

Mallorca 1st–6th June 2019

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Balearic Warbler, Boquer Valley

This is a brief report on a six day trip aimed primarily at seeing Balearic Warbler and a few other Balearic (sub)species and also some species I hadn't clapped eyes on for decades.

Information sources

The information provided is mainly to supplement the excellent report written by Nico Ordax and available from Cloudbirders (<https://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/show/18428/26708>).

The above report gives information about how to access all the key sites by public transport, although most birders are likely to hire a car – see information on logistics concerning the pitfalls to avoid if doing the latter.

Other useful information was derived from the Mallorca pages of the BirdingInSpain website (<https://www.birdinginspain.com/birding-in-mallorca.html>).



Thekla Lark, S'Albufereta

Logistics

We flew from Stansted to Palma with EasyJet, leaving on a Saturday evening and returning late on a Thursday evening (arriving very early Friday) as part of a (£230 pp) bed, breakfast and flight package deal booked through Opodo. Accommodation was at the Eix Lagotel hotel in Alcúdia with breakfast from 07.45 to 10.45. The hotel was friendly, with free parking: the only downside was the noise from the evening entertainment, although there was a strict cut-off at midnight each night. The late breakfast allowed plenty of time to visit close by birding sites if so desired beforehand. We walked into town to eat in the evenings. The room included a fridge, ideal for chilling the incredibly cheap (65 cents) one litre bottles of beer available from nearby supermarkets.

The hotel is in the north-east of the island and thus conveniently close to the main birding sites. Indeed, most (all?) rooms have a view over S'Albufera Natural Park, the key wetland site on the island. I was pleasantly surprised on the first morning to look out from our balcony and see Audouin's Gulls sailing past at eye level, and on occasion even landing in the hotel swimming pool. Other balcony view birds included Kentish Plover, Purple Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Glossy Ibis, Eleonora's Falcon (especially at dusk – they seem to occupy the same ecological niche as nighthawks in the Americas), Osprey and "Mediterranean" Spotted Flycatcher.



View from the Eix Lagotel Hotel

Free transfers from Palma airport to Eix Lagotel are possible if the accommodation is booked directly through the hotel's website – this option was not available to us as the package was booked via Opodo (who encourage you to buy their rather costly transfers). Instead, we choose to rent a car from Palma airport for the ca. 40 minute drive across the island and for the rest of our stay.

If hiring a car from Palma airport, be *very wary* about which hire company you choose – and make sure you read reviews of any company's services online before renting. Many are cowboys and quote incredibly cheap car hire prices – but then the insurance to cover the vehicle excess costs several times more than the hire itself. If you choose not to take their insurance, then there are a number of rip-off scams they operate. One is to find "new" scratches on the car upon return – and charge you heavily for them. Another is seriously to rip you off for fuel, while I also read reports of them simply keeping the deposit taken to cover damage excesses. Several of the companies don't have offices in the airport itself, so a bus ride is needed to get to their office. Most of these offices seem to shut at 23.00 – so be extra wary if, like us, you have a late flight.

Given the above, we choose to go with a global brand company: Thrifty, whose business is managed through Hertz in Palma. They have a 24/7 office in the airport, and were incredibly fast, efficient and friendly (we passed long queues at other hire car offices). The vehicle (a manual six-gear Opel Mokka) cost £98 for the duration of our stay and they took no issue whatsoever with us not paying their extra insurance to cover the damage excess (it cost £9 per day). Instead, we took out separate insurance to cover this that was readily available online and cost a total of £18 for 6 days. The vehicle return was hassle-free and simple. Top marks Thrifty.

Itinerary

01/06. Arrive Palma 22.00, pick up hire car, drive to Eix Lagotel.

02/06. Boquer Valley and S'Albufereta Natural Reserve.

03/06. Cuber Dam.

04/06. S'Albufera Natural Park.

05/06. S'Albufera Natural Park.

06/06. Cap de Ses Salines and Salines des Salobrar. Depart Palma 23.00.



