



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT

MALLORCA

29TH APRIL – 6TH MAY 2017

www.oriolebirding.com

oriolebirding@gmail.com



SATURDAY 29TH APRIL – *Part cloudy and calm, 15C*

With an unusually leisurely flight time from Luton of 1155, we all drove down this morning to meet up for 0930 check in, rather than the usual overnight stop. The airport seemed amazingly quiet, and we enjoyed a seamless transition through to the gate for our flight to Palma which departed on schedule. Once we arrived in Mallorca, things were a bit slower! It seemed to take an age to clear the passport and luggage reclaim, and the hire vehicle was also rather protracted. Nevertheless, we found ourselves on our way eventually and soon we were checking into our magnificent and luxurious five star villa which would be our base for the next seven nights. A superb location, surrounded by our own forest, landscaped grounds and small agricultural fields. There was time to see the endemic **Balearic Flycatcher**, **Common Redstart**, **Pied Flycatcher** and **European Hoopoe**, plus a dark **Booted Eagle** overhead and both **Common Nightingale** and **Stone Curlew** calling at dusk. It was going to be exciting exploring the area tomorrow!

SUNDAY 30TH APRIL – *Sunny spells, breezy at times, 17C*

We rose early this morning to make a pre-breakfast exploration of the habitat around our villa. What a stunning location, and very quickly we also established that it was full of birds. A Eurasian Wryneck was singing from the pines behind the parking area and was a backdrop throughout this early morning period despite remaining unseen, while the jangling European Serins were easier to come by– in fact we saw one group of at least twenty together foraging among long grass in one of the small fields along the entrance road. A Common Whitethroat was our first real passage migrant, as the Spotted Flycatchers we were seeing were all of the pale-breasted race now considered a distinct species by some authorities – **Balearic Flycatcher**. A **Balearic Woodchat Shrike** [another popular split - *badius*] also gave some nice views and a **European Hoopoe** flopped across the track in front of us. Once we reached the road, the sun was already catching the trees and bushes along the dry stream bed here and **Common Nightingales** were singing everywhere – we managed a couple of decent views of them among the tangled vegetation, or flicking across the road in front of us. **Sardinian Warbler** was also very common along this stretch, and again with patience we did manage a couple of sightings of males. A Common Stonechat was seen too, and back up by the villa, two **Pied Flycatchers** were among the Olive and Carob trees making a nice addition to our mornings list. After breakfast, we had stunning views of both the **Balearic Flycatcher** and **Woodchat Shrike** from our verandah – both very distinct birds indeed!



Balearic Flycatcher & Balearic Shrike, 30th April

Our destination for the rest of the morning would be the famous birding spot of Boquer Valley, only a fifteen minute drive from our villa. It was quite late in the morning by the time we arrived there, but we certainly achieved our aim of getting to grips with some of the commoner migrants, and of course enjoying the walk in what is a truly magnificent setting. On the walk up to the finca, we picked up our first **Booted Eagle** above the ridge, a pale phase bird, and this was quickly followed by a **Black Vulture** which drifted over us. This was an unexpected bonus away from the Tramuntana Mountains, and we went on to see what was probably the same individual on three more occasions. Among the Olive and Carob trees by the stony path, we saw three more **Pied Flycatchers**, another **Balearic Woodchat Shrike**, and saw our first **Corn Buntings**.



Pied Flycatcher, 30th April

Over the finca, eighteen **European Bee-eaters** drifted high overhead, filling the air with their distinctive calls, and soon a movement of hirundines and swifts began to gather pace too. We had excellent views of three **Crag Martins**, floating back and forth at eye level and showing their white-spotted tails with each dynamic twist and dive. The next section of the walk up into the valley was fairly quiet in a stiffening wind, but we did have a couple of highlights. The first was a tumbling pair of **Common Ravens**, and the second was a displaying pair of dark phase **Booted Eagles**. The latter were a real treat, flying in tandem and matching each others every turn, before the male bird broke off and began a fantastic display flight somewhere between that of a **Honey Buzzard** and a **Goshawk** – plunging down into dives interspersed with fluttered wing beats. Some interesting plants were also seen along the walk, including both **Mirror** and **Balearic Orchids**, and keeping our eyes to the sky paid off again with two sightings of an **Osprey** moving through. Once at the end of the valley, we hoped to find the localised **Balearic Warbler** but it proved to be a bit windy and we didn't even hear one singing. There were plenty of **Sardinian Warblers** about though, and a female **Whinchat** had paused on its northbound migration and seemed content to sit still and rest up – it didn't move for ten minutes! Walking back produced more of the same, with the addition of a nice male **Blue Rock Thrush**, peeking out over the top of a boulder in typical fashion. We were ready for lunch by the time we got back to the car park – where a stunning male **Pied Flycatcher** rounded off a very enjoyable morning.

