

Mallorca-21st to 26th April 2015

After enduring some severe pressure from Andy Platt and Barry Stanley, I finally agreed to go on my first foreign birding holiday. By the end of December 2014, flights, accommodation and car hire had all been sorted for the final destination of Mallorca.

As the trip approached and the research completed using site guides and some excellent trip reports on the Internet, we held a pre trip meeting on April 16th. We had identified our target birds and an itinerary was set taking in the most productive areas for our 5 full days on the island. We were ready for the off!

Day 1- 21st April

After a very early start, we arrive at Manchester Airport just after 4.30am. With a flight time of 6.20am we should have been out birding in Mallorca by lunch time but things didn't start off so well. Firstly the X-ray machine in our queue packed up then as we were all sat on the plane waiting for take-off the captain announced that there was a problem with the plane and were waiting for a technician to attend. After what seemed like an age, another announcement from the captain informed us that the plane has failed and we were awaiting a replacement plane which was en-route from Budapest and was currently over Antwerp. Anyway, all this delay put paid to our itinerary with arrival at our apartment at 3pm.

We decided to have a coffee on the balcony and then go for a walk and do some leisurely birding around Santa Ponca. Whilst sat on the balcony, the first official bird of the trip was a stunning **Blue Rock Thrush** which we would see each morning whilst having breakfast. Numerous **Yellow-legged Gulls** flew past at eye level and Barry found the first **Hoopoe** of the holiday flying over the adjacent rooftops. **Sardinian Warbler** was soon added to the 'balcony list'.



Blue Rock Thrush was seen daily from the balcony

Walking around Santa Ponca, an area which Andy had been birding at several times before, we found an adult **Audouin's Gull** perched on top of a McDonalds!



We followed a storm drain inland which proved very productive with numerous birds coming down from the adjacent trees for a drink and bathe. **Serin** was the most numerous of birds present and was probably the most numerous bird of the trip. The area was alive with birds with an obvious fall having occurred. **Pied Flycatcher**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, more **Sardinian Warbler**, 2 **Woodchat Shrike** were soon added to the trip list. A male **Spannish Sparrow**, our only sighting of the trip was seen on a building rooftop.

We now left the path of the storm drain and headed for Santa Ponca golf club. On the way, we passed an olive grove which held 2 stunning **Golden Oriole**. An area of rough ground was explored and every bush held either a singing **Cetti's Warbler** or **Nightingale** and the first of many **Fan-tailed Warbler's** flew overhead with its monotonous song ringing out. A field on the edge of the golf course held 10 **Stone Curlew**. Several **Redstart** were seen in the gardens adjacent to the golf course.

We now entered an area of pine forest and added **Firecrest**, our first **Turtle Doves** of the trip and a few flyover **Crossbill**. A big flock of **Swift** flew overhead and at least 2 **Pallid Swift** were picked out.

The birding was intense and we had lost track of time somewhat. We had walked for 4 hours away from our apartment and it would soon be dark. After checking out the last field and mountain beyond, an area where Andy had Booted Eagle on previous years and adding another 2 **Hoopoe** and several **Pied Flycatcher** to the list, we started to head back. Andy started 'thumbing' for a lift and to our amazement, an Audi pulled up and the young guy inside offered us a lift back into Santa Ponca. I have to say that all the locals we stopped and spoke to were all very friendly and pleasant.

Day 2 – 22nd April

During our breakfast on the balcony, an Osprey flew from the bay and out to sea. Unfortunately Andy and Barry didn't get on to it before it disappeared around the headland. After a bit of a shuffle to the itinerary, we decided to visit Albufera marsh. En-route we added **Black-winged Stilt** and **Cattle Egret**. We arrived at the reserve just after 9am. I had done a lot of research for the trip but I was blown away with the sheer density and variation of birds and habitat. We were greeted with **Hoopoe**, **Cetti's Warbler's**, **Nightingale's** galore. **Fan-tailed Warbler's** flew overhead, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Pied Flycatcher** and **Sardinian Warbler's** were all added whilst viewing the map at the entrance to the reserve!



Moustached Warbler showed well for us at least. Others weren't so lucky!

