

Spains Cantabrian Mountains - Realm of the Bear

Naturetrek Tour Report

11 - 18 June 2010



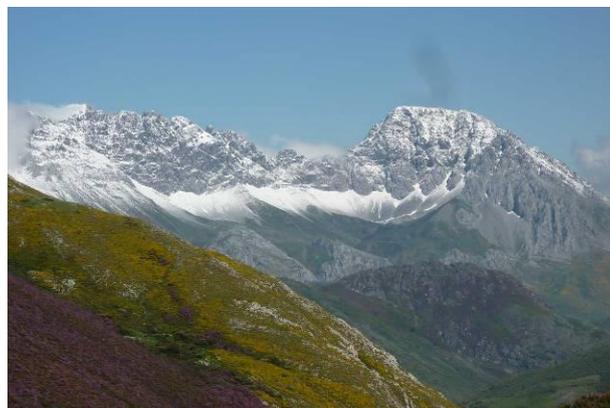
The group at Lago de la Cueva



Lizard Orchid



Red-backed Shrike



La Farrapona - Salencia valley

Report and images compiled by Byron Palacios



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Day 1

Friday 11th June

London to Pola de Somiedo

The group arrived at Asturias airport in time. We started our journey heading south towards Somiedo Natural Park. After a very nice coffee and snack stop en route in the village of Fontouria, we continued through Belmonte until we arrived at the lovely village of Pola de Somiedo. The scenery became increasingly impressive as we progressed, and it was greener than ever, and wet as well, due to a massive storm which was going on across Spain. We finally arrived at our comfortable hotel in Pola in the heart of the Somiedo National Park in good time to settle in before enjoying a delicious first dinner together.

Day 2

Saturday 12th June

Aguino, Senda de Castro & Pola de Somiedo

After a relaxing breakfast, we started to be concerned about the weather conditions of the day as it was still as wet as the day before, with no signs of improvement at all. Loaded with positive thoughts, we jumped in our van and meandered around, getting to the viewpoint of Aguino, from where we had three female Red Deer and fantastic views of two Chamois with a calf, grazing on one of the rocky cliffs right in front of us! We then drove down towards the village of Castro and walked the very ancient trail Senda de Castro, where Iberian Chiffchaff, Crag and House Martins, Blackcap, Firecrest, Short-toed Eagle and more were seen. We walked back to our van in order to set up our picnic lunch but suddenly the rain spoiled it so we decided to drive back to our hotel – as we were not far from it! – so we set it up in the bar cafe area instead! After a short break, we walked around Pola exploring the other side of the hill. As the weather was even worse, we stayed around the area, walking along the river, from where we could see Griffon Vultures perched and soaring around the cliffs. We walked back to the hotel in Pola for a hot chocolate and a little break. Later on, we met up at the hotel's sitting room to enjoy a drink, followed by dinner at the hotel's restaurant located a few metres away from the main hotel building.

Day 3

Sunday 13th June

Valle de Saliencia & Pineda

It was another wet day and we took a 'scenic' drive up to the Valle de Saliencia, the landscape was so green and lush. Once we arrived at the car park, we dressed up in our waterproofs and started our walk down the valley, following the Lake La Cueva track.

Water Pipit, Dunnock and Rock Bunting were around, but they were hard to see as the heavy mist was low. Hence, we focussed on the meadows where Lady, Common Spotted, Early Purple, Bee, Pyramidal, Burnt-tip and Man's Orchids were found. A clear area near the rocky cliffs allowed us to see Red-billed and Alpine Choughs very well too. At lunch time, we drove down the valley to the tiny mountain village of Veigas in order to have a delicious Pote soup as weather was not really nice to have an outdoor picnic. After lunch, we walked along the Pineda track, where weather conditions improved a little bit. After this nice walk, we drove back to Pola in order to have a break before supper.

Day 4

Monday 14th June

Puerto de Somiedo and Monte Carcedo (Castilla y Leon)

Today it was another wet and foggy morning to start with. After breakfast we drove south from Pola to the small village of Puerto de Somiedo. We walked the around the meadows near the village, facing southwards. We walked amongst the brooms and the *Ericas* looking for wildlife and although the weather was still wet and slightly windy, it was not an obstacle to see wonderful birds such as Garden Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Dunnock, Skylark, Ortolan Bunting and a beautiful pair of nesting Bluethroats, just a few metres away. As we saw some open blue gaps of sky further south, we decided to keep driving south into the region of Castilla y Leon and we had our picnic lunch at Monte Carcedo, a 5,000 hectare reserve of native old-pine. We explored the main track in the woods watching very interesting birds such as Crested Tit, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, Red Crossbill, and more. A lovely Fly Orchid was also found here. We also had a nice time watching White Storks and their chicks in eight different nests located around the village and in the border of the park. We also had great views of Serin, Black Redstart, Red-billed Chough and a handsome male Hen Harrier. We drove back to Pola de Somiedo in the late afternoon in order to have a break and get ready for dinner.

Day 5

Tuesday 15th June

Senda de Castro (Castro trail)

As we started out, the weather was very unsettled with constant rain and it was quite chilly. We decided to drive north instead to drive above Pola de Somiedo. We started walking on the Senda de Castro trail, and despite the intermittent rain it was not an obstacle and we enjoyed the trek very much. We arrived at the village of Castro and drove back to Pola to set up our 'picnic' lunch at our hotel as the rain was falling heavily by lunch time. Therefore, we decided to take a break in the afternoon and gathered together again to work on the checklist and go for supper.

