Rod Harket
Cynthia Lloyd
Stephen Bentley
Janet Van den Berge

Day 1

Sunday 16th September

Flight from UK to Spain

Day 2

Monday 17th September

After breakfast we gathered in the room that our accommodation, Casa Sarasa, had made available for us. Following the presentations and explanation of the objectives of the course the first class was devoted to explaining how the camera works and the methods for controlling light with the aperture, exposure and ISO. We talked about how to overexpose and underexpose images according to our needs. With this basic knowledge we did our first outing on the banks of the River Aragon.

The first exercise was about how aperture affects depth of field. At the river we studied the effect on the water of different shutter speeds. After completing the exercises the group walked into the Sotos de Martes looking at the nests of the bee-eater colony and bird watching on the banks of the Aragon River. We returned to Casa Sarasa for a picnic lunch.

At 16:00 we headed for the Foz de Biniés. This spectacular gorge offers beautiful changing light and contrasts. The main theme was the control of light and how to properly expose images. The group walked along the road constantly observed by and observing the large colony of vultures. We studied how light affects the subject being photographed, how to choose the position of the camera and the figure-ground relationship. Again, we worked with different speed effects with the Veral River water.

The last part of the day was devoted to reviewing and commenting on the images of all participants.

Day 3

Tuesday 18th September

A day dedicated to the study of different lenses, camera programs and the histogram. After a theoretical explanation which also reviewed the concepts of the previous day we went to the Aragües Valley, up to the Lizara refuge at an altitude of 1540 m.

Once there, we began the first exercises with different focal lengths, seeing how lens selection affects the aspect of the subject and its relationship with the environment. Another exercise was to see the difference in our distance to the subject and which lens is most appropriate in each situation. Then, we visited a dolmen and had our picnic nearby.

When the group was walking across the plateau we observed vultures flying in the same direction indicating that something was going on. Encouraged by the possibility of seeing something interesting the group climbed up a nearby hill from where we could make out a concentration of vultures on the ground on the opposite slope. A dead animal had attracted the birds and the star visitor among them was a Lammergeyer. We stayed and watched until feeding was over.

On the way back we had a drink all together at a mountain hut before heading to the typical Pyrenean village of Aragües. On arrival at Casa Sarasa we reviewed and commented on all the photos taken.

Day 4

Wednesday 19th September

The subject for the day was white balance and our destination was Napazal in Aisa Valley. The cloudless, sunny day contrasted with Tuesday's grey skies. Once we got to the beautiful and spectacular glacial valley of Aisa the group began to take pictures of the rugged landscape and rock formations - the Pyrenees at its best. A brief indication of the use of polarizing filters and lenses was enough to get the most out of the opportunities for landscape photography.

We had our generous picnic near the river, very much appreciated this time due to the heat. After a short walk around the end of the valley, we returned gradually to our vehicles. We stopped briefly on the way because someone spotted a Black Woodpecker but unfortunately it did not grace us with a second visit. It was a shame to leave but we had to review the day's work.

After the usual review of the images and the subsequent dinner, some group members spent part of the late hours of the evening photographing the Milky Way, taking advantage of the good weather and low light pollution surrounding Casa Sarasa.. A long and productive day indeed!

Day 5

Thursday 20th September

Today's topic was types of light so after breakfast we had a little class on how to work in different weather and light conditions. After the class we headed to the Hecho Valley but our first stop was the abandoned monastery of the Brothers of Mercy close to the village of Embun.

At the entrance to Hecho we changed our plans and headed to the Muladar a vulture feeding station where animal carcasses are deposited for them. We could get very close to the birds and take close shots of them. There were about 300 Griffon Vultures plus an Egyptian Vulture and some Red Kites. We spent some time at the hide taking photos.

At lunchtime we drove to the mountain hut at Gabardito (1300 m) where we had our picnic under the red pines close to a beautiful beech forest.

After the picnic, the group walked into the beech forest and some of the group reached the cliffs of Salto de la Vieja, a spectacular spot with rewarding views of the valley, the cliffs of Agüerri Peak and vultures in flight. The hut bar was the perfect place for a drink after our leisurely walk.

Day 6

Friday 21st September

Today and tomorrow are the two days dedicated to different aspects of picture composition; we talked about colour, shapes, lines, rhythms and sequences, movement, texture, etc.

With these concepts in mind we returned to the Hecho Valley. First we stopped in the village to pay a visit to the ethnological museum where the group enjoyed the exhibition of photographs from the late 1920s and 1930s about local traditions and customs.

We left the village heading to the Boca del Infierno Gorge where we intended to find the elusive Wallcreeper. The scenery was dramatic but the bird was nowhere to be seen. However, the group spotted one a little further up on the road before reaching Oza forest. Everybody got their shot of it. Excellent!

We had a relaxed picnic under a big beech tree in the Oza forest and soon after we drove up to the Guarrinza Valley. Directly from the minibus, the group spotted seven Marmots on the slopes and later when walking we saw a few more. Even a Lammergeyer was spotted flying in the cliffs in front of us.

A group of five of us decided to keep walking to the Aguas Tuertas Plateau to admire the alpine pastures and the meadows of the Aragon-Subordan River at 1600 m. We took the descent very slowly and we were lucky to spot a Wallcreeper once again - four sightings in a day!!

We arrived at Casa Sarasa in time for another fantastic dinner after a great day.

Day 7

Saturday 22nd September

Last official day of the course... We returned to the elements of composition, balance, movement, positive-negative space and texture.

Our destination today was the Anso Valley. On the way to Anso, just entering the Binies Gorge, a roe deer came to wish us a good morning. We had a first stop under the cliffs of Ezcaurri peak to take a look to the vulture colony there and were rewarded with a view of a Golden Eagle flying south.