As we neared the reserve we were greeted by the sound of 'croaking' **Cattle Egrets** and **Black-crowned Night Herons**. A single **Great White Egret** and a few **Little Egrets** were also seen. A **Purple Swamphen** showed briefly on a pool adjacent to the path. We hadn't reached the reserve reception yet! Having signed in and collected our free permit, we were greeted by a singing **Great Reed Warbler** which showed well in the top of the reed bed. One of the target birds was soon added with a **Red-knobbed Coot** showing well down to a few yards. Another target bird, a **Moustached Warbler** was singing in a reed bed. It eventually gave itself up with the occasional display flight to boot. Several fly-over **Purple Herons** were seen throughout the reserve.



Several Black-crowned Night Heron were present in the colony



As well as dozens of Little Egret

A group of birders were gathered looking along the main channel that runs through the middle of the reserve. A **Little Bittern** was feeding on the waters edge but was difficult to see unlike the one that climbed to the top of the reeds at a range of 10 metres in front of us! The wider scrapes were alive with birds, the most common was **Kentish Plover**. Other waders present included 2 **Spotted Redshank**, **greenshank**, 2 **Little Stint**, 20 or so **Wood Sandpipers**. The first **Garganey**, one of about 10 on the reserve was seen in its usual position asleep on an island. A female **Montague's Harrier** was seen quartering the marsh. Other notable birds were 2 **Hoopoe**, **Stone Curlew** and **Yellow Wagtail** of the race 'iberiae'. A fabulous reserve, alive with birds and an experience I will never forget.

We then drove a short distance to view some roadside pools where Marbled Teal had been seen earlier in the day. There was no sign of the Teal but we found 25 **Bee-eaters** and a **Golden Eagle** soaring over the mountain. We later found out that the Golden Eagle was seen quite regularly but was an escaped bird that had been roaming free in the area for several years.

En-route to San Bosc water treatment works we added **Tawny Pipit**. Having taken a wrong turning, we found a group of **Cattle Egret** feeding near some horses in a wild-flower meadow giving excellent photographic opportunities.



Cattle Egret in wildflower field-that's what you call a wildflower meadow!



Having eventually found the right place, 2 **Marbled Teal** were seen, another target bird in the bag! The day was ended with an unsuccessful twitch for Slender-billed Gull at Alcudia.



Marbled Teal at San Bosc.

Day 3- 23rd April

A Spotted Flycatcher of the Mediterranean race, with its clean un-streaked breast and throat was seen whilst we were having breakfast on the balcony.

En-route to Cuber Reservoir produced some very picturesque views from several 'miradors'. An **Osprey** and several **Ravens** were seen. After passing through a tunnel, we came across a small concrete reservoir with we decided was worth a look.

After a few minutes, 4 **Red Kite** sailed overhead. 2 **Crag Martins** circled overhead before flying into the tunnel. Risking life and limb, I followed them in and found them nest building in the roof of the tunnel.



Crag Martin taking a break from nest construction. Nest site is top right of the photo.

A **Black Vulture** and **Booted Eagle** appeared over the mountain giving good, if a little distant views. Our 2nd **Blue Rock Thrush** was picked up on a rock face by Barry but a singing **Wryneck** was more elusive only showing briefly to 2 of the group.

At Cuber itself, 3 **Booted Eagle**, 2 **Black Vulture**, 3 **Red Kite** and a **Griffon Vulture** were seen as well as another target bird, **Moltoni' Warbler**. Despite what had been written in the site guides it was quite easy to see being firstly picked up by its distinctive call. With a bit of patience they showed well.



Moltoni's Warbler

Below the dam, there is a lush, vegetated area which was alive with common migrants and was a productive hour or so with excellent views of **Nightingale**, **Redstart**, **Lesser Whitethroat** and migrant **Spotted Flycatcher**.

100's of **Yellow-legged Gull** loafed on the reservoir with 100's more sat on the adjacent cliffs. There must have been over 2000 in total, quite an impressive sight! 4 **Firecrest** were seen in the small pine plantation near to the car.



Cuber Reservoir

After dodging the cyclists driving back off the mountains, we headed for the 'central plains' which the guides say are the best place to see Red-footed Falcons and Lesser Kestrel. We had no such luck but a pleasant cruise around the lanes crossing the farm land added **Woodchat Shrike** of the race 'badius', **Corn Bunting**, **Thekla Lark**, **Short-toed Lark**, **Stone Curlews**, **Fan-tailed Warblers**, **Cattle Egret** and more **Yellow Wagtails**.