In the afternoon we planned to visit some of the wetland areas peripheral to the main **Albufera Marsh**, which we feared would be a bit too crowded on a Sunday. First we stopped at the western edge of the smaller **Albufereta** reserve and did a short walk, picking up **Cattle** and **Little Egrets**,

Marsh Harrier, a few Sand Martins and a decent overhead movement of Common Swifts. Another **Balearic Woodchat Shrike** was on the wires and we had some good views of both **Common Nightingale** and **Cetti's Warbler**, almost in the same bush. **Zitting Cisticolas** became familiar here too, with several 'zitting' overhead in song flight but none really perching in view. Continuing eastwards towards Alcudia, and then on past Albufera itself, we took the road around the eastern side of the reserve to the Depuradora, or sewage works. This excellent area entertained us for the rest of the afternoon with a string of excellent birds, starting with a Black Kite drifting over the road as we approached. A small colony of **European Bee-eaters** showed really well here, and the rough fields also produced a singing **Short-toed Lark**, a nominate form Spotted Flycatcher, another **Pied Flycatcher** and a flyover **Peregrine**. The nearby viewing tower gave us a real purple patch for waterbirds – **Black-winged Stilt**, **Common Redshank**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Little-ringed Plover**, **Common and Red Crested Pochards**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Gadwall**, **Little Grebe**, **Common Shelduck** [with young], **Northern Wheatear** and **Whinchat** all being seen in the vicinity. One or two really good birds though included singles of both **Whiskered and Black Terns**, a pair of **Marbled Ducks**, a drake **Garganey** and a fly by **Purple Heron**. Great Reed Warbler could be heard croaking from the reeds behind us and a surprise came in the form of two escaped **White-cheeked Pintails** flying around! A super area and one we would hope to revisit before the end of the trip. As we exited the site, a **Eurasian Golden Oriole** flew alongside the van as we drove along the road! Another quick impromptu stop by a reed-fringed channel added excellent views of an adult **Black-crowned Night Heron**, a very smart *iberiae* **Spanish Yellow Wagtail**, four more **Whinchats** and a **Cetti's Warbler**. Overhead movements of **Common Swift** were also well worthy of mention – the sky occasionally went black with them as many hundreds would drift into view in a feeding frenzy, before just as quickly evaporating away back into the ether and continuing their northbound journey. Fantastic to see and epitomising the spectacle of spring migration in the Mediterranean. A great day!

MONDAY 1ST MAY – *Sunny spells and showers, 16C*

We decided to opt out of a pre-breakfast walk this morning, as heavy cloud over the mountains and the threat of rain suggested that there could be a few more passerine migrants around and so we headed straight back to Boquer Valley to check the first section of the track up to the finca. It was quite busy among the bushes and trees here in the cool early morning temperatures, with **Balearic Flycatchers** buzzing around all over the place and our first **Willow Warblers** noted – this included a very grey and white bird with heavily marked head pattern possibly of the northern race *acredula*. As we headed up the trail, **Pied Flycatcher** was clearly more numerous than yesterday and their contact calls could be heard ringing around the whole area. Up at the Finca, we had to shelter from a pretty persistent shower of rain, and after this it was immediately apparent that a number of migrants had either been directly grounded by the weather, or that the brighter spell that followed had just encouraged them out. A **Balearic Shrike** showed really well but suddenly there were three or four in view, one with smaller bill and large white wing patches – a nominate **Woodchat Shrike**. A female **Common Redstart** flicked into view, and several **Crag Martins** appeared at close range, while one particular fenceline suddenly came alive with migrants! Three **Common Whitethroats**, several **Willow Warblers**, two more **Pied Flycatchers**, numerous **Balearic Flycatchers**, a male **Common Redstart** and a cracking **Melodious Warbler** were all seen along one short stretch of fence and we spent half an hour or so sorting through them all. A nice selection, and we came away confident that there were definitely more birds around. With this in mind, and following a welcome coffee in a nearby bar, we explored the small oak woodland at the edge of Puerto Pollenca known colloquially as 'Postage Stamp Wood'. A **Pied Flycatcher** on the pavement as we parked up was a good sign, but this was immediately overshadowed by male and female **Eurasian Golden Orioles** flying low across the road in front of us. By the edge of the wood in a building site, **Common Whitethroat** and **Balearic Flycatcher** were along the fence – clearly there were birds about. Entering the small wood, we were greeted with a veritable feast of warblers and flycatchers as the whole place was literally jumping with migrants. There were at least one hundred **Willow Warblers**, fifty **Pied Flycatchers**, many **Spotted Flycatchers**, single **Garden Warbler** and **Blackcap** and numerous **Sardinian Warblers**. A **Firecrest** sang as it gathered food just above our heads and two **Wood Warblers** were a lovely bonus. We spent some time tracking these through the trees, until they eventually settled in the same

tree together and allowed everyone some close views – keeping on them among the canopy among the thongs of Willow Warblers and flicking Pied Flycatchers, was not always easy! A female-type **Subalpine Warbler** was rooting around in the low shrubs but was only seen briefly and not assigned to species, and a female **Common Redstart** was also noted. A great haul from such a small area, and a fantastic spectacle to see so many migrants in one place.



