

MAJORCA, APRIL 2008

by Iain Johnson

The villa where we were staying was located on the northern outskirts of Pollenca, very close to the Roman Bridge, at the bottom of the Ternelles Valley. This valley is currently closed but is highly recommended in Graham Hearl's book; A Birdwatching Guide to Majorca.

Our villa at Pollenca

At least three different Booted Eagle's were seen over the villa during the week along with singing Serin on the television aerial, Yellow Legged Gull, Willow Warbler, Blackcap and Spotted Flycatcher. House Sparrows and Goldfinch were omnipresent throughout the trip, so I won't cover these two species again. On one occasion, two Eleonora's Falcons were seen high above the villa, whilst on another occasion one actually flew through the garden. Common Swifts were also omnipresent around the villa the whole week.

The Spotted Flycatchers seen during the week were of the Balearic race. These appear to have a 'cleaner' breast. In the area immediately surrounding the villa there was at least one pair of Woodchat Shrike, seen mating, although there may have been a second pair. The shrikes are also a Balearic sub species. Greenfinch, Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Blackbird and Hoopoe were all seen locally as well. Several Scop's Owls' could be heard at night.

During the day, House Martins could be seen in Pollenca (several nests were evident) and around the villa. In the evenings the Swifts tended to congregated in the main square and provide an aerial show! A Cattle Egret was seen flying over Pollenca on one occasion, with another (possibly the same bird) seen in a field of sheep from the road on the east of Pollenca.

Port de Pollenca – April 27th

Quiet afternoon spent on the beach with Audouins Gull flying overhead. These were very easy to see during the whole trip. A walk along the beach produced the Balearic race of Shag on the breakwaters. There is a stream (also mentioned in Graham Hearl's book) which flows through Port de Pollenca and discharges in the sea. A Little Egret was seen fishing along with a Blue Headed Wagtail, Mallard and Serin. There is a small trail being developed along the stream with plenty of pine trees.

There are small areas of pines along the sea front which might be worth checking for Crossbill. I also found a scrubby area about two blocks back from the beach, and very close to a small square/ park of pine trees, where I found Serin and Greenfinch. One thing I noted with the Greenfinches was that the males had much more yellow on their breasts than their UK counterparts.

Bocqer Valley – April 28th



The view from the beach at the end of Bocqer Valley

In Graham Hearl's book, he advises parking by the Oro Playa supermarket which is on the main road to Formentor. This is no longer the main road as a bypass has now been built. You can still park by the supermarket, which incidentally has now closed although the sign is still present. Instead there is a gravel/ dirt car park at the start of the valley adjacent to the bypass, although how much longer this lasts is unclear as there were several new houses being built. The avenue of pines mentioned in Graham Hearl's book is still present though.

From the dirt car park, we followed the obvious path through the Bocqer Valley. Unfortunately it was late morning and very busy with tourists/ walkers. The path itself leads to a small cove, where an Audouin's Gull was sat on the water. The valley held Spotted Flycatcher, Crag Martin, Raven, Booted Eagle, Sardinian Warbler and Marmora's Warbler. The walk to the cove takes about 45 minutes, unless you are birding!

Ternelles Valley

In the afternoon, I walked up the road (from the villa) along the lower reaches of the Ternelles Valley as far as the gate. This is locked and there is a security guard stationed in the lodge during the day. As well as being a premier birding site, the valley leads to a castle and if the lower valley is anything to go by, should be a beautiful walk.

The land beyond the gate is owned by a bank who you can phone to see if access will be granted or alternatively, check with the tourist information office. I did discover that you can access the valley from the other side, by walking in from Cala de Sant Vicenc but this takes about six hours. Because the land where the castle lies is public land is it accessible and therefore the bank can't prevent public access from the other direction.

That said, the walk was very productive with 2 Black Vultures seen about 100 metres from the villa. I managed to watch these for about 15 minutes as a gradually made my way along the road up the valley before they finally they disappeared over a ridge. I did see one again briefly from the gate where I stopped for half an hour with no problem. Birds seen along the valley included Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Firecrest, Pied Flycatcher, Swift, Swallow, House Martin, Sardinian Warbler and Great Tit.



