

Mallorca, April 2008

Trip report by Per Henningsson

Background and logistics

This is a short report on a weeks birding/relaxing trip to Mallorca in the second week of April 2008. The preparations and planning prior to the trip was relatively small since it was a “last-minute” booking. We, me and my girlfriend Teresa, left Sturup Airport, Sweden on the afternoon on 5th of April and arrived to Palma Airport around 9 pm. The travelling agency was the Swedish company “Ving” and we flew with Spanair. The flight was pleasant and without any problems whatsoever. From the airport we took the transfer bus to our hotel, “Sea Club” in Port d’Alcudia on the northeast corner of the island. This trip took only about 45 minutes. Port d’Alcudia is a coastal town close to the inland town Alcudia. Alcudia is a quite nice little town but Port d’Alcudia is nowadays a town almost solely for tourists. The hotel was very nice, though, and since we were here early, off season, the place was quiet and calm. I doubt that this is the case during the high season.

If birding is the aim for the trip the best places to stay is probably somewhere around Alcudia or Pollenca since this is close to at least four of the best birding sites and even the start of the mountain region, Tramuntana. From Alcudia or Port d’Alcudia as well as Pollenca it is easy to reach the wetland areas S’Albufera and Albufereta and the Boquer valley by bus. Bus services in Mallorca works fine and the busses are (almost) on schedule, unlike for example the bus services on most Greek islands. To get around the island to the more distant and “off-the-beaten-track-places” we rented a scooter for a couple of days. Most people coming to Mallorca might rent a car and this is probably best if the goal is to cover the whole island. Our goal was instead to cover the best places in the mountain region and the Artà peninsula and the absolute best way to travel these medium distances is by scooter. The roads in the mountains are often winding and narrow and there are few places to stop with a car. With a scooter you first of all hear and see a lot more along the way and most importantly you are able to stop at any time. Try birding from scooter! We covered the mountain region from Pollenca in the northeast to Valldemossa in the southwest in one day, but 130 km in one day on a little scooter might be on the steep side for some people.

Literature

Prior to the trip we bought the travel guide “A birdwatching guide to Mallorca” by Graham Hearl (ISBN 0952201976). This guide can be found at several online bookstores and we bought ours from “Pick a book” (www.pickabook.co.uk). In Sweden the book is also available at “Naturbokhandeln” (www.naturbokhandeln.se). Get this book! It is a very useful little piece of information, with good, detailed tips on where to go, both for general birding and for targeted species. Each birding site is well described and with local easily interpreted maps. Bird literature used was the “Collins Bird Guide” (“Fågelguiden” in Swedish) by Lars Svensson et al.

For general information about the island we used *Berlitz* guide “Mallorca” and *Första Klass Reseguiden* “Mallorca, Menorca & Ibiza” and for additional nature related information we use *Traveller’s Nature Guides* “Spain” which has a section on Mallorca.

The island and the birding sites

Mallorca is a very beautiful island with the typical wonderful Mediterranean landscapes and dramatic, breathtaking views. Only this is enough for making a trip to this place. Put on top of that a fascinating bird fauna containing an exquisite taste of the Mediterranean birdlife. On this fairly small island you will find a wide range of habitats. In the north you find very beautiful coastal areas and wetlands and nice altitudinal gradients of different environments in the mountain regions. South of these there are the central plains with open fields and agricultural areas of completely different character. The southern part of the island is without mountains and has a drier climate and consequently yet another habitat type. And on and on, many other places.

Following Hearl's guide mentioned above we went to, in order of visit, S'Albufera wetland, Boquer valley, Tramuntana with Cuber reservoir, Artà peninsula with Atalaya de Morei and Ermita de Betlem and finally Formentor peninsula. These are all very nice areas and among these the liveliest with respect to birds was without a doubt the S'Albufera wetlands. This place is packed with birds, apparently already as early as beginning of April. The Tramuntana Mountains cannot be called one site but is rather a complete region of very different environments. In the mountains many areas with marked hiking trails exist and it is very accessible. We did not have time to walk any of these trails, but I would think that many of them are very interesting and beautiful. Even though the tourist industry is old on Mallorca and extremely well established in some areas, we did not find this too disturbing. Having left the tourist towns we easily found nice areas away from all that. But, of course, one should not go to this island with the hopes of finding the genuine Mallorca without actively searching for it. But it will all depend on where you choose to stay, of course.

I would definitely recommend any birder who wishes to get the taste of the Mediterranean birdlife to visit Mallorca especially in spring during migration season. We visited the second week of April and this was at least this year maybe a bit too early to get the absolute peak of diversity. To optimize the amount of birds one might aim for last week of April or first week of May. The weather during our stay was good, we had a couple of days with perfect sun and 22 degrees but some days had overcast in the morning and then only 14-15 degrees. The sun always broke through in the afternoon, though. Remember that a day with colder climate and clouds is not bad from birding point of view, quite the contrary. Such weather might cause massive amount of birds stopping on their migratory journey. We did not receive any rain at all, but the weather this time of year is even in the Mediterranean region unpredictable and quickly changing. Prepare for everything from warm and sweaty to cold, wet and windy! So not only flip-flops and shorts or bikinis in the suitcase then.