Audouin's Gull, 1st May

Lunch was taken just along the coast towards Alcudia, on a quiet stretch of beach where **Kentish Plovers** were breeding. A stunning **Audouin's Gull** dropped in to join us – one of the specialities of the Balearic Islands and a real treat indeed. We then planned to spend the afternoon at the nearby S'Albufera Marsh, the most important wetland in Mallorca and certainly one of the best areas for passage waterbirds in the Mediterranean. Our walk in along the canal was punctuated by a cracking **Gull-billed Tern** which drifted right past us, closely followed by a single **Pallid Swift** overhead in good light, showing the distinctly sandy upperparts, blunt-tipped wings and large white throat patch. Further on and we could hear the strange gargling calls of Cattle Egrets which were breeding in a mixed colony with Little Egrets along the edge of the main channel. Close ups of Sardinian Warbler and **Balearic Shrike** were also enjoyed before we reached the Visitor Centre, where we used the facilities before checking the trees and bushes around. Looking over a gate towards one of the pools, we saw our first **Western Purple Swamp-hen**, a roosting **Stone Curlew**, and great views of **European Hoopoe** feeding on the ground. Both Little-ringed and **Kentish Plovers** were scurrying around on the short turf, and another **Common Redstart** flicked up into a pine. Best bird at this spot was definitely a fine **Collared Pratincole** which was strutting around in the open, often in the same scope view as the Swamp-hen, and the Stone Curlew! Next we headed over towards the Bishop Hides on the west side of the canal. A **Red-knobbed Coot** was in the channel, one of the reintroduced birds with a neck collar, but much better was a female **Little Bittern** which strode across on some floating reeds, as bold as brass! **Cetti's Warbler** could also be seen well here, and a female Cleopatra butterfly and several beautiful Sawfly Orchids were also enjoyed. The Bishop Hides were really the highlight of the day though, with a bewildering array of waders just a few metres outside the hide. Scores of boldly marked Tundra Ringed Plovers were covering the last remaining corner of suitable soft mud,

with many smart **Kentish Plovers** dotted in amongst them. Careful scanning revealed about a dozen Dunlin, two **Curlew Sandpipers**, two **Little Stints** [including a stunning rufous adult], three **Common Greenshanks**, two **Collared Pratincoles**, five beautiful **Spotted Redshanks** and best of all, two **Temminck's Stints**. **Black-winged Stilts** and **Pied Avocets** were noisily defending their nesting spots – all in all a great array of birds on offer here. The walk back to the car park produced one more highlight – three stunning **Audouin's Gulls** which had dropped into the canal to bathe. Another super day on Mallorca!



Temminck's Stint & Kentish Plovers, 1st May

TUESDAY 2ND MAY– *Sunny day in light winds, 22C*

Today was our excursion to the island of Cabrera, which lies off the south-east tip of Mallorca and is not only a magnet for migrating birds, but also an important breeding area for the two shearwaters – Scopoli's and Balearic – and the two endemic Mediterranean island warblers – Moltoni's and Balearic. We hope to see all these and more on our trip, but we also had a couple of hours for some birding on the way down towards Colonia de San Jordi. We took a scenic route through the farmland areas in the centre of the island, where a very unintensified form of agriculture exists – Almonds, Olives and vines are interspersed with cereal and hay fields full of wild flowers. And Fig Trees provide perches for Corn Buntings and Common Stonechats. Once off the beaten track, we began to enjoy good roadside views of **Short-toed Larks**, but also several **Thekla Larks** too. Our main quarry here was **Red-footed Falcon**, as one or two had been recently reported and with a south-easterly airflow across the region we knew there was a good chance of more of these exquisite birds arriving. A fortuitous unplanned turn to allow a car to pass us on a narrow junction produced the stroke of luck we needed, as a falcon could then be seen hovering over the fields up ahead. It was a female **Red-footed Falcon**, and soon we were enjoying fantastic close views of this lovely raptor. We couldn't believe how close we were to it, and even as we disembarked the vehicle it carried on hovering right next to the road. A recently mown field was the attraction, and soon we realised two males were sitting in an adjacent Fig Tree and they too began hunting over the field right in front of us. Amazing views and we didn't know which one to follow with the cameras! This was also a beautiful location, with Red Kite and **Booted Eagle** overhead, the air full of lark song and lots of passerines about too – Yellow Wagtails, Corn Buntings and Common Linnets. A male **Lesser Kestrel** was a nice surprise, and in fact each time we scanned the fields the falcons seemed to multiply – we ended up with seven **Red-footed Falcons** and four **Lesser Kestrels** together! Some interesting behaviour was observed as