Moltoni's Warbler, Cuber Dam

Key sites

Boquer Valley

Park at (39.91311, 3.0843). Follow trail passing through gates at a finca and start looking for **Balearic Warbler** after you pass through the last wall along the track and it starts descending towards the sea. The vegetation is slightly shorter from this point. We saw birds on the righthand side of the main track at around (39.92763, 3.09306). Two were seen; there were no extensive areas of knee-high vegetation some reports mention as being the habitat of this species. Also in this area was the first of around half a dozen **Woodchat Shrikes** (*badia* race) seen during the trip. Another target, the *balearica* race of **Spotted Flycatcher**, which the IOC splits as "Mediterranean Flycatcher" was common around the finca and at the start of the trail – and indeed was seen at every site we visited.



Spotted Flycatcher, water treatment site

Another site said to be good for **Balearic Warbler** we didn't visit is Mirador Es Colomer at the base of the Formentor peninsular (39.92928, 3.11048). The birds are around the car park. Get there early before the crowds.



Boquer Valley

S'Albufereta Natural Reserve – western fringe.

See the BirdingInSpain website for how to access this area. This is another wetland site although nowhere near as good or accessible as the similarly named S'Albufera Natural Park to the south. However, in fields along the road around the Can Roca Villa Holiday Villa (39.8516, 3.10332), **Thekla Lark** was common, so it may prove to be a good stakeout for this species. Stone Curlew was also in the area.

S'Albufera Natural Park

Park at (39.79909, 3.11916). The premier wetland reserve on the island, with some superb birding. The reserve is officially open from 09.00 to 18.00 in summer (it closes earlier in winter) and you need to walk to the visitor centre (39.79582, 3.10612) to get a permit, which is free. To get a permit to access the reserve out of opening hours (at much better times of the day for birding!), you will need to have your passport with you. You can easily pass around the side of the entrance gate. There are several trails and hides. Our main target here was **Moustached Warbler**, which we saw (and heard) in the reedbed along the west side of the red trail (39.79375, 3.11234). Other birds of note we saw included Little Bittern (both times along the main canal), several Great Reed Warblers, a party of Whiskered Terns, many Eleonora's Falcons, and rather unexpectedly a Golden Eagle, which was doubtless the same escaped individual seen by Nico Ordax a few years previously. Note that Red-knobbed Coot, Purple Gallinule, Red-crested Pochard and White-headed Duck are all (re)introduced here, although we didn't see any White-headed Ducks. The threatened *witherbyi* race of Reed Bunting has been seen from the hide at ses Pardes on the green trail (39.79507, 3.10381).



Golden Eagle with Marsh Harrier, S'Albufera

The water treatment site is well worth a visit for **Marbled Duck**. We saw a female with a brood of 12 chicks from the Depurado Son Bosc viewing platform (39.77573, 3.11471). This can be accessed on foot from inside the park, although you will have to hop over a gate just past a very derelict building on the left side of the red trail at (39.78217, 3.11616). Follow the track past the entrance to the water treatment plant and take the first dirt track after it on the right that leads to the viewing platform. Alternatively, you can drive here. On the north side of Can Picafort, take the Ma3431, turn right at (39.76499, 3.13102) then take the dirt road left at (39.77858, 3.11969) that leads to the platform. We also saw three **Gull-billed Terns** here.



Marbled Duck, water treatment site

Cuber Dam

Park at (39.78721, 2.79702). Follow the trail with the lake on your right and pines on your left to the dam at (39.78065, 2.7921) for **Moltoni's Warbler**. We saw our first pair literally perched on the dam wall. Two more were seen, one by the small quarry just past the dam and the second, a showy male, where the track heads off up the far side of the lake. **Balearic Crossbill** is regularly seen in the pines between the car park and the dam. We only saw two, both right next to the car park, where there were also a couple of Wrynecks. We saw our only Tawny Pipits along the track too. Keep your eyes on the sky for raptors: we saw several Griffon and Black Vultures here, also several Eleonora's Falcons and Red Kites.

Cap de Ses Salines

Park at 39.26566, 3.05299. Walk past the lighthouse and head left over the rocks in front of it and check the scrub to your left (although you can't enter as it is fenced off). Seawatching from here produced distant views of several **Scopoli's Shearwaters**. However, just as we were leaving, a fishing vessel passed by close inshore with many Yellow-legged Gulls and a few Audouin's Gulls in tow, as well as half a dozen Scopoli's. Also offshore were several European Shags, presumably of the Mediterranean race *desmarestii*, while the scrub produced a **Balearic Warbler**.

