

Trip report, Mallorca 28/3/16 -4/4/16 Trevor Fletcher, Janine Burnham and Mollie Burnham Fletcher

Background

We decided on an Easter break for the family which would offer plenty of opportunity for birding as well as activities to satisfy a teenager who likes the outdoors but has her limits! We decided upon staying in Puerto Pollensa in the North of Mallorca - a well-known base for easy to access birding sites in a variety of habitats.

Travel and accommodation

We took an early flight (6.50am) from Bristol with Ryanair which was fine and cheap too, returns for 3 adults totalled around £240. Only concern could be that when flights are busy you can find that hand luggage allowance has to go in the hold if you are not one of the first 90 passengers on board! This could be a bit of a nightmare if you have cameras, bins and scope to carry on only to find that some items are whisked off to the hold!! (One small item can be carried on regardless of how busy the flight is). We avoided the issue by getting in line early.

We booked a car in advance via Terry's Car Hire (Fiat Punto) which was €189 including taxes and insurance with 2 named drivers. As all the paperwork was completed online a couple of weeks before there was no queuing at the airport -We just located the car within the terminal and off we went. Returning the car was also no problem as it just involved dropping the car in the terminal carpark and locking the keys in the boot.

We stayed in an apartment linked to the Hotel Panorama (Don Miguel) which was basic (particularly the cooking facilities) but clean, large, quiet and had a balcony and access to a pool. Booked through www.alpharooms.com . Accommodation cost was €300 for the week.

Birding

Day 1

Puerto Pollensa seafront, Talaia d'Albercutx and La Gola

We arrived at our accommodation by lunchtime and headed down to the Port for lunch , on the way we noted numerous **Serin** , **House Sparrow**, **Stonechat**, **Blackcap**, **Sardinian warblers** and **Cetti's warblers** in good voice(all specie were numerous wherever we went). Along the seafront we noted about 6 **Audouine's gulls** and a number of **Yellow legged gulls** flying around and loafing on the beach. Just offshore on the rocks we clocked **Shag (Ssp. desmarestii)**, and **Cormorant**. As I was aware that there were a few overwintering Alpine Accentor's lingering we headed for a watchpoint 15min drive away on the Formentor Peninsula. After a spectacular arrival which involved cutting someone up whilst turning the wrong way into the carpark while accidentally leaning on the car horn! We headed up to the Talaia d'Albercutx, best known as probably the best raptor watchpoint on the Island. We had distant scoped views of **Black vulture** and **Booted Eagle** while **Black redstart**, **Blue rock thrush** and **European Robin** hopped around the rocks near the tower. Small numbers of **Crag Martin**, **House martin** and **Swallow** flew around our heads. Feeling a little disappointed that I had missed the **Alpine accentor** I walked around the back of the viewpoint tower and was met by said bird feeding on the ground within a few feet! The walk back to the carpark also produced some cracking birds-A fly by **Egyptian vulture** (quite scarce on Mallorca although a breeder) and a **Rock thrush** perched up on a pylon. A **Kestrel** flew past and our first of many **Hoopoe** flew from the scrub.



Alpine accentor, Talaia d'Albercutx



Audouine's gull, Puerto Pollensa seafront

In the evening we took a quick look at La Gola reserve –A little oasis of green in the middle of the town with woodland and saltmarsh. A **Great white egret** was feeding in the inlet along with common species including **Moorhen** and **Mallard**. **Swallows** and **Swifts** were feeding overhead.

Day 2

C'an Cuarassa hides nr.S'Albufereta, around Puerto Pollensa and Boquer Valley

An early walk to the C'an Cuarassa hides produced **Kentish plover** on the beach. Two screened hides are located just inshore and are linked by tree lined footpaths surrounded by saltmarsh and small open waterbodies. **Fan tailed warblers** were displaying and some **Corn buntings** were singing around the pools. The pools held a pair of **Black winged stilt**, **Common Sandpiper** and **Green sandpiper**. A few **Little ringed plover** and **Ringed plover** fed around the pools and a **Meadow pipit** was located around the reeds along with a smart **Yellow wagtail (Iberian race)** On return to the accommodation I checked over an area of rough grassland and reed just across the road and lucked upon a **Spectacled warbler** which gave good views but was flighty and soon disappeared.

