

Mallorca 2nd - 16th June 2007

Dylan Wrathall



A fortnight in the sun, once again, had to be a compromise. Bev needed the U.V. fix whilst I, naturally, required a few birds to look at. That Bev's Mum, Dad, Auntie & Uncle also accompanied us meant that I was also expected to play my part in a family holiday! Tough call, but I did my best. We stayed in a magnificent villa, just outside the town of Pollencia. Luckily I had a choice of two hire cars to aid my morning's birding excursions. I believe that a balance between the various interests was managed and everyone enjoyed their time on the island.

Saturday 2nd June

An un-eventful flight, from Gatwick, arrived at Palma Airport mid-afternoon and, after picking up the hire cars, we drove 60km north to our villa. Hoopoe and Yellow-legged Gull were my only positive id on the drive but, Blackbird, House Sparrow, Common Swift, House Martin, Swallow, Greenfinch, Collared Dove, Goldfinch, Serin, Cattle Egret, Red-legged Partridge, Spotted Flycatcher, Sardinian Warbler & Nightingale were all in the bag before night fall.

Sunday 3rd June

I chose to drive up into the "Tramuntanas" mountains, using the C710 Pollencia - Soller road. I took the Fiat Panda and was very happy with my choice. To say the least, it is a very interesting road with several testing sections that require 100% concentration (more of this later) Birds were seen but, sadly, there are very few places along this route that allow cars to leave the road. The habitat ranges from the agricultural lowlands, through the thickly forested slopes, to the scree covered peaks of the high mountains. So what did I see? Not much – Great Tit, Wren, Wood Pigeon, Blackcap and Woodchat Shrike. Returning to the villa, I managed to add Nightingale,

Yellow-legged Gull, Booted Eagle (adult pale morph), Serin, Swift, Hoopoe and my only Pallid Swift of the holiday.



Female Woodchat Shrike
(*Lanius senator badius*)

I found this bird in an orchard just along the road from the villa. Digi-scoped, it showed me the problems to be encountered using this technology in the harsh light of the Mediterranean. With the sun almost directly overhead, shadows and contrasts combined, making good pics difficult to get!

Monday 4th June

My first visit to the S' Albufera Reserve. I didn't have much time, so opted to scan the marshland from the northern edge of the site. By walking between the, ever encroaching, hotel/apartment developments of Alcudia I was able to enjoy excellent views over the area. Black-winged Stilt, Fan-tailed Warbler and Spanish Wagtail (Yellow Wagtail of the race "iberiae") were all very conspicuous. I nearly trod on a Hoopoe as it foraged in the scrub behind a particularly austere apartment block. In the distance it was possible to make out Purple Heron, Cattle Egret, Night Heron, Little Ringed Plover, Moorhen & Coot, whilst Mallards appeared to be the only ducks present. Scanning the skies revealed little more than a few over-flying Yellow – legged Gulls. As I emerged from a patch of dense vegetation I was delighted to find myself confronted with two 2nd summer Audouin's Gulls perched, on some wooden frames, close by. I got some nice pics before it was time to rendezvous with the posse back at the villa. My walk back to the car, via a small canal, allowed me to add Common Sandpiper to the note book – a little late I thought, but have subsequently learned that they are recorded in every month of the year on the island! I explored the area around the villa, later in the morning, and recorded Cattle Egret, Woodchat Shrike, Fan-tailed Warbler, Stonechat, Pied Flycatcher – a smart adult male in a neighbouring garden, Cetti's Warbler and Kestrel. In the afternoon a bout of "sky watching" resulted in a dark morph Booted Eagle, 2 Raven and a group of 3 Eleonora's Falcon. My first Little Egret was noted as Bev and I drove to Port de Pollencia in the evening, fishing in the mouth of the Torrente St Jordi. As it got dark, I managed to record both Stone Curlew and Scop's Owl on call and had the good

fortune to have a Long-eared Owl fly over my head, as I walked the entrance track back to the villa.



Audouin's Gull

Larus audouinii

2nd summer

Very close to my idea of avian perfection. I don't think I will ever tire of looking at these beautiful gulls. Quite simply - "the best"

Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

Common, in all habitats I visited, the males looked stunning in their breeding plumage.



