

CANTABRIA AND ASTURIAS



"The Cordillera mountain range is not only home to the stunning Picos de Europa NP, but also many other Natural Parks and Reserves, which are not as well-known. All of these areas are just as stunning, with a fabulous diversity of wildlife. I cannot wait to return for all the incredible mammals, birds, butterflies, reptiles and amphibians." Julian Sykes

Dates Sun 24 - Tues 2 Sep 2025

Price £4,365

Deposit £870 Single Supp £300

Leader Julian Sykes

Flights Vueling, scheduled,
Outbound: Morning, Gatwick-Bilbao
Inbound: Evening, Bilbao-Gatwick

Weather Probably a mixture of sun and showers (15°-30°C), warmer in lowland areas and on coast, but will be cooler in the mountains and on the boat trip

Walking There will be some short easy walks on level paths, but some of the watchpoints can involve steep walks up uneven tracks through vegetation

Health A decent level of fitness is recommended

Meals All included from lunch on Day 1 to lunch on Day 10

Insects Biting insects are not usually a problem but repellent may be useful

Accom Twin and single rooms all ensuite

Group 7

Just some of what we hope to see:

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|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Cantabrian Brown Bear | Short-toed Eagle |
| Iberian Wolf | Long-tailed Skua |
| European Wildcat | Sabine's Gull |
| Wild Boar | Black Tern |
| Southern Chamois | Black Woodpecker |
| Snow Vole | Snowfinch |
| Spoonbill | Alpine Chough |
| European Storm Petrel | Rufous-tailed |
| Great Shearwater | Rock Thrush |
| Cory's Shearwater | Iberian Chiffchaff |
| Lammergeier | Red-backed Shrike |
| Egyptian Vulture | Wallcreeper |
| Honey Buzzard | Alpine Accentor |
| Golden Eagle | |

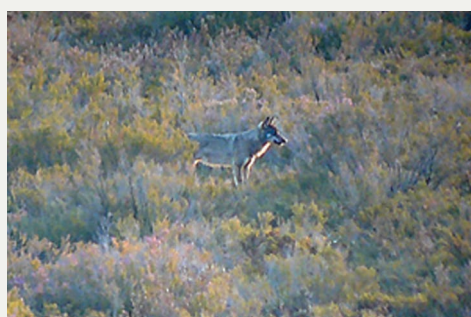
Julian Sykes: Cantabrian Brown Bear, Chamois, Iberian Wolf, Sabine's Gull
Carolyn Hill: Collado de Llega
Simon Eaves: Wallcreeper
Gaye Henson: European Wildcat

A wonderful opportunity to combine the fantastic wildlife and scenery of the Cantabrian Mountains and the coastline of the Asturias Costa Verde.

- Rare mammals of Europe - Iberian Wolf and Cantabrian Brown Bear
- Good chance of European Wildcat in the meadows
- High mountains for Wallcreeper, Alpine Chough and Alpine Accentor
- Breathtaking scenery in the Cantabrian Mountains
- Full day at sea from Gijon chumming for seabirds
- Spanish Ibex, Southern Chamois, Snow Vole, Red Deer
- Lots of seabirds – petrels, shearwaters, skuas, terns, gulls

Fly to Bilbao and drive straight along the coast, stopping off at the excellent Santona Marshes briefly to kick off the tour checklist with Cattle and Little Egrets, Spoonbill, Curlew, Western Yellow-legged Gull, Dunlin and Ringed Plovers. With a bit of luck, we might even find Whimbrel, Ruff and Little Stint, making their way back south for winter.

We continue to our accommodation in Cremenés, close to the Picos de Europa National Park. Late afternoon, we shall make our first local excursion looking for either Iberian Wolf or European Wildcat, which in reality takes a lot of patience and luck. However, we shall be in the best position to encounter one of these elusive mammals, due to our local guide's local knowledge, which is invaluable.