three Red-foots ganged up on a female Lesser Kestrel, chasing her in a pack in skua like fashion until she dropped her insect prey, which one of them promptly caught in mid air. A young **Peregrine** then appeared from no-where, scattering all the smaller falcons as it stooped down across the field and nailed a Feral Pigeon! It was all happening! Time was ticking on though, and with memory cards full of Red-foots we made the final leg of the journey down to Colonia de San Jordi to catch the boat at 12pm.



Red-footed Falcons, 2nd May

It was a beautiful day, but boy it was cold out over the water as we sped out towards Cabrera! We were glad we had all brought warm jackets along with us! First we completed a full circuit of the island – **Mediterranean Shags** of the race *desmarestii* were common, and we also had fantastic views of **Osprey** with three seen in the air together along the cliffs. We were very surprised to discover that they are cliff nesting here, and that there are five pairs around just this one island! A male **Blue Rock Thrush** was also seen, before we cruised down the beautiful natural harbour, and into the small quay overlooked by the Castillo up on the hill. What a stunning island – and so well preserved and protected too, with strict regulations preventing disturbance to its sensitive wildlife. We walked up from the harbour and straight away began to see migrant passerines. **Common Redstart**, **Willow Warbler**, **Whinchat** and **Pied Flycatcher** were all very common, and in fact we saw scores of each. Every bush had something flicking into it, onto it or behind it! The Redstarts in particular were so confiding, very different to when they are in breeding terrain. We reached the picnic area and this was full of more migrants among the low bushes and open grassy areas. A **Yellow Wagtail** dropped in, and a couple of **Common Nightingales** were hopping around under the picnic tables! Three **Turtle Doves** were a lovely addition, and we heard a **Eurasian Golden Oriole** singing too. After lunch, and once everyone had enjoyed wandering around for a bit amongst the myriad common migrants, we set off with a mission in mind to try and connect with the two endemic Mediterranean warblers which both breed here. Up by the museum, we found a singing male **Moltoni's Warbler**, and eventually had some pretty good views of it in the scope and got to hear its distinctive wren-like chattering call and soft song full of mimicry – quite unlike its more widespread Subalpine relatives. The pastel pink washed underparts really were distinctly different on this 'new' species, now split from the Eastern and Western Subalpine Warblers found in the respective mainland regions. Some **Stone Curlews** suddenly started kicking up a racket from beneath the adjacent pines, and a

European Bee-eater was noted overhead. Three hours had just evaporated though, and we had to begin working our way back along the trail which was again littered with stunning male **Redstarts** and **Whinchats**, and several corking male **Pied Flycatchers**. A short chattering song from the scrub-covered hillside denoted the presence of our other main target, the **Balearic Warbler** [once conspecific with Marmora's Warbler of Corsica and Sardinia but now a separate species]. In the limited time we had left we managed some fairly distant views, but everyone saw it and some even had decent views in the scope, so that was a good starting point to improve on later in the week! After a quick coffee in the small bar, it was back on the boat and out to the 'Blue Cave', where some people on board could take a swim while we watched the fish in the azure blue water and saw a **Bottle-nosed Dolphin** close by breaching a few times. The journey back was more direct, and with the evening approaching we were hopeful that our two remaining quarry would be starting to gather in the waters around the island ready to come ashore after dark. The first, **Scopoli's Shearwater**, soon cruised past the boat and we saw three or four pretty well. Smaller, faster flying **Balearic Shearwaters** were also noted, perhaps half a dozen in total so not big numbers, but excellent views. We reached the harbour by about 6pm, and so we were not back at the villa until 7.30pm. After a quick turnaround, we headed down into Pollenca square for an excellent meal of local Mallorquin cuisine – a **Scop's Owl** by torchlight in the garden rounded off what had been an absolutely brilliant and action packed day of Balearic birding!