We kept driving up the valley towards the hut and forest at Linza. Because it was Saturday and the weather was very nice, it was more crowded than we expected and full of mountaineers and walkers. It did not matter because we headed away from them towards the beautiful beech forest. There the group was given an assignment to photograph the forest in order to put together a photographic report.

We had our picnic comfortably seated at one of the picnic tables available. We even had a coffee at the camping site of Zuriza.

From there we drove on for two miles to Taxeras, another wonderful forest surrounded by the impressive Alanos cliffs. Some of the group members started to walk enthusiastically and soon dispersed. At the designated hour we met up again by the minibus because we wanted to stop in Anso. The village was celebrating its local fiesta and it is always interesting to see the running of the young bulls and walk around the lively village streets.

The sunset that greeted us on arrival at Casa Sarasa was spectacular.

Day 8

Sunday 23rd September

Last day... The group spent the morning at the Yesa Reservoir and its parched landscape at this time of year. We had our picnic lunch at Casa Sarasa this time.

As usual the last day was mainly taken up by the journey from Berdún to Zaragoza during which we stopped to visit various points of interest. First we stopped near Murillo beside the Gallego River to photograph the spectacular view of the Mallos de Riglos rock formations.

Then, after Ayerbe we turned left off the main road towards Sarsamarcuello and drove up the track to the old castle and the vulture viewing point. From here we were able to enjoy a splendid bird's-eye view of the former Kingdom of the Mallos and of the vultures in flight from our position above one of the biggest colonies in Europe. It is always a great image to keep in the mind before heading to the airport.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

Birds (H = heard only; R = Recorded)

	Common name	Scientific name	September						
			17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	2	2	2	2		1
2	Lammergeier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>		2			1		
3	Eurasian Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	30	40	6	300	20	50	60
4	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>		1		2			
5	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		5				1	
6	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>				1			1
7	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	3	6	7	6	6	4	2
8	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				1			
9	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	4	12	20	20	20	6	16
10	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1						
11	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		6	1		2		2
12	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>					1		
13	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>					1		
14	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	R		R				
15	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			1	3	10		
16	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
17	Eurasian Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>				1			
18	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			H	H	1	2	2
19	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>				2			
20	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>			1			H	
21	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>					3	1	
22	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1	2		2			
23	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>						1	
24	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	1		H			1	1
25	Common Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>				1			
26	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	6	10			4	20	4
27	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	20		4	1000	10	10	10
28	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		100	10	R	200	200	50
29	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	40				10		1
30	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	4	2		3	8		2
31	Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>				1		1	
32	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1	2	3	2	2	2	1
33	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		6	2	1			
34	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	H	3	2	3	3	4	1
35	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	3	4	4	2	6	6	6
36	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			4				
37	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	6		1				
38	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>					1		
39	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>						1	
40	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	2	2	1	1	3		2
41	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	1						
42	Garden warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	1						
43	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	H	1			4	2	
44	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	1					1	
45	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	1						
46	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>				H		H	
47	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>				1		1	

	Common name	Scientific name	September						
			17	18	19	20	21	22	23
48	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	50	3	8		6	6	2
49	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	H	H	H		H		
50	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			H		H		
51	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	10	4	1		2		
52	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	H	2			2	1	1
53	European Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	H				2		
54	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		H	H	4	1	4	
55	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	H	H	H	2	1	H	
56	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>				H		3	
57	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	H	H		H		H	
58	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			1			2	
59	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>					4		
60	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	1					1	
61	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>				H			
62	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>					1	H	
63	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		2	1				
64	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		2		2			
65	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		H	1			2	
66	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>		6			4		
67	Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>		130	10	10	120	300	50
68	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	6	6	4	6	8	7	10
69	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	9	10	12	20	100	20	12
70	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	100	100	200	200	200	200	100
71	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	2	20	6	10	10	20	6
72	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	20				20	200	2
73	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>					20		10
74	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				1			
75	Citril Finch	<i>Cardulis citrinella</i>				4			
76	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	4	2			1	20	
77	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>						H	
78	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		12		1		H	
79	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		8					
80	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		12					
81	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>		4	100	1	30	8	10
82	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		6					

Mammals

1	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			1				
2	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>						1	
3	Pyrenean Chamois (Izard)	<i>Rupicapra pyrenaica</i>		1					
4	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	1	1					
5	Alpine Marmot	<i>Marmotta marmotta</i>		H			10	H	
6	Otter spraint	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	X						
7	Feral Goat	<i>Capra aegagrus</i>						5	

Amphibians & Reptiles

1	Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>			1				
2	Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>				3			
3	Common Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipera</i>			1				
4	Common Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis muralis</i>			1				

	Common name	Scientific name	September						
			17	18	19	20	21	22	23
5	Viperine Snake	<i>Natrix maura</i>			1				

Butterflies

1	Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	1						
2	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		1					
3	Small White	<i>Artogeia rapae</i>	1	1		1	1		
4	Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidae</i>	1			1	2		
5	Pale Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias hyale</i>				1	1		
6	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	10	10	10	4	6		2
7	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	1						
8	Provence Chalkhill Blue	<i>Lysandra hispana</i>	4	2	2				
9	Spanish Chalkhill Blue	<i>Lysandra albicans</i>	1						
10	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	1	1	3				
11	Large Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>	10	8	10	10	2		1
12	Chestnut Heath	<i>Coenonympha glyceron</i>				1			
13	Grayling	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>	1						

Moths

1	Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>	4	3					1
---	----------------------	---------------------------------	---	---	--	--	--	--	---

Other Invertebrates

1	Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulescens</i>	2						
2	Dung Beetle sp.	<i>Scarabaeoidea sp.</i>		1					