Day 6

Wednesday 16th June

Valle del Lago, Coto de Buenamadre and Urria

After having our breakfast, we drove right above Pola de Somiedo following the road which takes to Valle del Lago. We parked our car when the road ended and started walking along the track to the lake system of the valley. We enjoyed the lovely walk, full of misty landscapes overlooking the impressive iron-rich walls and cliffs at 1,400 metres above the sea level.

Many birds such as Garden Warblers, Song Thrush, Iberia Chiffchaff, Willow Tit, Blackcap, Alpine Chough and beautiful Lizard Orchids were seen along the track, amongst the few locals having their midmorning walks, wearing their local wooden clogs. We then went to one of the local campsites (own by Gloria's parents) where we enjoyed a delicious 'ColaCao' hot chocolate, while a fresh 'tortilla de patatas' (Spanish potato omelette), meats, pork loin and local tomatoes were prepared! The weather gradually improved allowing us to make several stops on our way down to Pola, and we enjoyed the clear and lush landscape, seeing Roe Deer in green meadows, Tree Pipit, Griffon Vultures, and beautiful roadside flowers. We arrived at our hotel in the late afternoon to have a break, check our lists, have drinks and enjoy another delicious supper!

Day 7

Thursday 17th June

La Peral, LLamardal and Valle de Salencia

The weather was very kind this time offering us a glorious clear sunny morning. In the early morning we went up to the high viewpoint above the dramatically positioned village of La Peral where we walked from the car park through this very typical 'vaqueiros' village (the vaqueriros are the name of the locals who live in the mountain villages from spring to autumn, and migrate with all their belongings – families and animals – down to lower altitude villages to spend the long winter). The trail to the mountains of Villardevidas offers great meadow flowers, butterflies and a variety of tree line forest birds, such as Yellowhammer, Red-backed Shrike, Rock Bunting, Black Redstart, Red-billed Chough, plus a good population of Chamois (we found 18 wandering the top of the hills!). After this very pleasant walk in sunshine, we decided to enjoy of proper outdoor picnic lunch in the hamlet of Llamardal, just below La Peral.

After this, we started heading to the Salencia Valley when a female Wildcat took us all by surprise while crossing the road right in front of our van, a truly unexpected surprise! We then arrived at La Farrapona, right on the top of Valle de Salencia where the road ends. The clear sunny afternoon allowed us to enjoy the lovely landscapes of the Cantabrian snow caps in the distance, while many Linnets and Rock Buntings were hopping amongst the heathland. We walked down the track to La Cueva Lake, enjoying the different landscapes of the valleys. Lots of active House and Crag Martins, Raven, Griffon Vultures, Red-billed and Alpine Choughs, Dunnocks and Serins were flying around. As the late afternoon hit, we drove back to our hotel ready to enjoy our last 'Asturian' supper of the trip together.

Day 8

Friday 18th June

Pola de Somiedo – Asturias Airport to London

After a leisurely morning in Pola de Somiedo we enjoyed our last breakfast together, and then some of us went to the shops to get some souvenirs and local products to take home. With bags and suitcases packed and loaded, we left Pola and made our way back down towards the coast. We stopped en route for a 'late elevenses' break and to stretch a bit, and then we continued and made it to the airport in good time. Although the weather was wet for the first five days of our holiday, we enjoyed every single minute of it, thanks to our mutual encouragement as a group. We managed to see great wildlife, and amongst cowboys, conquistadors and gold stories, we had a great camaraderie throughout, and we were all very satisfied after our week enjoying the beautiful landscapes and wildlife of Somiedo National Park.

Species Lists

Birds (h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	June					
			12	13	14	15	16	17
1	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>			✓			
2	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
3	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	✓					
4	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			✓			
5	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
6	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓				
7	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓		✓	h	✓	
8	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	h	h		h		
9	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>					h	h
10	European Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓				✓
11	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓	✓	✓		
12	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>					✓	
13	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓			
14	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
15	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓
16	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
17	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>						✓
18	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>		h				
19	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓			✓
20	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			h		✓	h
21	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
22	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓		✓		✓	
23	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	h	h	h	h	✓	
24	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>						
25	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>						
27	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>			✓			
29	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>			h			
30	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	h					
32	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓			
33	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		h	✓		✓	✓
35	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		h	h	✓	✓	✓
36	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			✓			
37	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	h					
38	Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>			✓	✓		
39	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓		
40	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>	✓					
41	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	✓		h	h		
42	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	h		✓		✓	✓
43	Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
44	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>					✓	
45	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			✓			
46	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓			
47	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	June					
			12	13	14	15	16	17
48	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>						✓
49	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓				✓	
51	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax Pyrrhocorax</i>		✓	✓			✓
52	Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>		✓			✓	✓
53	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
54	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓					✓
55	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			✓			
56	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓		✓		✓	
57	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>			✓			✓
58	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	✓		
59	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>			✓			
60	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓
61	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>			✓			
62	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>					✓	✓
63	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>						✓

Mammals

1	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	3				2	
2	Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>	3					18
3	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>			1			
4	Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris</i>						1f

Amphibians

1	Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>		1				
2	Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanica</i>						✓
3	Iberian Rock Lizard	<i>Iberolacerta monticola</i>						✓

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