Cabrera, 2nd May

WEDNESDAY 3RD MAY – *Light winds and sunshine, 17C*

We opted for a leisurely day today after four pretty full on days, and this meant a lazy breakfast around our villa with the chance to catch up again with local **Balearic Shrike** and **Balearic Flycatcher**, **European Hoopoe** and a brief **Eurasian Wryneck** which was in trees around the swimming pool for a few moments before retiring to the pines behind. Our main destination for the day would be Cuber Reservoir in the Sierra de Tramuntana, and after spending fifty minutes negotiating our way through the twenty miles of hair pins and peletons of lycra-clad cyclists, we eventually arrived at the parking spot for the reservoir. We had a couple of targets here, and thankfully all were relatively straightforward, starting with **Tawny Pipit** which we saw briefly among the 'pin cushion' vegetation of the heavily grazed stony hillside. There were a few migrants here too – Willow Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Whinchat and **Balearic Flycatcher** – and we had excellent views of both **Booted Eagle** and **Osprey** over the hills around. Continuing on towards the dam, we could frequently hear the wren-like chatter of **Moltoni's Warbler** emanating from the pines, and with patience we ended up get some superb views of this species. We had a pastel-pink male singing from the open crown of a small pine, and another song-flighting right over our heads. They were always tricky to photograph, but between us we managed some decent shots and also some sound recordings of those distinctive vocalisations.



Moltoni's Warbler, 3rd May

Down at the dam, we saw a **Common Nightingale**, but it was otherwise quiet among the bushes, and getting warm too. This probably helped us connect with our other targets – the two vulture species. A **Black Vulture** drifted over the ridge, giving a good lesson in its distinctive flight silhouette, and eventually we managed a single **Eurasian Griffon Vulture** too – a relatively recent colonist to the island following a wind-blown flock making landfall here a few years back and staying to breed. On the walk back, we had much better views of the **Tawny Pipit**, which was now foraging out in the open – a full set of key birds successfully in the bag! Lunch was enjoyed in the shade of the picnic area, with its tame Chaffinches, but also several migrant **Pied Flycatchers** and a courting pair of **Balearic Flycatchers** too. In the pines at the back of the picnic area, we could hear **Common Crossbills** calling, and we had superb views of a pair nest building. Well in fact, it was the female doing all the nest building, while the male sat around singing and looking pretty! After this, we wound our way back down the mountain, and headed back to our villa via the supermarket to stock up on provisions. For the first time this week, we were able to eat outside in the warm evening sunshine, with a flock of forty **European Bee-eaters** overhead – superb!



Common Crossbill nesting, 3rd May

THURSDAY 4TH MAY – *Clear and sunny, 27C*

The hottest day of the trip so far and after an early breakfast, we headed out to the north coast and the beautiful area around Son Real. The four kilometre walk out to the coast and back was pretty hot even early in the day, but among the shade of the pines we found many nice birds to keep us going. **European Hoopoe**, **Common Nightingale**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **European Serin** and **Balearic Shrike** were all common species which we had been enjoying throughout the trip, but which seemed to offer us particularly good views here this morning. Two **Pallid Swifts** moved north low overhead, making several nice passes and with the light behind us, they looked fantastically sandy! Perhaps our best views so far of this often tricky to identify species. Out at the coast, the views back towards Alcudia and Formentor were spectacular, but our main target bird was noticeable by its absence – the endemic **Balearic Warbler**. We searched hard, but didn't even hear one – **Thekla Lark** and **Tawny Pipit** both gave great views though, and we saw several **Mediterranean Shags** and a single **Scopoli's Shearwater** offshore. A female **Kentish Plover**, perhaps nesting nearby, was wandering on the coastal track just in front of us. On the walk back, we took a different route, and were stopped in our tracks to hear a **European Nightjar** churring in the middle of the day! Extraordinary! We picked our way carefully into the trees and scanned every suitable looking perch, but the bird had stopped churring by now and we weren't sure exactly which tree it was in. Thankfully one more step to the left and a dark shape became visible on a main trunk at the back of a pine, and it was the Nightjar. With a well-positioned scope, we had tremendous views, a real surprise indeed. Back to the car park, we made use of the facilities at the small visitor centre, before continuing on towards Albufera.



European Nightjar, 4th May

A coffee stop in Can Picafort was most welcome, and perked us up for a busy afternoon! We had lunch at the viewing platform at the depuradora on the south-east side of Albufera, and saw a similar spread of birds to our last visit here. Common Terns now seemed to have arrived and taken over the nesting platforms though, and we had better views of the drake **Garganey** who was now swimming in the open. The usual assortment of ducks and waders were seen otherwise, with one notable sighting being a female **Red-footed Falcon** which circled in from the north and spent some time hawking insects distantly over the reedbed before dropping out of view. We wanted to return to the

