

LA MARINA, COSTA BRAVA, SPAIN, JULY 2007

by Simon Johnson

This trip was a family holiday to my parent's new house in la Marina – Spain and although most of it was spent by the pool sunbathing or running round after my 4 year old niece, I did manage to get a few hours birding in most days.

My Folks have bought the house (for their coming early retirement) on the edge of one of the biggest urbanisations in Europe and the surrounding area is fantastic for bird watching with farmland, saltpans, coast, wetlands and several National Parks, so even though it wasn't the best time for bird watching I still had to go and explore.

We flew from Manchester to Alicante on the afternoon of the 1st July, the day after the failed bomb attempt of Glasgow Airport and the London car bombs, so security through the airport was pretty tight. My bird watching equipment needed extra checks and I was grilled on what it was for....surely the Collins field guide would have given it away?!

1st July -Alicante to La Marina

Picked up at Alicante airport at 7pm by my step-dad who then drove us to la Marina, the main road to la Marina after Santa Pola cuts through a huge area of Saltpans and it wasn't long before I was seeing birds such as **Little Egret, Greater Flamingo, Little Tern and Black-winged Stilt** from the car and also had fly over **Greenshank** and **Audouin's Gull**. Arrived at the house and headed straight for the sun terrace with a nice cold beer, the terrace overlooked a huge quarry with lots of rugged scrub. **Bee-eaters** and **Red-rumped swallows** buzzed over whilst enjoying the beer and my folks told me the quarry was hopefully going to be turned into a golf course instead of even more houses!

2nd July – La Marina & the Salt Pans

Woke up at 7.30am and decided to go for a walk around the area to the back of the house away and away from the quarry. About 10 minutes walk along the main road I came across a dirt track that led into a national park, I have no idea what it was called but it was on the hill surrounding La Marina. The habitat again was very rocky, with dense scrub and few small stands of pines. It seemed pretty dead at first but it wasn't long before I was encountering **Rufous Bush Robin, Woodchat Shrike, Crested Lark, Orphean Warbler** and fly over **Cattle Egrets** and a **Squacco Heron**. In the evening had an hour at the Saltpans but unfortunately was dropped off at the works entrance on the main road, I managed to find a safe spot to watch from as you couldn't walk along the edges due to the traffic and it limited my viewing, a distant flock of **Ruddy Shelduck** flying over made it worthwhile though.

3rd July – Clot de Galvany reserve Gran Alicante

My mum had arranged for one of her local friends who knew his way round the area to take me early to this reserve situated in Gran Alicante to the north and back up near the airport. I was expecting to find a lush marsh in the middle of no-where as was told it held breeding White-Headed and Marbled ducks so was a bit surprised to find it was in a valley bottom sandwiched between a built up town and the beach with no fresh water in sight! I did wonder if I was at the right place until I found a map and some signs at a visitor centre which showed that there were a few expanses of water but as I found out with it being July these had dried up and it was more like a scrubby desert with **Stone Curlew, Little Owl and Southern Grey Shrike**. I did manage to find a shallow pond in this desert which held **Black-winged Stilts, Marbled duck, Water Rail** and **Purple Swamp Hen** and after giving up and heading back to my pick up point I then stumbled across the oasis with **Great Reed Warbler** singing from the reeds, **Little Grebe, Pochard**, and a cracking male **White-headed duck** sat within touching distance from the hide (how I kicked myself for not bringing a camera). Didn't do any more birding after getting home but had Stone Curlew and Little Owl at the house in the evening.

4th July – El Fondo

Again had arranged for my mum's friend to act as a guide and take me to this huge wetland reserve out in the country. When we got there it was a bit of a shock to find you had to call and book an appointment with the rangers before your visit and I found myself unable to get access to the main reserve. The Rangers sent me in the direction of a visitor centre which was some distance away, here I walked around its small walkway and stood for a few hours over looking some lagoons, I also picked up the number to call to book an appointment. The area was still full of birds and at the watch point **Whiskered Terns** and **Cattle Egrets** were constantly flying over along with others such as **Glossy Ibis, Night Heron** and **Montagu's Harrier**. The lagoons held

good numbers of **Avocet** and **Pochard**, and the surrounding area held **Zitting Cisticola** and **Spotless Starling**. After a few hours of standing around it was soon time to head back as it was getting hot and I just spent the rest of the day by the pool.

5th July - La Marina Beach/Forrest & La Pinet

Today was spent at the beach, mainly trying to catch few rays in the overcast conditions but I decided to go have a wander for an hour or so into a strip of forest which ran the whole length of the beach and as far as the eye could see. It was pretty dead with a few **Spotted Flycatchers** and a few other bits but I could imagine on passage this could hold a few goodies. The sun eventually managed to come out and we enjoyed a few beers in the evening before heading home. We decided to take a different way home and headed a little further up along the beach front before turning inland. Coming out of the dunes we passed a wall of screens which I soon realised had brackish lagoons behind them, the car came to an abrupt stop and I was left to explore. **Kentish Plover**, **Avocet** and **Collared Pratincole** were all breeding on these pools along with a Tern colony and a good selection of gulls had built up with **Yellow-legged**, **Med**, **Black-headed**, **Slender-billed** and **Audouins** all present in varying numbers and it was a nice round off to a day at the beach.

6th July - El Fonda Visitor Centre

I was unable to get through to the reserve by phone yesterday to make this "appointment" so had to drive back out there to see if they would let me have a wonder round today. How wrong! They still wouldn't allow a visit and so I made my "appointment" to go birding around the main reserve for tomorrow morning. Birds were pretty much the same as the last visit with a party of **Stonechat** the only new species for the trip.

7th July – El Fondo

I really don't know where to start with this....it was a fantastic mornings birding. It started by being let in at 8.am parked up and then walked down a dirt road which ran parallel with a large irrigation dyke. There were several hides along this track some of which I didn't venture into due hundreds of spiders living in them but they all looked out over the huge marsh. The main reservoir had dried up a bit and thus pushing the birds further out from the hides but there were still thousands of birds with uncountable numbers of **Coot**, **Pochard**, **Black-winged Stilt** and **Black-necked Grebe's** amongst these were smaller groups of **Red-Crested Pochard**, **White-headed duck** and the odd **Wood Sand** and **Black-tailed Godwit**. Gulls, Terns and Herons were constantly flying over and the vegetation and trees along the track yielded **Ortolan Bunting**, **Great Reed Warbler** and **Melodious Warbler** to name but a few. It really was a worthwhile wait to spend a morning birding here.

8th July Santo Pola Salt Pans

Last day today so had a morning visit to the salt pans, again birds pretty much the same as the last visit with **Great Crested Grebe**, **Flamingo's**, Egrets and a few Waders.

After an hour here headed back to the pool to try and soak up the last bit of sun before catching a flight home to sodden Manchester!!

Simon Johnson, July 2007

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