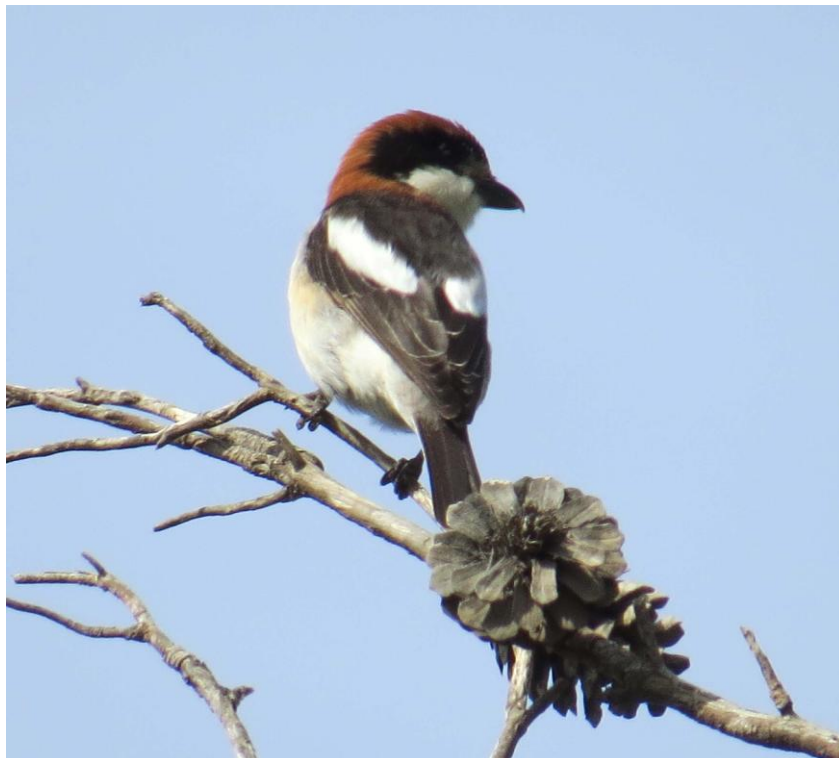


Thekla Lark feeding young

The day ended with a visit to Son Reus dump with **Booted Eagle** and more **Red Kites** present.

Day 4 – 23rd April

Today proved to be a very memorable day of the holiday. The intention was to visit Cabrera, an island of the south Coast of Mallorca. Things didn't go exactly to plan when we arrived at Colonia Saint Jordi, as the boat that we planned to take to Cabrera didn't run this early in the season even though it was published on their website. We had a couple of hours to kill before the sailing so explored an area of farmland just around the coast. 4 **Audouin's Gull** were on the beach, then we had a brilliant hour or so watching **Sardinian Warbler**, **Serin**, **Fan-tailed Warbler**, **Stone Curlew's**, **Wood Warbler**, **Corn Bunting** and **Woodchat Shrike** of the Mediterranean race *Badius* amongst others. On the return to catch the boat we saw the only **Turnstone** of the trip.



Woodchat Shrike (badius)

On the 40 minute boat ride we had a few **Cory's Shearwater** but apart from hundreds of Yellow-legged Gull it was pretty quiet. An **Osprey** circled over the harbour as we arrived and after receiving our brief from one of the Rangers, we set off to explore the island. We bumped into a 'local' birder who spends some time on the island during migration times who told us that yesterday was good but there has been a clear out overnight. They had 3 Great Spotted Cuckoo and a female Collared Flycatcher but there was no sign today.

We were told the best area for Balearic Warbler was about ½ mile away at the scrub near a picnic area behind the beach. We set off but had only walked about 200 yards when we found our first **Balearic Warbler** perched up in a gorse bush showing well for a few seconds before disappearing into the undergrowth.



Cory's Shearwater on the crossing to Cabrerra

As we approached the picnic area what can only be explained as one of the best birding spectacles I have seen! There had been a 'fall' and the place was alive with birds. A small lawned area held Black **and Common Redstart**'s. Every bush seemed to have **Whinchat**, **Spotted Flycatcher** and Pied **Flycatchers**. It was teeming with birds. We found 2 **Red-backed Shrike** briefly and when we mentioned our sighting to the locals, they informed us that Red-backed Shrike was a major rarity on Cabrerra. It wasn't that we were watching 'rare' birds, it was just the sheer volume of common migrants.

A juvenile **Shag** of the Mediterranean race preened on a rock.