In the afternoon we headed for the Boquer valley located on the outskirts of Puerto Pollensa. The weather was hot and sunny. The valley is a favourite for casual walkers as it provides a nice stroll through limestone crags, into a steep sided valley and on to a small cove. It was very busy with walkers but we saw **Cuckoo**, **Cirl bunting** and lots of **Black redstart**. We failed to catch sight of the endemic **Balearic warbler** but **Kentish plover**, **S'Albufereta**

A few minutes at La Gola later in the evening added **Chiffchaff** and **Willow warbler**.

As we walked back from the town in the evening we could hear a **Scops owl** calling near the apartment.



Kentish plover, S'Albufereta

Day 3

C'an Cuarassa hides and surrounds and S'Albufereta reserve

Although a rather foggy start I decided to get out as the girls don't do early. I added a **Common Redstart**, **Little egret**, **Redshank**, **Little grebe** and **Siskin**. The fields nearby produced a small flock of **Spotless starling** and some **Tawny pipit** as the fog cleared and the sun shone again. I went to the North end of the Albufereta reserve but the hide overlooking a pool was disappointing in its lack of birds and I also had to walk through a posh holiday resort to access it which felt like trespass. Don't waste your time on that spot.

As the weather was good we decided that a trip up into the Tramuntana mountain range was in order. We headed for the Lluç Monastery, a winding road and endless cyclists added some fun to the drive! The open areas around the monastery proved good for seeing **Black vulture** and we had a single **Griffon vulture** and a number of **Booted eagle**. After a good walk around the very impressive monastery we headed for the monastery botanic gardens where we found singing **Firecrest** in the pines as well as **Blue tit** and **Great tit**. Surprisingly no Crossbill.

We drove on a few km to a viewpoint overlooking the Torrent de Pareis where we had really good views of a **Black vulture** and saw **Redstart** and **Blackcap** in the woodland clearing below us.

Time was against us so we decided not to continue on to Cuber reservoir but returned to base.

Day 4

Albufereta reserve and Palma town

An early walk in the sun at the main section of Albufereta was very productive. There is a newly built tower which affords excellent views over the reserve. I added **Gadwall**, **Shoveler**, **Teal**, **Red crested Pochard** and **Widgeon** and there were numerous **Black winged stilt** and **Grey heron** around, a female **Marsh harrier** was seen quartering the reedbeds and a pair of distant terns which I thought were **Gull billed tern** but views were too brief and distant for a species I am not that familiar with (suspicion confirmed a few days later when resting birds seen).

A short walk through some pines led to a low mound which afforded views over some smaller water bodies, I scoped a distant **Slender billed gull** in adult plumage which showed a light pinkish tone to the breast. I reported to the Mallorca birdwatching site and it was later confirmed that it was the first sighting on Mallorca this year. This site is a wealth of information about sightings and more

around the island, administered by Mike Montier and well worth checking out before and during any visit. On the way back to the car I spotted a few **Sandwich terns** feeding offshore.



Slender billed gull, Albufereta reserve

Most of the rest of the day was spent sightseeing and shopping in Palma followed by ice cream at C'an Picafort (**Turnstone** on the beach) and more eating and drinking in Puerto Pollensa. We later reflected that this largely non birding day had produced a **Black Kite** near Inca, **Cattle egret**, an **Eleanora's falcon** pursuing Swifts seen from our accommodation balcony and also a fortuitous meeting with another birder staying at the nearby Hotel Pollensa Park (Hugh M) who was able to show us the **Scops owl** which was resident in a service vent at the rear of the Hotel Ulyal and flew to its favoured tree giving close views just after sun set.

Day 5

Boquer valley, La Gola and Albufereta

A cold start to the day and a little windy with hideous rainfall predicted. As it was dry when I woke up I headed to the Boquer valley in the hope of seeing the Balearic Warbler and pick up any seabirds in the Northerly wind. I heard calling **Eleanora's falcon** on the way up and saw a pair of **Booted eagle** and got a less than satisfying peek at a **Balearic warbler** which spent most of its time singing and calling from deep in a bush. A quick look at the sea was productive as both **Balearic shearwater** and a single **Cory's shearwater** had been pushed in quite close by the stiffening breeze. The heavens opened as I walked back and I slipped and fell on the wet and well- worn limestone path, protecting scope and bins but hurting my ribs!

I popped into La Gola for a while in the afternoon as the girls refused to go out in the rain. After a nice chat with Christina who runs the visitors centre I headed out and found a **Sparrowhawk** which was most likely a newly arrived migrant. A **Bluethroat** had been seen the previous day right next to the visitors centre but no such luck today.