We stopped where it was possible to pull off along the road leading to Cap de Ses Salines and saw a Stone Curlew, several Woodchat Shrikes, our only Greater Short-toed Larks of the trip and heard a European Turtle Dove.



Audouin's Gulls, S'Albufera

Salines des Salobrar

Park in the Font Santa Hotel car park (39.35472, 3.01581). Take the track off to your right and walk down to the saltmarsh and salt pans. Of note here was a decent flock of about 40 **Greater Flamingoes**. It is also possible to view the salt pans from along the narrow and extremely busy road signposted to Es Trenc that leads off the Ma6040 at (39.34882, 3.01314).



Balearic Crossbill, Cuber Dam



Hoopoe, water treatment site

Trip list

Boquer Valley (BV), Cap de Ses Salines (CS), Cuber Dam (CD), S'Albufera (SA), S'Albufereta (S'Alb), Salines des Salobrar (SS). (c = common).

Common Shelduck, c
Marbled Teal, female plus brood SA
Red-crested Pochard, SA – introduced
Common Pochard, SA
Gadwall, SA
Mallard, c
Red-legged Partridge, SA/b, CS
Greater Flamingo, 1 SA, SS
Little Grebe, SA
Great Crested Grebe, SA
Rock Dove, c
Wood Pigeon, c
European Turtle Dove, CS
Eurasian Collared Dove, c
Common Swift, c
Water Rail, SA
Purple Gallinule, SA – introduced
Common Moorhen, SA
Red-knobbed Coot, SA – introduced
Common Coot, c
Scopoli's Shearwater, CS
Little Bittern, 2 males SA
Black-crowned Night Heron, SA
Squacco Heron, only 2 SA
Cattle Egret, c
Grey Heron, SA
Purple Heron, SA
Great Egret, only 1 from hotel
Golden Oriole, heard CD
Woodchat Shrike, BV, CD, CS
Common Raven, BV, SA
House Sparrow, c
Tawny Pipit, 2 CD
Yellow Wagtail, SA, SS race *iberiae*
Common Chaffinch, CD, CS
European Greenfinch, c
Common Linnet, c
Balearic Crossbill, 2 CD
European Goldfinch, c
European Serin, c
Corn Bunting, c
Cirl Bunting, 3 CD
Great Tit, c
Greater Short-toed Lark, 2 CS
Thekla Lark, SA/b, 1 CS
Zitting Cisticola, c
Moustached Warbler, 1 SA

Little Egret, c
Glossy Ibis, SA
European Shag, CS
Eurasian Thick-knee, SA/b, CS
Pied Avocet, c
Black-winged Stilt, c
Little Ringed Plover, SA
Kentish Plover, SA, SS
Black-headed Gull, SA
Audouin's Gull, SA, CS
Yellow-legged Gull, c
Little Tern, SA
Gull-billed Tern, 3 SA
Whiskered Tern, flock of 13 SA
Black Tern, 1 from hotel
Osprey, 1 SA/b, 2 sightings from hotel
Griffon Vulture, 6 CD
Black Vulture, 2 CD
Golden Eagle, 1 escaped individual SA
Booted Eagle, 1 BV, 3 SA
Western Marsh Harrier, c
Red Kite, CD, SS
Common Hoopoe, SA, CS
Wryneck, 2 CD
European Bee-eater, only 2 SA
Common Kestrel, c
Eleonora's Falcon, c
Peregrine Falcon, 1 BV, 1 CS
Common Reed Warbler, SA
Great Reed Warbler, SA
House Martin, BV
Barn Swallow, c
Eurasian Crag Martin, BV, CD
Cetti's Warbler, c
Blackcap, SA, CD
Moltoni's Warbler, CD
Sardinian Warbler, c
Balearic Warbler, BV, CS
Firecrest, CD
Eurasian Wren, BV
Spotted Flycatcher, c race *balearica*
Common Nightingale, c
Blue Rock Thrush, 3 BV, 2 CS
Eurasian Blackbird, c

Also a couple of Indian Peafowls seen