Tuesday 5th June

Just a short drive to the reserve at Albufereta. The early morning sun makes for difficult conditions to scan the main pool, but the lack of disturbance is ample compensation. I parked my car in the area beside the tennis courts of the Pollentia holiday complex and walked alongside the Torrente de Albufereta before making my way on to the reserve proper. A fabulous morning's birding produced 10 Night Heron, 4 Purple Heron, 5 Cattle Egret, 20+ Little Egret, 3 Grey Heron, a family party of Water Rail, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, female Marsh Harrier plus an assortment of the regular passerines, including my first Corn Bunting and Linnet of the trip. I hadn't made any particular effort to record the butterflies I had seen yet Clouded Yellow, Cleopatra, Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Small Heath, Speckled Wood – the Spanish race and several species of Whites & Blues had been seen. Best of all was a very confiding Swallowtail that allowed close approach in the early morning sunshine.



Swallowtail
Papilio machaon

A striking insect
that never
disappoints
whenever I see
one.

Wednesday 6th June

I drove to Cuber Reservoir, a distance of 38 km from our villa. As I said before, the mountain roads demand 100% concentration at all times. Not only are there the gradients, twists and turns to contend with but also herds of sheep and goats that inhabit the area and, scariest of all, the Malloquian coach drivers. One particularly odious individual thinking it was highly amusing to force me off the road. I'm only glad that I happened to be driving the Fiat Panda, and not the mini-bus, or it might have been far more serious. The walk around this famous site was a little disappointing, although in part due to my own expectations of what I would find. No Rock Thrush, Spectacled or Subalpine Warbler were seen/heard, yet there was still plenty to keep me occupied. Cirl Buntings sang, two male Red-legged Partridges were engaged in a vocal contest up on the hillside whilst flocks of Chaffinch, Linnet and Serin fed on the stony banks of the reservoir. 3 Tawny Pipits were recorded, all singing males, and high up over the crags a Raven appeared. Just as I started to leave, one final scan from the dam revealed the bird I had come for. An adult Black Vulture rose up from behind a wooded hillside and gave nice, if somewhat brief, views before it drifted behind another peak and was lost from sight. A "lifer", one of only three I thought possible on this trip, in the bag at my first attempt. It got better on my drive home when, somewhere between Lluc and Pollencia (14.2km marker post) I had the fortune to watch, and photograph, two more adult Black Vultures as they lazily cruised the crag beyond a small farm.

Although this has nothing to do with birding, I'm going to include it anyway. Whilst I was at Cuber something weird happened. I was scoping a Cirl Bunting from a point just above the small refuge building at the far end of the reservoir. All the time I was there I hadn't seen another person! So, as I scoped the Cirl Bunting, the sound of crunching gravel was sub-consciously noted and attributed to the local sheep. I felt something (someone?) tap me on the shoulder. Turning round – absolutely nothing! No one and no sheep! It didn't cause me any anxiety; I was just left wondering if it had really happened? Has anyone else ever had a similar experience at Cuber? I would love to know.



Top Left – **Adult Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*
**My reason for visiting the island, they are magnificent birds
and well worth the drive up into the mountains.**

Top Right – **Male Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirius*
A poor record image of a very smart bunting

Thursday 7th June

Another early morning drive to the Albufereta reserve. A Thekla Lark, on the road, was a nice surprise. However, although I could hear it singing, I didn't manage to get close enough to get any pics once I had parked the car and grabbed my gear. The reserve produced all the usual suspects. Night Heron numbered 20+ and I managed to locate an adult Squacco Heron in a ditch as I scanned across the main pool from the entrance track. A Hoopoe added a touch of the exotic, as it flew past, whilst Fan-tailed Warblers provided a constant accompaniment as the males displayed overhead. There were 6 Kentish Plovers besides the Torrente de Albufereta, as I left, and an Eleonora's Falcon was seen hunting over the northern edge of the reserve on my drive back to the villa. Another afternoon of sky watching resulted in 2 Booted Eagle, 1 Cattle Egret and an adult Osprey, carrying a rather large fish, all being recorded from the villa garden.



