Menorca  Sept 27-Oct 11, 2014

A birding trip report by Sean Huggins

Researching my first visit to this attractive and mostly unspoilt Balearic island was a challenge; not many birders choose Menorca over the more species-rich Mallorca, even in spring, and detailed information for autumn was scarce. This meant some of the birds I found came as a pleasant surprise, however.

We stayed at Platges de Fornells on the north-east coast, an area I’d recommend for its ruggedly beautiful landscape and proximity to good sites such as Tirant Marsh and Cap de Cavelleria. But Menorca is a small island and if you have a car, as I did, all sites are within a fairly short drive. The relatively new and well-signposted path around the island, the Cami de Cavalls, has improved public access in many areas.

Migration was obvious over the two weeks, with decent numbers of flycatchers, common redstarts and wheatears in the first and an influx of ‘winter’ species - robins (big numbers), blackbirds and song thrushes (small numbers) - in the second. Audouin’s gulls seemed to disappear after the first week, presumably moving south to their wintering grounds off North Africa.

The resident ‘big three’ of booted eagle, red kite and Egyptian vulture were seen almost daily, often at close quarters.

Falling into the pleasant surprise category were a rock thrush, a slender-billed gull, a glossy ibis and a marbled duck, though with an introduced population of the latter on Mallorca perhaps this species should be expected.

The weather was delightful throughout, 26-27C and mostly sunny with the odd thunderstorm, mostly at night.

Main sites visited

S’Albufera des Grau (Es Grau) The biggest and by far the best wetland on the island, though water levels were too high for most smaller waders. The woods behind Es Grau beach and dunes were good for passerine migrants.
Tirant Marsh A seasonal wetland that was bone dry at the beginning of our holiday and but flooded after a couple of night thunderstorms. Never great for waders but produced a Glossy Ibis.

Cap de Cavalleria Big numbers of Scopoli’s Shearwaters and smaller numbers of smaller shearwaters. Balearic Shearwater is very variable but the underparts of these birds seemed rather pale, suggesting Yelkouan Shearwater. The smaller shearwaters breeding on Menorca are said to resemble Yelkouan but I don’t know if these birds would be present at this time of year.

Punta Nati This bleak and haunting landscape was very birdy on my single visit, producing the only records of Stone Curlew and Skylark plus a fall of about 30 Northern Wheatears. We also recorded Hoopoe and Woodchat Shrike just inland from nearby Punta de s’Escular.

Ses Salines d’Addaia Disappointing despite promising water levels but produced the only Greater Flamingo of the trip.

Son Bou No clear water visible in the main reedbed though the east end produced a Slender-billed Gull and the attractive, boggy habitat at the north-west end hosted a Squacco Heron.

Reserva d’Conception to Arenal de Son Saura (just north of Son Parc) A walk along the Cami de Cavalls past (private) saltpans produced the only record of hobby. The saltpans are not viewable from the track though I think visits can be arranged. The reassuringly old-fashioned sewage works at Arenal de Son Saura was the best spot for grey wagtail, though like Son Bou, no clear water was visible in the adjacent marsh. I refer to the pines here as Son Parc woodland.

Platges de Fornells to Fornells Walks from our apartment along a very rocky coastal path produced the only records of Peregrine Falcon and the biggest count of Audouin’s Gulls (six, at the beginning of the holiday).

Cala Morell to Codolar de Biniatramp The highlight was five Hoopoes together and an Osprey.

Algendar Gorge (Barranc d’Algendar) A beautiful area but in birding terms good only for Egyptian Vulture. Walked in two sections: the lower one from Calda Galdana and the picturesque higher reaches, where the gorge is signposted from the Me-1 at the Ferreries roundabout.

Mount Toro: A presumed migrant Common Rock Thrush here was a bonus.
Other sites visited included woodland at Sa Roca, the small saltpans by the Me-15 just S of the turning for Platges de Fornells, the coast in the south-east between Punta Prima and Alcafar, Cap de Favaritx and the town of Cuitiedella.