The view from Formentor Beach

Cuber Reservoir – April 29th

Accessed from the mountain road between Soller and Pollenca, there is a car park immediately outside the reservoir at mark 33.9 kilometres but this is very small and soon fills up. There are two other car parks, one 100 metres prior to and one 100 metres after the main car park. The car parks were very full and there were a lot of walkers around and a few birders. We started out by following the path to the left of the reservoir. The area to the left of the path has been recently planted with pines so could yield crossbill in future year. The reservoir water was very clear but very blue suggesting that there is very little life in the water. The only bird we saw actually on the water was Yellow Legged Gulls.

There were at least two, possibly up to four, Black Vultures as we walked along as well as Raven and Sardinian Warbler. Brief views of the back ends of Subalpine and Marmora's Warblers! Spotted Flycatchers were also present. An American birding couple reported that they had seen a Spectacled Warbler.

At the end of the reservoir you come to a refuge, which looks like a good spot for lunch! From here you can either carry on around the reservoir and back to the car or continue into the mountains. We chose the latter options! The walk into the mountains provided cracking views of Nightingales along the path. At the top of the path, you go through a small wooded area pine, before the path levels out onto a 'saddle' between two valleys. In the trees were up to 4 Balearic Crossbill, all female/ immature. Unfortunately the cloud had descended so our panoramic views were limited but we did have lunch on some rocks over looking a viewing telescope where there were two Rock Sparrows and a pine martin hunting.

After following the same path back down to the reservoir, we took the return path along the other side where there were several Woodchat Shrikes and superb Osprey right at the end which floated about 30 feet above our heads for ages, so much so that my girlfriend hogged my binoculars!

After visiting Soller, we returned to Pollenca via the Soller tunnel. The area prior to the tunnel starting when heading in the Palma direction is reputedly one of the best spots for Red Kite, but unfortunately I didn't see any.

Albufera Reserve – April 30th

We visited this reserve on Thursday afternoon but only had three hours to explore what is a massive reed bed. Also, there were a lot of tourists looking around.

That said, still managed all three egrets, Night Heron, Grey & Purple Heron, Black Winged Stilt, Stone Curlew, Kentish & Little Ringed Plover, Coot, Crested Coot, Moorhen, Pochard, Red Crested Pochard, Mallard, Marsh Harrier, Eleonora's Falcon, Swift, Pallid Swift, Sardinian, Fan Tailed & Moustached Warblers and Yellow Legged and Audouins Gulls. Heard Great Reed and Cetti's Warblers. A Sacred Ibis had been seen that morning.

Would have liked more time and been able to visit both early morning and late evening. It's situated on the main road south of Alcudia with free and open access. There is a car park 30 metres away which didn't appear to have a gate and could therefore be open all the time. However, there are plenty of side streets to park on.

Cabrera Archipelago – May 1st



The cove on Cabrera Island

For me this was the best day all week, not because the birding was amazing but because we had to take a (one hour) boat road to reach this national park, got to sun bathe on a fantastic beach in a beautiful cove and there was hardly anyone one around.

Birds included Peregrine, Yellow Legged and Audouin's Gulls, Sardinian and Subalpine Warblers, Pallid Swifts, loads of Whinchats and Redstarts, several Pied Flycatchers including one which was feeding on the dusty ground outside the café and perching on an old cooker! Spotted Flycatcher and Greenfinch were also plentiful. I also found a Bonelli's Warbler and had brief flight views of a possible Roller.

The best place for the migrants was the start of the valley adjacent to the (sandy) beach which leads up to the French Monument. There is an open area with sheltered picnic benches and they were all feeding in the area. Talking to a local birder, he said that in the previous week there had been several Golden Oriole, Blue Rock Thrush and Ortolan Bunting. If you walk up to the monument then you will come across the mist nets which are checked every hour. It would appear that these islands are one of the premier spots for birds in Majorca.

On the sea crossing I bagged Cory's and Balearic Shearwater plus 5 Black Terns. Whilst all the local literature and the local Majorcan birder indicated that the 'Mediterranean' shearwaters encountered here were of the Balearic race, it would be worth checking for Yelkouan Shearwater as there is some range overlap, especially in winter, plus two Yelkouan Shearwaters were seen in the English channel last summer. The Islands also hold breeding Storm Petrels and Ospreys.

There were also hundreds of Linfords Lizards running around which are of an endemic race.



The view from the castle of the archipelago

Additional

See did see several Vagrant Hedgehogs, but unfortunately these were lying squashed on the roads. Swallow tailed butterflies were quite common at Albufera.

Iain Johnson, May 2008

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