Booted Eagle
Hieraetus pennatus

A dark morph hunting over the farmland beyond our villa garden. Easily aged, as a juvenile, by the combination of perfect feather condition and the narrow terminal band on the tail.

Friday 8th June

I crept out of the villa just before 06.00hrs. Taking the mini-bus I drove to S'Albufera only to find the main entrance gates padlocked and access denied. Worst was to follow, when I discovered I had left my binoculars at the villa. A drive back was pointless, as I had no keys to get back in, so I became a photographer for a morning. I made my way to the southern section of the reserve where the access track remains un-gated. I parked by the Alcuia Pins (read Pines) Hotel complex and walked the track directly opposite the traffic lights. Moustached Warbler provided great views and a Purple Gallinule blundered across a small pool, giving me my second lifer of the trip! By following the path through the roadside pines I was finally able to walk the track along the southern boundary and make my way to the dis-used sandpit. Short-toed Lark, Tawny Pipit, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Black-winged Stilt, Squacco Heron, Fan-tailed Warbler, Eleonora's Falcon, Red-crested Pochard, Gadwall, Shelduck, Pochard and Collared Pratincole all made it into my notebook as I explored this section of the marsh. Walking back to the carpark allowed me to add an adult Audouin's and 3 Black-headed Gulls to my list, as I scanned a pool near to the hotel.



Black-winged Stilt
Himantopus himantopus

Very common at, both, Albufereta & S'Albufera reserves. Once again the harsh light did nothing to aid good digital images. This female was digi-scoped.



Moustached Warbler – *Acrocephalus melanopogon*
This adult male provided great views as it sang from a trackside reed stem.

Saturday 9th June

A repeat of the previous day, but this time I also carried my binoculars! For some reason Great Reed Warblers were singing, thus becoming the latest addition to my trip list. Nothing much else to report, but I did get some nice pics of Eleonora's Falcon, Bee-eater and Short-toed Lark using my digi-scoping gear.



Bee-eater
Merops apiaster

There can be very few birders that fail to be impressed by these superb creatures. Not content with outrageous plumage, their calls are the essence of the Med.



Eleonora's Falcon
Falco eleonora

By the end of my holiday I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about.

These falcons were encountered everywhere I went on Mallorca. Pale morph birds seemed to dominate the population, although I made no efforts to follow this initial impression up with comparative counts of the two colour phases.



Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

There were several birds present in the area of the dis-used sandpit. The display flight of the males is a very erratic affair!

Sunday 10th June

For the third morning, on the trot, I returned to the southern end of S'Albufera. This time I made the effort to visit the lagoons of the Water Treatment Works. The birding was almost predictable, although the lagoons allowed me to add Shoveler and Little Grebe to the trip list plus get some record shots of Stone Curlew. I found a group of 5 birds feeding in a field behind the viewing platform. My discovery of a male Plain Tiger (African Monarch) Butterfly was quite a thrill, but soon eclipsed by the colour-ringed, adult, Audouin's Gull that I located on the pool by the Alcudia Pins Hotel.



Top – **Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*** This was the first time I have ever had prolonged views of this species on the ground.

Bottom Left – **Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus*** With a range covering Tropical Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, Asia and Australia, the status of this insect on Mallorca is unknown. Is it yet another indicator of climate change?

Bottom Right – **Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*** Complete with a readable colour ring - gulls can't get any better than this!

Monday 11th June

I took the minibus on a trip to Formentor Lighthouse. The route was even more demanding than that to Cuber Reservoir. On my arrival I stayed just long enough to get the pics of Blue Rock Thrush I wanted then returned home before 08.00hrs to avoid any chance of encountering another mad coach driver along the route. Raven, Yellow-legged Gull, 8 Crag Martin, Sardinian Warbler, Wren, House Sparrow, 6+ Eleonora's Falcon and a Peregrine were the only other records in my notebook. Back at the villa I recorded a Honey Buzzard over at 11.00hrs and a drive into Port de Pollencia was brightened up with fabulous views of a fishing Osprey along the beach near the Torrente St Jordi.



Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

This pair of birds were digi-scoped in the lighthouse carpark. I just set my gear up on the steps and waited for them to come and join the House Sparrows that forage around the litterbins.

Tuesday 12th June

My only serious birding session of the holiday. I left the villa just after 05.45hrs and spent nearly 8 hours in the field. I started at Albufereta where 2 calling Quail were new for the trip. I spent a little time getting pics of the Kentish Plovers on the Torrente de Albufereta and noted 4 Audouin's Gull loafing on the beach before I drove over to the reserve at S'Albufera. I spent a very interesting time wandering around this spectacular habitat. I got "lifer" No.3 when I stumbled across a neck-collared Crested Coot. I had absolutely no idea that there was a re-introduction project at the site. 3 Squacco Heron, a Common Tern – incubating? Collared Pratincole, Reed Warbler, a massive nesting colony of Cattle Egret, Black-winged Stilt and Eleonora's Falcon all made it into my notebook. Despite this, I have to say that I was terribly disappointed by the reserve. Billed as the finest wetland on the Balearics (which I'm sure it is) it must be the most birder unfriendly place I've ever visited! Just one hide

accessible. The Tower Hide shut and the others out of bounds due to wardens wielding trimmers! Miles upon miles of dusty cycle tracks bordered by 4m reeds. Never again will I moan about the lack of viewing opportunity at Stodmarsh NNR. Great Reed Warbler, Purple Gallinule, Moustached Warbler and many other species must prosper in this vast expanse of reeded pools, it's just a shame that the requirements of the visiting birders are not as well catered for as that of the joggers and cyclists who share the amenities. Gripe over – the reserve is still very good and please don't be put off a visit based on the strength of my experience/opinion.



Kentish Plover

Charadrius alexandrinus

Fabulous views of these birds could be had along most stretches of coastline. This male was feeding on a muddy island beside the entrance track to the Albufereta Res.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

I had some fun & games before I managed to get a usable image of this species. Digi-scoped, from a road bridge by the power station, I'm not sure I endeared myself to the drivers using this route!



Wednesday 13th June

A boat trip to Formentor, via the Lighthouse and caves beyond, was a nice day out. Mediterranean Shag and Cory's Shearwater were the only additions to the trip list. A second C-R Audouin's Gull was found in the harbour at Port de Pollencia – the ring only being readable when I got my pics onto the computer at home!

Thursday 14th June

My only visit to the Arta Peninsular and an attempt to locate Marmora's Warbler. My quest for the warbler was a failure, but I really enjoyed birding along this coastal strip between Betlem and the point at Es Pla d'es Calo. Sardinian Warbler, Stonechat and Spotted Flycatcher were particularly numerous, but Blackbird, Raven, Kestrel, Crag Martin, Serin, Mediterranean Shag and Audouin's Gull (including a 3rd C-R adult) provided plenty to look at along my route. A female Common Redstart was a surprising find in a small strip of coastal pines, another sign of the effects of the bad weather, in Southern Europe, on migration?



Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*

This is the best I could manage. A most frustrating time was spent attempting to predict the flight path of these erratic feeders. Still, it's better than nothing!

Friday 15th June

My final day, so I decided on a drive back up to Cuber Reservoir. No weird experiences and not much on the birding front of any note. A, pale morph, adult, Booted Eagle was scoped, hunting the ridge above the refuge building. Every time I see one it really gives me the hump at the "piss poor" decision of the BOURC to reject the 1999 Bockhill juvenile. I located 2 singing male Firecrest in the strip of scrub on the western side of the reservoir, thus adding another species to my trip list. Cirl Bunting, Eleonora's Falcon, Peregrine, 2 Black Vulture, Spotted Flycatcher, Tawny Pipit, Blackcap, Serin, Chaffinch, Linnet and Sardinian Warbler filled a few more lines in the notebook. A nice session to end the holiday. Later in the afternoon, as Bev & I were messing about in the pool, a Black Vulture, in very heavy moult, drifted directly over the garden. I managed to grab a couple of pics before it was lost from sight. A Woodchat on the telephone wires, Eleonora's Falcon over followed shortly after by a, pale morph, juvenile Booted Eagle kept the interest going well into the late afternoon. As we sat in the restaurant, that evening, the general consensus was that it had been a very successful holiday and that everyone had enjoyed it in their own way. I'd certainly had a great time!