main reserve in the latter part of the afternoon, to revisit the hides from a few days ago and also to visit some different spots to try for one or two missing species – notably Moustached Warbler. It was a long hot walk down to the visitor centre, but we did in fact hear both Moustached and Great Reed Warblers along the walk and five Glossy Ibis flew low over the track – a new species for the trip list. On the canal, the same Red-knobbed Coot was present as previously, bearing a numbered neck collar, and a male Little Bittern was seen this time, incredibly close just below the sluice wall but tricky to see among dense reeds. Down at the Bishop Hides, the water levels had actually dropped quite a bit since Monday, and there were probably fewer waders – still there were lots of Kentish Plovers, a few Tundra Ringed Plovers and singles of Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint. A pair of Black-winged Stilts were vigorously defending a small area from any bird which dared venture too close to their newly hatched chicks – even a Common Coot was successfully escorted off the premises! Two each of Common Greenshank and Spotted Redshank completed the waders, and another Glossy Ibis flew over. Cetti's Warbler, Common Nightingale and Red Crested Pochard were seen along the shady walk back up to the canal, from where we took the route back to the centre and on around the loop towards the Sa Roca pools. Here we finally had excellent views of Great Reed Warbler, with a particularly noisy individual flying up into the top of a Poplar at the edge of the reedbed to sing. From the mound, we could see a Glossy Ibis feeding on Sa Roca pools, as well as Purple Swamp-hen, so we continued round to the hides for a closer view. There were in fact six Glossy Ibis, five of which flew off north leaving just a singleton feeding on its own. There were many Red Crested Pochards, Common Tern and a Purple Heron drifting over, too. It was now 5pm though and with only an hour until the reserve would close, we wanted to have a try for Moustached Warbler. This involved heading back along the main track, and taking a side track south-east to a raised viewing platform which overlooks an excellent area of grazing marsh interspersed with clumps of sedge and fringed by taller reeds – perfect habitat for our quarry. It was quite windy though, and at first all we could hear was Great Reed Warblers. A Purple Heron posed nicely in the marsh, and then towards the back, quite distantly, we could hear the distinctive crescendo whistling of a singing Moustached Warbler. Patient scanning rewarded us with a view of the bird, swinging from a reed stem out in full view. It stayed put for a good five minutes, allowing us to get the scope on 60x magnification and have a good look at its dark overall plumage, short wings, blackish crown, white supercilium and demarcated white throat patch. Excellent views despite the distance, and we were very pleased! It certainly made the remainder of the walk back in the waning heat somewhat more comfortable! In addition, we also had a good view of a Reed Bunting of the race *witherbyi*.



Black-winged Stilt & Kentish Plover, 4th May

FRIDAY 5TH MAY – Overcast and windy, 17C

Today we headed down to the south-east corner of the island, via Palma airport where we dropped off one participant who had to go home a day early. This saw us down on the coast at Portocolom by 9am, but we were not expecting the cold wind and choppy sea to be greeting us – the forecast had been for 28C! Nevertheless, we fancied a short seawatch in these conditions and sure enough, we had some decent views of passing flocks of both **Balearic** and **Scopoli's Shearwaters**. It was the coastal scrub we had come here to check though, for the endemic **Balearic Warbler** which had thus far given us only the briefest of views. For such a key species, this was not sufficient and we planned to spend the morning trying to improve on this situation. But with the wind blowing, and the cold temperatures, it seemed like we might struggle again. Our tactic was to walk very slowly along the pathways through the scrub, listening for any singing *Sylvia* that might alert us to the presence of our quarry. As they had been on the rest of the trip so far, Sardinian Warblers were everywhere! For half an hour we had nothing, but once we got up onto the plateaux away from the sea, it was more sheltered and right away we heard the distinctive high, thin jingling song of a **Balearic Warbler** which promptly burst out of a bush and danced a song flight above our heads. It dropped down out of view though and over the next twenty minutes, despite hearing its contact call a few times, it didn't sing again. With such a well known site much visited by birders throughout the season, we were reluctant to use a tape. Instead we pursued the subtle yet distinctive contact call until we worked out what the bird was doing. This was clearly a male, and he seemed to be gathering food for a nest or perhaps fledged young. He was making a small circuit through the low bushes, calling all the time but remaining predominantly hidden. Just occasionally, he would pop up onto the top of a shrub to take a look around, before continuing to root around out of view. He would then repeatedly fly back to the same spot [presumably the nest] before returning and completing the same circuit again. So by standing quietly, we were ready for him each time! Eventually, we all pieced together some superb views, and even had him in the scope a time or two! **Pallid Swifts** were passing overhead, coming and going to their nearby colonies in the coastal caves, and a **Peregrine** passed by. Not a bad morning at all! After a coffee stop back in Portocolom, it was on to the salt pans at Salobar de Campos, forty minutes drive away.

