Report of a (birding) trip to Corsica in August 2018
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Introduction
Having never been to Corsica, I always fancied a family holiday that combined a little bit of birdwatching for the endemic taxa that occur there. In August 2018, we did just that. We decided that our young boys Kyo and Syd would enjoy it most if we travelled Corsica by train and so we did. The trains travel through some very nice regions, but take their time. Beware that they can be crowded in especially the northwest (Calvi). To reach the sites of the endemics, I rented a car for one day.

I decided to do a brief write-up of my trip as little information is available on birding on Corsica in August. As can be seen, I did see almost all target species.

Endemic bird taxa
Few bird taxa are really confined to Corsica but these include Corsican Nuthatch. Two other good species that are however shared with Sardinia and/or mainland Italy are Corsican Citril Finch and Moltoni’s Subalpine Warbler. These three species were my main targets. Other taxa that are confined to Corsica (and/or Sardinia) are for instance the local subspecies of Sparrowhawk, Goshawk, Common Buzzard, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay, Coal Tit, Wren, Eurasian Treecreeper, Mistle Thrush, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Red Crossbill. I presume that not all these are really diagnosable though. Two further interesting taxa are the local Spotted Flycatcher and Woodchat Shrike: they only breed on the western Mediterranean islands (including the Balearics).

Itinerary
We had initially planned to travel by train all the way from the Netherlands and back, but, literally while booking the international trains, the prizes went up and up and were suddenly three times the prize of flying... We do not mind paying a little extra for the train ride but felt this was too much. We had however already booked the ferry between Marseille and Corsica... In the end we flew to Marseille from Amsterdam and vice versa, taking the ferry between Marseille and Corsica and vice versa. A bit cumbersome but flight and ferry ride were good fun for the boys. So the detailed itinerary was as follows:

2 August:
We flew from Amsterdam Schiphol airport with EasyJet at 07:30 to arrive Marseille at c 09:00. With the airport bus we went to Gare St. Charles at downtown Marseille for some sightseeing. We walked to the ferry and left at 19:00. Birds seen in Marseille but not on Corsica: White Wagtail and House Sparrow.

3 August:
Arrival in Ajaccio (Corsica) at 07:00. A little breakfast at the quay before taking the train to Corte at 08:30. We stayed there at Hotel Variana Park. In the late afternoon, I picked up the pre-arranged local car at Europcar (EUR 87). We drove onto the citadel for a dinner at U Museu. Recommended!

4 August:
Early leave for the Gorge de Restonica (road D623). I decided to first drive all the way to the end for two reasons. First the road is very small, and it is very time-consuming to let approaching cars pass, thus spoiling precious birding time. Also, as there are few people early on at the end of the road, your chances of seeing Corsican Citril Finch are higher. And so it was, I quickly found two finches that flew however away after having been disturbed. After this success, I drove back to my second site (Capellaccio) for some forest birding. Again quick success with both Corsican Nuthatch and Moltoni’s Subalpine Warbler. This meant that I had seen my three prime targets early on. I thus
tried to find the remaining endemic subspecies, for instance just west of the camping de Tuani, but I was considerably less successful with those.

As it was getting hot, I picked up the family. We decided for a picknick at Col de Sorba; besides one Wren, we did however not add any other species, nor did we see for instance nuthatch or citril finch. Later on, we went for a swim in the river along the Restonica-road and I tried one more time for local subspecies at camping de Tuani.

5 August:
We went by train via Ponte Leccia to Calvi where we had reserved a room in the Grand Hotel. Sightseeing and swimming. Fantastic dinner at A Casetta with harbour-view from the balcony.

6 August:
A day at the beach. Dinner at the square along the Traverse de l'Eglise Santa Maria.

7 August:
Almost all day at Calvi, visiting the citadel. In the afternoon we took the rather crowded train via Ponte Leccia to Bastia. We went off at station Montesoro for our pre-reserved AirBnB nearby.

8 August:
We slept in after which we went to the beach just south of Camping Les Sables Rouges. In the afternoon we went by train to the ferry which left at 19:00.

9 August:
Arrival at Marseille at 07:00. We went by metro and bus to the airport. Species seen (and not on Corsica): Magpie, Jackdaw and House Sparrow.

Birding site
I only birded along the D623-road through the Gorge de Restonica. I focussed on three spots:
1. Parking lot at the end of the road. Target: Corsican Citril Finch.
   After some scanning of the unpaved part of the parking lot, I found two quietly foraging finches that flew away when people approached from the other side.
2. Winding trail uphill towards the Capellaccio. Target: forest birds including Corsican Nuthatch. From Corte, this is along the D623 just before (100-200 metres) crossing the river. Parking is possible at the trailhead (but probably fills quite quickly) or else at the restaurant at the river crossing.
   I was lucky to find a mixed flock quickly that contained the nuthatch and several treecreepers. And while standing there, I heard a ‘wren’ calling that actually appeared to be Moltoni’s Subalpine Warbler. It apparently breeds in the undergrowth of the open coniferous forest.
3. Westside of Camping de Tuani. Target: forest birds including Corsican Nuthatch. From Corte, the camping is easily found at the left side of the road. Cross the little bridge onto the camping and turn right to the end of the camping. There a trail into the forest starts following the river.
   I only saw some more Moltoni’s Subalpine Warblers including a beautiful male.

List of selected bird species (* denotes lifer)
- Scopoli’s Shearwater (diomedea) – commonly seen from the ferry on both legs
- Shag (desmarestii) – one in the Calvi-harbour
- Buzzard (pojana) – only seen along the north between Calvi and Bastia
- Woodchat Shrike (badius) – only one male seen between Ponte Leccia to Bastia.
- Jay (corsicanus) – seen in the mountains of Corsica but especially at Gorge de Restonica.
• Great Tit (*corsus*) – regularly but not commonly observed.
• Coal Tit (*sardus*) – commonest species of the coniferous woodlands.
• Crag Martin – 4 seen at Gorge de Restonica.
• * Moltoni’s Subalpine Warbler – Only at Gorge de Restonica: one female rattling away at birding site 2 (see above) with two more seen at site 3.
• Wren (*koenigi*) – only one seen at Col de Sorba.
• * Corsican Nuthatch – a male seen extremely well along the Gorge de Restonica, birding site 2.
• Treecreeper (*corsa*) – four seen along the Gorge de Restonica, birding site 2.
• Mistle Thrush (*deichleri*) – two seen at Gorge de Restonica, between birding site 1 and 2.
• Spotted Flycatcher (*tyrrhenica*) – easiest endemic taxon to find, also in lowland sites.
• Dipper – one seen between Ponte Leccia to Bastia.
• Goldfinch (*tchusii*) – just a few but also in lowland sites.
• * Corsican Citril Finch – two at Gorge de Restonica, site 1.
• Cirl Bunting – three seen at Gorge de Restonica, at several sites along the road but also at birding site 3.

Other species observed: Little Egret, Red Kite, Yellow-legged Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Common Swift, Pallid Swift, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Hooded Crow, Blue Tit, Swallow, House Martin, Blackcap, Goldcrest, Spotless Starling, Blackbird, European Robin, Italian Sparrow, Grey Wagtail, Chaffinch and European Serin.