Black Vulture
Aegypius monachus

Although not clear, in this poor image, I'm sure that this is a sub-adult bird. The pale secondaries, particularly on the left wing, would seem to support this. I remember thinking how pale it looked, when first viewed, through my binoculars. Not a bad record from a pool?

Saturday 16th June

With the bags all packed and loaded into the vehicles, I had one last wander around the garden. Feeding amongst a small patch of weeds in the adjoining orchard was a Tree Sparrow. I thought that I had heard this species on a couple of previous occasions, but my information on the status of this species indicated that it is less common on Mallorca than it is in Kent, meant that I'd dismissed it! A nice addition to the trip list before the unavoidable stresses of the journey home.

Systematic List

- 1) **Little Grebe – 2 birds seen on the Water Works Lagoons and others heard at S'Albufera Res.**
- 2) **Night Heron – Seen regularly at both wetland sites.**
- 3) **Squacco Heron – 1 at Albufeta and 6 at S'Albufera**
- 4) **Cattle Egret – very common**
- 5) **Little Egret – common around both wetlands and occasionally seen along the coast.**
- 6) **Grey Heron – seen at both wetlands**
- 7) **Purple Heron – seen at both wetlands, great views from the hide at S'Albufera.**
- 8) **Shelduck – a single seen on two dates at the southern end of S'Albufera**
- 9) **Gadwall – probably overlooked, but a few noted at S'Albufera.**

- 10) Mallard – very common at both wetlands
- 11) Shoveler – a pair at the Water Works Lagoons
- 12) Red-crested Pochard – very common at S'Albufera
- 13) Common Pochard – A female with young at the “old Salinas” and an adult male on the main channel at S'Albufera.
- 14) Honey Buzzard – a late migrant over the villa on the 11th
- 15) Black Vulture – seen at Cuber Reservoir and along the mountain road between Pollencia and Soller. A sub-adult over the villa, on 15th, was a bit of a surprise.
- 16) Marsh Harrier – recorded at both reserves, although usually hunting over the adjoining farmland.
- 17) Booted Eagle – seen daily in various habitats
- 18) Osprey – noted on two dates
- 19) Kestrel – very common
- 20) Eleonora's Falcon – where do I start? Common/very common. Seen almost everywhere I went the most impressive gatherings were above Albufereta, at dusk, when up to 80 birds were hunting insects over the marsh and surrounding area. They must fly in the dark to return to their mountain roost site. This gathering was noted on three occasions as we returned from an evening meal in Alcudia or Ca'n Picafort. Smaller numbers were seen over S'Albufera, also at dusk. During the day they could be seen almost anywhere in small numbers.
- 21) Peregrine – one at Formentor and another at Cuber
- 22) Red-legged Partridge – seen or heard on several dates
- 23) Quail – 2 singing males at Albufereta on 12th.
- 24) Pheasant – a cock bird calling at Albufereta was discovered to be in an enclosure with chickens!
- 25) Water Rail – seen or heard at both wetlands
- 26) Moorhen – very common
- 27) Purple Gallinule – one seen and others heard around the S'Albufera Res.
- 28) Coot – very common
- 29) Crested Coot – two seen (one with neck collar) at S'Albufera on 12th.
- 30) Black-winged Stilt – very numerous around both wetlands
- 31) Stone Curlew – heard more often than seen.
- 32) Collared Pratincole – recorded at S'Albufera on two dates, probably the same bird?
- 33) Little Ringed Plover – very common
- 34) Kentish Plover – very common
- 35) Common Sandpiper – two birds seen along a small canal in Alcudia.
- 36) Black-headed Gull – small groups seen around S'Albufera on several dates
- 37) Audouin's Gull – widespread and very approachable
- 38) Western Yellow-legged Gull – common along the coastline, but difficult to get close to. Best views were at Formentor beach where the birds foraged around the ferry landing area.
- 39) Common Tern – a bird on an island at S'Albufera appeared to be incubating.
- 40) Woodpigeon – very common
- 41) Barbary Dove – a single bird regularly around the villa