The sun was trying to break through as we arrived at the salt pans, and subsequently it had warmed up a bit. A **Zitting Cisticola** greeted us along the track as we walked down, and **Short-toed Lark** was also singing overhead. But the highlight without a doubt was the fantastic views we had of two **Collared Pratincoles**, hawking back and forth over us in the stiff breeze – such elegant birds. On the main pan, Little-ringed and **Kentish Plovers**, Common Redshank, Pied Avocet, **Black-winged Stilt** and many Little Egrets were seen, and by walking a bit further down the track which bisects the pans, we could get a decent view across the rest of the area. Six **Gull-billed Terns** were a highlight, floating back and forth over the water and occasionally passing really close. Their raucous calls were certainly a good giveaway to pick up on when they were higher overhead. A party of about fifty **Greater Flamingo** were resting at the back of the farthest pan, and were later seen in flight as they were flushed by a school party – quite a sight to see them flying around! Sardinian Warbler, Common Stonechat and **Iberian Yellow Wagtail** were also common around the edge of the pans and a single **Glossy Ibis** dropped in too. We lunched back at the van, before driving round a short way to the entrance to the salt works. Just beyond here, from the side of the road, we could view a particularly productive pan which was full of Kentish and Tundra Ringed Plovers, but also held a few Sanderling. We were just getting stuck into the flock when everything flushed in a very alarmed fashion – a Peregrine perhaps? We looked up to see if we could spot the culprit and sure enough a falcon loomed into view – but it was rangy with very long wings and tail, and dark in appearance. A quick check through the scope confirmed our suspicions – it was a dark morph **Eleonora's Falcon**. The bird circled a few times before drifting off east with a few elastic wing beats – our first Eleonora's of the trip and as it would materialise, also the last! From here we made the trip back to the villa of just over an hour, for a chill out. It had already been a long day, but we wanted to make an evening trip out too as this was our last night on the island.

After our siesta, we headed out again at 1730 and up to Can Cuerassa on the road to Alcudia. Three **European Rollers** had been seen there yesterday and we were hoping they might still be present. Even before we set off down the track we could see two **Rollers** on the wires, quite distant but with the light behind us, not bad views. Walking 500m down the track got us slightly nearer, and we enjoyed watching them dropping down to the saltmarsh before flying back up again with a flash of purple in the wings. They were joined on the wires by seven **Spotless Starling**, another new species for the trip and one we thought we had missed out on. This whole area was excellent too for seeing common species such as Corn Bunting, **Zitting Cisticola**, **Sardinian Warbler** and **Spanish Yellow Wagtail**, all of which showed particularly well. Our next move was to continue towards Alcudia, but then take the road around the west side of S'Albufera marsh and check some of the peripheral areas as dusk approached. **Great Reed Warblers** could be heard croaking all around in the tall phragmites, but also European Reed Warbler which we saw for the first time. A small marshy area was checked for waders with a good result – apart from the Little-ringed and **Kentish Plovers**, single **Temminck's** and **Little Stints** showed well, and the light was absolutely superb. A **Purple Heron** was stalking through the grass at the back of the marsh, occasionally causing a **Purple Swamp-hen** to pop up its head in disagreement. We thought we had seen a **Squacco Heron** drop in by the track a bit further on, so we walked down to check it out. The bird flushed before we spotted it, and flew around us in the beautiful evening light. We saw a second one too, and this time it settled by the side of the path and we were able to pop a scope on it – our first of the tour. As dusk began to draw nearer the **Great Reed Warblers** really took centre stage – we had excellent views of one croaking away right at the top of the reeds beside the path. The evening was almost over, but we just had time to drive around to one of the platforms at the back of the reserve. We were hoping really for an Eleonora's or two, but it wasn't to be – instead we had to make do with the cacophony of **Common Nightingale**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Great Reed Warbler**, and a tree full of **European Bee-eaters** gathering to roost. A young **Night Heron** flew out to feed as the light fell – it was time for a beer!



Zitting Cisticola & Great Reed Warbler, 5th May

SATURDAY 6TH MAY – *Early fog clearing to sunshine and light winds, 17C*

Our final day on the island and we had about half a days birding time before heading down to Palma for our afternoon flight back to Luton. We were tidied up and out of the villa just after 9am, and after