2 flyover **Bee-eater** and a purring **Turtle Dove** ended our brief visit to the island. The 3 hours we were there passed too quickly but was certainly an experience that I won't forget.

More **Cory's Shearwater** were seen on the boat back to Colonia Saint Jordi. After a quick coffee on the harbour, we set off for our next site, the salt pans at Salobrar de Campos. Apart from a vast array of waders, we soon caught up with another of our target birds, **Greater Flamingo**. 40+ birds were seen throughout the site with several family parties.

2 **Audouin's Gull**'s flew overhead before we explored an area of farmland and scrub. Here we had 2 **Thekla Lark**, **Hoopoe**, **Pied Flycatcher**, **Redstart**, **Wood Warbler**, **Subalpine Warbler**, **Cuckoo** and **Whinchat**. A **Black Kite** hunted the fields and several **Red Kites** soared over the far side of the reserve. We drove around to the north end of the site and the farmland here had **Stonechat**, **Whinchat**, **Fan-tailed Warbler**, **Corn Bunting** and **Yellow Wagtail**.



Hoopoe feeding young

Several new pools had been created since the writing of our site guide and they were full of waders. Our only **Whimbrel** of the trip and a monster flock containing 72 **Wood Sandpiper**, 18 **Temminck's Stint** and 11 **Little Stint** all took to the air, flushed by a **Marsh Harrier**. More **Stone Curlew** were seen in rough fields and 4 **Gull-billed Tern** flew over with their distinctive call breaking the silence. Apart from being 'bitten to death' by mosquitoes, a very enjoyable days birding came to an end.

Day 5 - 25th April

The **Blue Rock Thrush** showed from the balcony whilst having breakfast, a very obliging individual. We were heading for Cap De Formentor but decided to call into Alcudia to try for the Slender-Billed Gull but we drew a blank. During a quick visit to Albufererta marsh we saw **Osprey**, 2 **Great White Egret**, **Purple Heron** and **Greater Flamingo**. A driver around the lanes surrounding the marsh added **Tawny Pipit**, **Thekla Lark**, **Stone Curlew**, **Whinchat**. A farmer was ploughing a field and this had 10 **Cattle Egret**, **Yellow-legged Gull** and a lone **Audouin's Gull**.





Spectacular view from the lighthouse at Cap de Formentor

We then undertook the short drive through the mountains to Cap de Formentor, the most North-easterly point of the island. The drive was fraught with danger, mainly suicidal cyclists and steep sided drops. Unfortunately it appeared that most of the island had decided to take the trip as well and the watch point was crowded to say the least. Once we had parked up we made our way to the viewpoint looking along the north of the Tramuntana Mountain range and out to sea.

A raft of 300 **Cory's Shearwater** loafed on the sea with a few **Balearic Shearwater's**, 2 **Ospreys** gave wonderful views and were seen from another watch point later in the day roosting at the bottom of the cliffs. Best was yet to come though. We had a couple of sightings of 2 falcons but they were just too far away to identify in the heat haze. Sometime later two stunning Eleanor's Falcons flew around the headland at very close range!

An area of recently cleared scrub held more common migrants such as **Pied and Spotted Flycatcher**, **Common and Black Redstart**. 3 **Red-rumped Swallow** flew in off the sea and a couple of **Pallid Swift** circled overhead and a **Blue Rock Thrush** perched on a fence giving crippling views through the scope.

A short drive to another watch point proved productive with 2 **Black Kites**, **Griffon Vulture** and another **Blue Rock Thrush**. A calling **Wryneck** proved more elusive and didn't give itself up.

Calling in at a small wooded area near the beach at Santa Ponca produced a **Hoopoe**, 3 **Audouin's Gull**, **Yellow-legged Gull** and another target bird, **Monk Parakeet**.



A colony of Monk Parakeet in Santa Ponca



Day 6 – 26th April

The **Blue Rock Thrush** didn't disappoint and showed on its usual roof whilst we were having breakfast. That was it, trip over. We headed off to the airport for our flight home. Whilst in the airport, news broke of a Hoopoe in my home borough of Oldham! Needless to say it was a very long flight home and after dropping Andy and Barry off at home I made my way to Royton and connected with the Hoopoe.

A very enjoyable trip with some cracking birds, wonderful scenery and great company.

The final list was a very creditable 131.



Mark Rigby, Barry Stanley and Andy Platt - April 2015