Species list
(names and taxonomy as Collins Bird Guide, Svensson et al)

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* Two Es Grau 29/9.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Many Es Grau and Tirant Marsh, a few anywhere with freshwater.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* Common Es Grau

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* two Es Grau 29/9, seven there 8/10

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Common Es Grau, six Tirant Marsh 7/10

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas Penelope* Four Es Grau 8/10

Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* One Es Grau 29/9

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Fairly common Es Grau

Garganey *Anas querquedula* Two Es Grau 2/10

Pochard *Aythya farina* Common Es Grau

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* One eclipse male Es Grau 29/9

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* At least 3 Es Grau 8/10

Red-legged Partridge *Alectorus rufa* A few groups of up to 10 in the Cap de Cavilleria and Fornells area

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Small numbers Es Grau

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* Up to six Es Grau

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficolis* About 200 at Es Grau, four Son Parc golf course pond
Scopoli’s Shearwater  *Calonectris diomedia diomedia* A few moving most times I looked at Cap de Cavelleria. Early on 7/10, at least 400 were off the Cape, many lingering and sitting on the sea, with smaller numbers feeding off Platges de Fornells early evening.

Balearic or Yelkouan Shearwater  *Puffinus mauretanicus*  Seen regularly off the Cape and occasionally Platges de Fornells in smaller numbers than the above species; max c30 in one and a half hours Cap de Cavelleria on 7/10. See comments on ID in site list above.

Great Cormorant  *Phalacrocorax carbo*  Up to four Es Grau, one Son Park golf course pond 5/10

European Shag  *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*  Odd ones, twos and threes widespread

Cattle Egret  *Bubulcus ibis* Several groups mingling with cattle, sheep and horses. Titant Marsh the best site (they appear to roost in area) with 59 on 1/10

Squacco Heron  *Ardeola ralloides*  One west end of Son Bou reedbed 1/10

Little Egret  *Egretta garzetta*  Widespread in small numbers at wetlands

Great Egret  *Casmerodius albus*  Singles at Son Bou and Fornells salt pans, up to four at Es Grau

Grey Heron  *Ardea cinerea*  Widespread in ones and twos, frequenting rocky coasts as well as wetlands

Glossy Ibis  *Plegadis falcinellus*  One seen in flight at Tirant Marsh 7/10 was relocated just east of the marsh on the pool below Es Prat farmhouse. Seen there again 10/10

Eurasian Spoonbill  *Platlea leucorodia*  Two immatures at Es Grau 29/9

Greater Flamingo  *Phoenicopterus roseus*  One juv Ses Salines d’Addaia 30/9

Egyptian Vulture  *Neophron percnopterus*  Fairly widespread in the rockier areas, with seven at Algendar Gorge 6/10, eight at Punti Nati on 3/10 and an impressive 33 low in the air together just west of Punta de s’Escular on the same day. Presumably had just risen from a carcass

Booted Eagle  *Aquila pennata*  Widespread in greener landscapes, more pale-phase than dark-phase birds. No site counts higher than three
Red Kite *Milvus milvus* Widespread in ones and twos in all coastal habitats, four at Punta Nati on 3/10 the highest count

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* Two Es Grau 8/10, one Tirant Marsh the same day

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* One near Tirant Marsh 1/10

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* One Es Grau 8/10, one Codolar de Biniatramp (west of Cala Morell) 9/10

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Very common and widespread

Eurasian Hobby *Falco Subbuteo* One Reserva d’Conception 10/10

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* Single(s) between Platges de Fornells and Fornells 28/9 and 5/10

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* Birds calling at Es Grau and Son Parc marsh

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* At least 1,500 Es Grau, small numbers other wetlands

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* Two at Es Grau 29/9, 2/10 and 8/10

Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* Two elusive birds calling at Punta Nati 3/10

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* One west at Cap de Cavelleria 7/10

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* Four Es Grau 29/9 and 8/10

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* Singles Es Grau 29/9 and Tirant Marsh 7/10; seven Tirant Marsh 8/10

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Up to two birds at several sites including rocky coasts.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* The most common wader with peak counts of 13 Es Grau 8/10, 15 pool by Es Prat farm 7/10

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* One Tirant Marsh 8/10

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* Recorded only at Es Grau; 25 on 28/9 and 11 on 2/10 and 8/10
Slender-billed Gull  *Chroicocephalus genei* A very approachable first-winter in stream leading from south-east end of Son Bou reedbed to beach on 1/10. Worth braving the horrors of the naturist beach for

Yellow-legged-Gull  *Larus michahellis* Widespread but in surprisingly small numbers

Audouin’s Gull  *Larus audouinii* Recorded at five sites in first week with peak count of six between Platges de Fornells and Fornells on 28/9. None seen in second week

Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon  *Columbia livia* Both in urban areas and at rocky cliffs. Perhaps some pure birds at the latter sites?