dropping the keys back at the office in Pollenca we soon arrived at Boquer Valley. The wind was really blowing, after overnight thunderstorms, and it was clearly going to be a struggle to see many migrant passerines at least. We took the rocky path up to the finca, and it was clear that many of the flycatchers and warblers here a few days ago had either now departed, or were keeping a low profile. A **Eurasian Wryneck** called from below the track, a species which we had still not seen well on the trip. With a little gentle persuasion, it popped up into a fairly open tree and we were able to get a scope on it long enough for the one group member who needed it for a lifer to get a good view! It was clear though that small birds were going to be a struggle in the exposed areas and so we decided to head along to Postage Stamp Wood which we knew would be more sheltered. Two **Eurasian Hoopoe** were feeding on the grass verge really close to the van as we drove down into the edge of Puerto Pollenca, perhaps the best views we had had of them all week. At the wood, migrant numbers were low – just a single **Pied Flycatcher** and two Willow Warblers, which was quite a contrast to our visit earlier in the week! Two **Balearic Flycatchers** and a nice singing **Firecrest** were also seen. We had some time left, and the one drive we had not yet made during the tour was along the spectacular Formentor Peninsula. Winding up to the small lookout tower on top of the ridge, the views back across the island were truly spectacular. A female **Blue Rock Thrush** was by the path, and on the scrubby slope below, a **Balearic Warbler** was singing. Bizarrely, despite the altitude, the wind was nowhere near as strong as it had been lower down, and the sun was warm. The Balearic Warbler did a short song flight, and then perched nicely in a palm allowing another scope view of this key endemic for everyone. Gazing down the valley, we noticed a large raptor thermalling over the crags – it was a **European Honey Buzzard**, and quite a distinct pale individual. The bird circled up against the azure blue sea – what a great way to see one! There were no hoped-for Eleonora's Falcons up here, but we were pleased anyway with the morning. After coffee back down in Pollenca, and two more **Audouin's Gulls** along the beach, we made the journey south to Palma, enjoying our best view yet of a **Black Vulture** on the way which was circling low beside the motorway! Our flight left Palma on time, at the end of a very enjoyable Balearic House Party!

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Balearic Shearwater
2. Scopoli's Shearwater
3. Little Grebe
4. Great Crested Grebe
5. Great Cormorant
6. Mediterranean Shag [*desmarestii*]
7. Little Bittern
8. Glossy Ibis
9. Cattle Egret
10. Little Egret
11. Grey Heron
12. Black-crowned Night Heron
13. Purple Heron
14. Squacco Heron
15. Common Shelduck
16. Gadwall
17. Mallard
18. Northern Shoveler
19. Marbled Duck
20. Garganey
21. Red Crested Pochard
22. Black Kite
23. Red Kite
24. Eurasian Griffon Vulture
25. Black Vulture

26. Marsh Harrier
27. Booted Eagle
28. Osprey
29. Common Kestrel
30. Lesser Kestrel
31. Red-footed Falcon
32. Eleonora's Falcon
33. Peregrine
34. European Honey Buzzard
35. Red-legged Partridge
36. Greater Flamingo
37. Common Moorhen
38. Common Coot
39. Red-knobbed Coot
40. Purple Swamp-hen
41. Stone Curlew
42. Black-winged Stilt
43. Pied Avocet
44. Kentish Plover
45. Little-ringed Plover
46. Common Ringed Plover
47. Common Greenshank
48. Common Redshank
49. Spotted Redshank
50. Common Sandpiper
51. Dunlin
52. Sanderling
53. Temminck's Stint
54. Little Stint
55. Collared Pratincole
56. Yellow-legged Gull
57. Black-headed Gull
58. Audouin's Gull
59. Common Tern
60. Gull-billed Tern
61. Black Tern
62. Whiskered Tern
63. Woodpigeon
64. Collared Dove
65. Turtle Dove
66. European Hoopoe
67. European Bee-eater
68. European Roller
69. Eurasian Scops Owl
70. Eurasian Wryneck
71. Common Swift
72. Pallid Swift
73. European Nightjar
74. Greater Short-toed Lark
75. Thekla Lark
76. Crag Martin
77. House Martin
78. Barn Swallow
79. Tawny Pipit
80. White Wagtail

81. Yellow Wagtail [*iberiae*]
82. Wren
83. European Robin
84. Common Redstart
85. Common Stonechat
86. Whinchat
87. Northern Wheatear
88. Blue Rock Thrush
89. Blackbird
90. Common Nightingale
91. Zitting Cisticola
92. Grasshopper Warbler [H]
93. Cetti's Warbler
94. European Reed Warbler
95. Great Reed Warbler
96. Moustached Warbler
97. Melodious Warbler
98. Sardinian Warbler
99. Moltoni's Warbler
100. Balearic Warbler
101. Blackcap
102. Common Whitethroat
103. Garden Warbler
104. Common Chiffchaff [H]
105. Willow Warbler
106. Wood Warbler
107. Firecrest
108. Pied Flycatcher
109. Spotted Flycatcher
110. Balearic Flycatcher
111. Blue Tit
112. Great Tit
113. Eurasian Golden Oriole
114. Common Raven
115. Woodchat Shrike
116. Balearic Shrike
117. Common Starling
118. Spotless Starling
119. House Sparrow
120. Chaffinch
121. European Serin
122. Greenfinch
123. Goldfinch
124. Common Linnet
125. Common Crossbill
126. Cirl Bunting [H]
127. Reed Bunting [*witherbyi*]
128. Corn Bunting

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