As the girls had spent most of the day indoors and the weather improved we decided to dash to Albufereta before going out for the evening. Best birds were 4 **Greater flamingo** , calling **Stone curlew** and 4 **Night heron** which flew up in front of us onto overhead wires before dropping down to feed.

Day 6

S'Albufera reserve and Depuradora and Son Bosc

After a slow start the weather picked up really nicely and we headed for the huge S'Albufera reserve near Alcudia. We spent about 6 hours on the reserve, mainly visiting hides around the visitors centre. There were too many birds to list but highlights included a **Little bittern**, dozens of **Night heron** roosting along the river, **Osprey**, lots of **Marsh harrier**, **Purple swamphen**, summer plumaged **Water pipits**, **Little stint**, summer plumaged **Kentish plover**, a pair of **Glossy Ibis**, **Marbled duck**, **Moustached warbler** and **Red knobbed coot**.

As we were leaving the reserve we met 3 birders heading in the opposite direction at speed! A **Pallid harrier** had been seen briefly at one of the hides. We headed back with them and spent a while scanning but to no avail although plenty of Marsh Harriers were over the extensive reedbeds and we added **Great reed warbler** to our day list. This site is really something and on a longer break I think I would have spent much more time here.

After finally exiting the reserve we headed for a bar to rest weary feet and then elected to visit the nearby Depuradora where we had excellent views of a few **Thekla lark**, a pair of **Hoopoe** and very close views of calling **Stone curlew** in the bare fields. From the viewpoint we picked up **Greenshank** and **Marsh sandpiper** and numerous wildfowl. It was still and sunny and an enjoyable end to a good day as we listened to stone curlew and watched hundreds of Swallows and Swifts overhead.

Day 7

Boquer valley, La Gola and Albufereta (again)

An early visit to the Boquer had 2 pairs of **Booted eagle**, pale and dark variants, a calling **Eleanora's falcon** gave really good views and I finally got a proper look at a **Balearic warbler**. As I walked back to the car I scanned the fields below and picked up 2 **Woodchat shrike** and heard but could not locate a **Wryneck**.

Later in the morning we decided to return to the viewpoint at Albercutx to admire the scenery, a team of regular raptor watchers were at the tower and had seen a trickle of raptors migrating through (mainly Marsh harrier and Sparrowhawk).We picked out an arriving **Sparrowhawk** which circled briefly and made landfall as if extremely tired. A **Pallid swift** flew close mixed with numerous Swift and we were informed that the first **Alpine swift** of the year had passed over a few minutes before we arrived.

After food and more ice cream in Puerto Pollensa we headed for La Gola for a quick look around as a Subalpine warbler had been present the day before. As we strolled along a bird caught my eye and I literally came face to face with the **Subalpine warbler** as it moved across the pines lining the path. I got a few photos which seemed to show features of both Western and Moltoni's but as no call there was no way of telling but presumed Western.



Subalpine warbler, La Gola reserve



Woodchat shrike, La Gola reserve

We squeezed in a final visit to Albufereta which seemed to be everyone's favourite spot. We got onto the Flamingos again, a **Purple heron**, numerous **Stone curlew** and with a final scope across the smaller water body I picked up a pair of resting **Gull billed terns**. There were literally thousands of swallows and swifts overhead which was a sight to behold but not enough time to pick through them all for the scarcer species.

We ended the evening at the Bella vista vegan /veggie restaurant where the food was truly excellent and reflected on a brilliant holiday which involved a fair bit of birding but also swimming, lounging in the sun, sightseeing and a bit too much drinking and scoffing!

Best bird of the holiday for me was the close view of the Alpine accentor. Favourite place was the Albufereta reserve as it is under watched, easily accessed has varied habitats in close proximity and had some good birds.

We missed a few birds in the area local to our accommodation including a Collared Flycatcher and Bonelli's warbler but saw some fantastic birds through the week so no complaints. There are many more sites to visit, particularly in the South which could make for an extended stay.

Day 7

Flight home from Palma at 10.25 a.m so no time for birding!

Resources

Birding in Mallorca 2nd Edition Dave Gosney

Still very relevant and handy for finding sites. Specifics such as exactly where to see species seemed to still be bang on in most cases. Cheap and a handy size for carrying in the field.

Birding frontiers Challenge series Autumn (2014) Martin Garner.

Nice section on separating Subalpine warblers.

www.mallorcabirding.com

Website maintained by Mike Montier, a resident birder –Sightings page and advice pre- visit from Mike helped me get onto the Alpine accentor which was not seen again after the day I saw it (winter visitor). You need to register username and password to access some of the site info.

Trevor Fletcher