- 42) Collared Dove – very common. There was a leucistic adult regularly seen around the villa.
- 43) Scop's Owl – heard on all occasions I listened for them. Usually calling from adjoining gardens, I didn't actually see one!
- 44) Long-eared Owl – one flew over my head whilst out searching for Scop's on 4th.
- 45) Common Swift – very common
- 46) Pallid Swift – only one recorded, although may have been overlooked amidst the huge numbers of its' common cousin.
- 47) Bee-eater – Only recorded at the dis-used sandpit area of S'Albufera, up to 5 adults were present
- 48) Hoopoe – regularly encountered around the island
- 49) Short-toed Lark – fairly numerous around the southern section of S'Albufera
- 50) Thekla Lark – only recorded on one date
- 51) Crag Martin – easily found in the mountains
- 52) Swallow – surprisingly scarce. A few birds were seen around the villa.
- 53) House Martin – very common. A very impressive nesting colony in Pollencia.
- 54) Tawny Pipit – easily seen at Cuber, Arta and S'Albufera
- 55) Yellow Wagtail – of the race *iberiae* they were common around both wetlands.
- 56) Wren – very common
- 57) Nightingale – very common
- 58) Common Redstart – a female on the Arta peninsular was a very late migrant
- 59) Stonechat – very common in all habitats I visited
- 60) Blue Rock Thrush – found easily around Formentor Lighthouse
- 61) Blackbird – very common
- 62) Cetti's Warbler – seen at both wetlands
- 63) Fan-tailed Warbler – very numerous in any suitable habitat
- 64) Moustached Warbler – seen easily at S'Albufera
- 65) Great Reed Warbler – easily heard, but difficult to get views of amongst the dense masses of 4m high reeds. S'Albufera – the track towards the power station provided me with my best views.
- 66) Reed Warbler – a couple of singing males were heard at S'Albufera.
- 67) Sardinian Warbler – very common
- 68) Blackcap – common in the forested areas of the mountains. Cuber provided me with my best views. Their song is a very distinct variation of the familiar UK version.
- 69) Firecrest – 2 singing males at Cuber
- 70) Spotted Flycatcher – very common. The breeding birds are of the race *balearica*
- 71) Pied Flycatcher – a male in a garden near the villa was my only record
- 72) Blue Tit – numerous in the mountain forests, I did record them in the villa garden and Alcudia.
- 73) Great Tit – very common
- 74) Woodchat Shrike – very common (the race *badius*)
- 75) Raven – seen on several dates
- 76) House Sparrow – very common

- 77) Tree Sparrow – a lone bird feeding in the orchard beside the villa was a nice surprise on my last morning
- 78) Chaffinch – very common
- 79) Serin – very common
- 80) Greenfinch – common
- 81) Goldfinch – common
- 82) Linnet – seen regularly around the Albufereta Reserve.
- 83) Cirl Bunting – only recorded at Cuber, but easily found on both occasions I visited the site.
- 84) Corn Bunting – common

Please continue to scroll down to see some of the pics that I couldn't include in this report.



Cattle Egret



Purple Heron



Night Heron



Fan-tailed Warbler



Hoopoe



Serin



Tawny Pipit



Spanish Wagtail



Moorish Gecko



Red-eared Terrapin



Egyptian Grasshopper

So there you have it folks! Another holiday report by the “Hippy with Attitude”

Several things have caused concern. Why do the coach drivers need to drive like “Mad Max”? The lack of viewing opportunity at S’Albufera was a problem, as is the presence of Red-eared Terrapin (an American species) in the waterways of this showpiece reserve. As the island of Mallorca seeks to squeeze the very last Euro Dollar from its’ visitors there is bound to be a conflict of interests about the water supply. The wetlands of Albufereta and S’Albufera are both being encroached upon by developments that will be to the detriment of the habitat they overlook, thus providing further reason for continued development. “Catch 22” is the scenario that comes to mind! Mallorca – it’s a wonderful place to visit but I wouldn’t want to live there!

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