Wood Pigeon  *Columbia palumbus* Widespread in small numbers

Eurasian Collared Dove  *Streptopelia decaocto* Small numbers around human habitation

European Turtle Dove  *Streptopelia turtur* One flushed from scrub behind Es Grau beach 29/9

Common Kingfisher  *Alcedo atthis* Widespread at wetland sites, highest count three Es Grau 29/9

Eurasian Hoopoe  *Upupa epops* Singles Son Parc woodland 30/9, Son Bou 1/10, just inland from Punta de s’Escular 3/10, farmland on road to Cap de Cavelleria on 2/10 and, most memorably, five together in the cove immediately east of Cala Morell on 9/10

Skylark  *Alauda arvensis* Seventeen at Punta Nati on 3/10

Thekla Lark  *Galerida theklae* Up to three at Fornells, Cap de Cavelleria, Alcalfar and Punta Nati

Barn Swallow  *Hirunda rustica* Small numbers seen almost every day

Common House Martin  *Delichon urbicum* Scarcer than above species, seen only on three days. Ten at Son Bou on 1/10, also recorded Tirant Marsh and Son Parc woodland

Tawny Pipit  *Anthus campestris* Two flew north-west calling at Son Bou on 1/10

White Wagtail  *Motacilla alba* One Platges de Fornells 28/9
Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* Recorded only in first week, when five at Fornells on 28/9 was the highest count, with three at Son Bou on 1/10

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Singles widespread, with five at Son Parc sewage works 30/9

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* Rare in first week, very common and widespread in the second

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* More in the first week with three in Es Grau woods on 29/9 and 2/10. Two at Cala Morell on 9/10 and singles at six other sites.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Two at Punta Nati on 3/10, three at Mount Toro on 7/10, one there 8/10.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* Singles Son Bou 1/10, farmland on road to Cap de Cavelleria 2/10 and Punta Nati 3/10

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* Very widespread, groups of up to five

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* None recorded until 5/10 when there were six in Son Parc woodland, a few more seen from the car later

Blackbird *Turdus merula* Common and widespread, more in second week

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitaries* Common and widespread, frequenting the roofs of our holiday complex as well as the rocky coast

Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* A female-type in flight at Mount Toro on 7/10 came as a surprise. In appropriate habitat, the highest point of the island. Couldn’t find it the following day

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* Widespread in small numbers, especially in in first week, with peak count about 30 at Punta Nati on 3/10.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* Found on the drier surrounds of most wetlands, with highest counts three on same branch at Son Bou 1/10 and four Es Grau 8/10

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* One Es Grau woods 29/9 and 2/10

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* Widespread in small numbers. The most numerous Sylvia warbler with a peak count of eight at Es Grau woods 2/10
Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*  Astonishingly abundant and widespread

Cetti’s Warbler  *Cettia cetti*  Shouting from suitable habitat at many sites

Willow Warbler  *Phylloscopus trochilus*  One Reserva d’Conception 4/10

Common Chiffchaff  *Phylloscopus collybita*  About 6 scattered singles

Goldcrest  *Regulus regulus*  One between Reserva d’Conception and Arenal de Son Saura 10/10

Spotted Flycatcher  *Muscicapa striata*  Seen at five sites with peak count five Son Parc woodland 30/9; three at Es Grau woods 29/9. One at Tirant Marsh 8/10 was the only bird seen in the second week

European Pied Flycatcher  *Ficedula hypoleuca*  Three at Es Grau woods 29/9 and two at Son Parc woodland 30/9

Great Tit  *Parus major*  Widespread, the only tit species seen

Woodchat Shrike  *Lanius senator*  Single juveniles in farmland on road to Cap de Cavelleria 2/10 and just inland from Punta de s’Escular 3/10

Northern Raven  *Corvus corax*  The only corvid seen, ones and twos several sites with a peak of eight at Punta Nati 3/10

Common Starling  *Sturnus vulgaris*  Flocks of up to 150 birds, numbers increasing in second week

House Sparrow  *Passer domesticus*  Common and widespread

Common Chaffinch  *Fringilla coelebs*  Widespread in small numbers

(Common) Linnet  *Carduelis cannabina*  Fairly common

European Goldfinch  *Carduelis carduelis*  Common

European Greenfinch  *Chloris chloris*  Fairly common

Corn Bunting  *Emberiza calandra*  Small numbers along road to Cap de Cavelleria and Tirant Marsh area