

## NORTH-EAST SPAIN 3-6 APRIL 2015

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### INTRODUCTION

During a short birding trip to NE Spain over Easter 2015 I visited a couple of sites with a couple of interesting mammals. There are useful maps of both sites and more details of the birding at these sites and many other sites in NE Spain at <http://www.birdinginspain.com>.

### Aiguamolls Natural Park

On the coast about 45 minute drive NE from Gerona Airport, Aiguamolls Natural Park is an excellent wetland birding location. It is a massive area but is well covered by trails and hides particularly at the southern end of the reserve. I visited one evening and again the following morning. It is accessed from the road south from Castello d'Empuries to Sant Pere Pescador. The visitor centre is signposted off to the left about 3 kilometres down this road. The southern entrance is off a track signposted camping a couple of kilometres further south.

The first evening was Good Friday and I entered from the northern end by the visitor centre. The site was absolutely crawling with people and should probably be avoided on weekends and public holidays. Nevertheless despite the crowds the birding was excellent and I did see quite a few **Fallow Deer** around one of the lagoons.

The second morning I entered from the southern end by the tower hide from dawn and hardly saw another person until about 10 am when it started to get busier. Although the birding was good I didn't see any mammals but did spend time looking for **Southern Water Voles** which apparently occur commonly in the ditches. **Eurasian Otter**, introduced **Coypu** and **Wild Boar** are among the other species that occur at the site.

If visiting I would recommend the southern entrance as it is less busy, there is no entrance charge (it costs five euros) at the northern end, and the habitat is probably better. There is lots of cheap accommodation in nearby Castello d'Empuries although it is definitely worth pre-booking over holiday periods.

### Sierra de Cadi

Sierra de Cadi lies just north of Baga (where there was plenty of accommodation even at Easter) north of Berga off the main route (the E-9/C-16) from Barcelona to Andorra. You can only access the valley from Baga itself not from the main road. Drive into Baga, at the end of the main street turn right, and at the roundabout take the last exit signposted to Coll de Pal, the BV-4024.

Keep following the signs towards Coll de Pal. Follow the road up until you get above the tree line and there are meadows on the right hand side of the road. From this point, where there is a refuge on the right of the road, up to the ski left at the pass **Pyrenean Chamois** are common. I saw more than 50 including one herd of 24. **Alpine Marmots** also commonly occur and there are information signs about these by the refuge. I spent a couple of hours looking for marmots before I was successful. The best approach, at least initially, seems to be to sit in the car on one of the pull-outs on the right hand side of the road as you head towards the pass and scan the slopes below waiting for a marmot to emerge from a burrow. I saw one around 11 in the morning once it had warmed up although I suspect they would have been out earlier had it not been so windy.

I also tried spotlighting the road from here down to Baga one evening and pre-dawn on the final morning and saw **Roe Deer** and two **Red Foxes** along the lower stretches along with what was probably a **Beech Marten** which shot up a slope before I could get a good look at it.