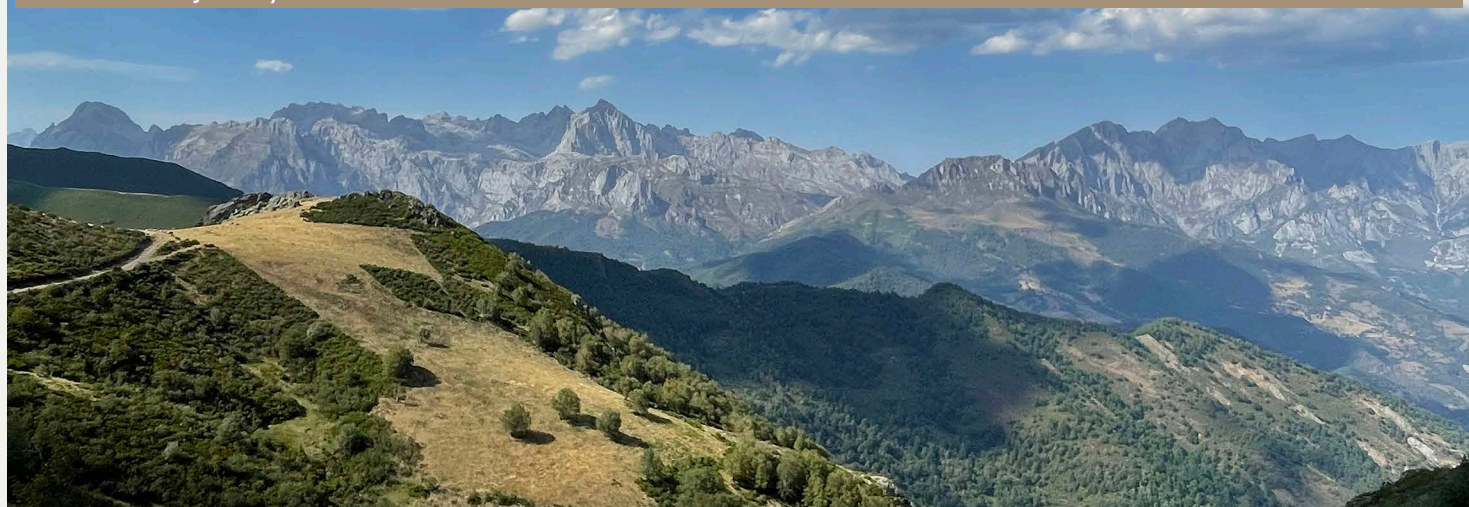
2-4 The next three days will be spent primarily searching for the Iberian Wolves at dawn and dusk, as this is the time when they are most active during daylight hours. The Sierra de Riano forms part of the Cordillera Cantábrica, which holds most of Spain's 3,000+ wolves, a marked and welcome increase since the estimated lows of the 1970's.

During our time watching and waiting we should also see other mammals including Fox, Wild Boar and Red and Roe Deer, some of the wolves known prey.

Off-road vehicles will be used to access the remote areas and local knowledge of their dens will be invaluable. Although seeing these beautiful canines will be our main priority, we shall also utilise the main daylight hours for other wildlife excursions, looking for Southern Chamois, Spanish



"To see a wolf anywhere in the world is a very special experience, but to see one in your own backyard of Southern Europe, where their density is relatively small, is truly memorable. These (still) highly persecuted and hunted carnivores are so wary of humans, that our quest to see some is difficult. However, with the best local knowledge of packs, we have a great chance as the alpha female raises her young cubs. Some physical exercise is required to reach these places, but it's worth every bit of effort." Julian Sykes



Ibex and rare Broom Hare, found only in these mountains.

One day we shall drive back into the Picos de Europa National Park, where we shall take the 600m cable car ascent up to Fuente De, looking for scarce montane breeding wildlife such as Wallcreeper, Snowfinch, Alpine Accentor and Snow Vole. If we are really lucky a Lammergeier might be seen amongst the much commoner Griffon Vultures.

5-7 After another morning visit to one of the watchpoints for either wolf or wildcat, we shall return to the accommodation, collect our luggage and head off west along the edge of the mountains.

Enroute we stop for lunch and a welcome rest in the heat of the day. We shall then continue the drive to Pola de Somiedo, where we shall spend the next three nights at a fabulous rural hotel, in the heart of the Cantabrian Brown Bear country.

The next two full days we shall drive and walk through this incredibly scenic mountain range in search of Cantabrian Bears, which is a sub-species of the much wider-spread Brown Bear, that occurs in the northern hemisphere. Unfortunately, through hunting and habitat destruction, they were reduced to very low numbers in Spain, but are now making a fantastic recovery. These mountains are a stronghold for the species and we have a good chance of spotting one on these vegetated scree slopes feeding on Hazel and Buckthorn. These

fabulous karst limestone mountains are also home to Southern Chamois and Red and Roe Deer, which we should find as we scan for bears. This is a very special place with wonderful natural beauty, plus some fantastic birds such as Golden Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Red-backed Shrike and Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush.

8-9 After a final look for Cantabrian Brown Bear, we leave the mountains and drive north back to the 'Costa Verde', where we shall make our way to our charming, rural hotel. We are only a few miles from Gijon where we spend our final full day in NW Spain, on a boat in the North Atlantic. Specialist charters have been sailing into these waters for several years now, with excellent results for attracting seabirds. This pelagic will offer fantastic photographic opportunities, with shearwaters, petrels, skuas and other seabirds feeding at the back of the boat – making for a day to remember and a fantastic finale to the holiday.

10 Depending on the time of the return flight, we may have a chance for a stop at one of the coastal wetland sites enroute to Bilbao Airport. A great way to end the holiday.



Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Fly from Gatwick to Bilbao and transfer to our hotel in Cremenos
4 nights Hotel Huelde
- Days 2-4** Three full days in the Cantabrian Mountains searching for Iberian Wolf and European Wildcat
- Day 5** Transfer to Pola de Somiedo
3 nights Hotel Castillo de Alba
- Days 6-7** Two full days searching for Cantabrian Brown Bear near Villablino
- Day 8** Transfer to our hotel near Gijon
2 nights Rural Casona de Cefontes
- Day 9** Full day pelagic trip on board our boat from Gijon
- Day 10** Transfer to Bilbao for our evening flight home, stopping enroute if time allows