The birding

Day 1 (6/4-08) (Around Alcudia)

First day we started slowly, looking at the areas around us, walking along the coast of Port d'Alcudia and to the village of Alcudia. Along the coast several **Audouin's Gull** (Rödnäbbad trut) was seen. These are really common nowadays on Mallorca and are seen at many places. Also, of course, several **Yellow-legged Gulls** (Medelhavstrut). A couple of **Great White Egrets** (Ägretthäger) was seen flying over the village. One **Fan-tailed Warbler** (Grässångare) was seen and heard just outside Alcudia. These were later shown to be fairly common on several places. Along the coast, one **Firecrest** (Brandkronad kungsfågel) was

heard singing in the pine trees. In and around the villages the **Serin** (Gulhämpling) is common. In the evening after dark we got the first jackpot of this trip. Along the coast inside Port d'Alcudia one **Scops owl** (Dvärguv) was heard calling from one of the pine trees. This was a nice experience.

Day 2 (7/4-08)

(S'Albufera)

The plan for this day was to go to S'Albufera wetlands. We went there at not exactly the crack of dawn (after all we're on vacation, right?) by bus (10 minutes trip). This was very convenient; there is even a bus stop just by the entrance to the area. S'Albufera is a big wetland area consisting of several connected canals and in-between these, large marshes. It is a very nice area. Criss-crossing the area there are several tracks which allow the visitor to get out into the wetlands. There is a central reception with maps and other information around one kilometre into the area and along the tracks several very good hides and towers. It is easy to get an overview of the area and its birds.

Already at the entrance we were met by several **Cetti's Warblers** (Cettisångare) singing and jumping around in the bushes and also a couple of **Fan-tailed Warblers** (Grässångare). Both of these are common in this area and are seen and heard at most places. The first **Great White Egret** (Ägretthäger) for the day was also seen just after entering. A little bit further down the main track (or road) that follows the main canal 6 **Night Herons** (Natthäger) were found resting in the bushes on the other side of the canal. Search these bushes, some herons sit well inside them. At the end of the first straight part of this track there is a colony of **Cattle Egrets** (Kohäger) and **Little Egrets** (Silkeshäger) also on the opposite side of the canal. These are very nice to study from this spot. While standing there we were lucky to see, briefly, a **Purple Heron** (Purpurhäger) landing in the reed bed just a short distance up the canal. This one is not super-easy to find, compared to the rest of the herons in this area.

Continuing towards the reception we stopped at a look-out by one of the canals in the reception area and saw from this spot two **Crested Coots** (Kamsothöna) very nicely. From here we went for the first hide (Called CIM-hide). From this we saw many species, among these **Black-winged Stilt** (Styltlöpare), **Stone Curlew** (Tjockfot), **Red-crested Pochard** (Rödhuvad dykand), **Purple Gallinule** (Purpurhöna), **Shelduck** (Gravand), **Glossy Ibis** (Bronsibis), **Little Ringed Plover** (Mindre strandpipare), **Kentish Plover** (Svartbent strandpipare), **Grey Heron** (Gråhäger) and much more.

Follow the guide (Hearl) in this area and you will get a good picture of it. We walked towards the "three bridges" and to the Watkinson's hide. From the hide we saw **Moustached Warbler** (Kaveldunsångare) very nicely. These are relatively common within the area, but not very easy to see. During this first day we also walked to the tower hide in the western part of the area and to the Es Colombars Hide in the north. From the tower we saw for example **Osprey** (Fiskgjuse)(in total three during the day) and from the hide among other things 2 **Little Terns** (Småtärna). We saw a lot of birds during this day and really enjoyed the area. It is not possible to account for all we saw in this report. Don't rush it while here, we spent at least 7 or 8 hours and then we only covered half of it. In the end of the day, while leaving, we got to see a **Hoopoe** (Härfågel) flying around just before the entrance gates at close distance. At the coast, while waiting for the bus, we saw two **Audouin's Gulls** (Rödnäbbad trut) on the pier and yet another **Hoopoe**.

Day 3 (8/4-08)

(Boquer Valley)

Again we used the bus to get to a very beautiful birding site, the Boquer Valley near Port Pollenca. We took the bus to the end station in Port Pollenca and walk the short walk up to the entrance of the mansion that lies at the entrance of the valley. For this place you probably need the guide to find the entrance since the signs are very rudimentary, there is a small parking, though. As mentioned in the guide you have to pass through two gates and walk very close to the property lying on the hillside in order to get to the valley. This felt a bit awkward, but apparently the people living in the house accept this. But do not linger here even though the view from here is absolutely breathtaking. Once passed the property you are entering a very beautiful valley! It starts with a shrubby area before the valley opens and this area looks really super-hot from migration stop-over point of view. Look through these shrubs for passerines. We were a bit unlucky this day, it was rather windy and therefore not a whole lot of bird activity. We saw and heard some **Sardinian Warblers** (Sammetshättä), **Serins** (Gulhämpling) and **Goldfinches** (Steglits) in this area. Also a couple of **Crag Martins** (Klippsvala) flew around here along the steep mountain ridge. Just before entering the valley we got a brief (almost too brief) sighting of a **Booted Eagle** (Dvärgörn). This was the first for the trip, but it would turn out not to be especially hard to find later on. The walk through the valley was very nice and the landscape is truly fantastic. The views of the rough mountain hillsides on both sides in contrast to the soft sweeping landscape are very beautiful. There are several tracks through the valley and they will all lead you towards the other side of the valley by the seaside. At the end of the valley, there is a small cove, called Cala Boquer, with crystal clear water. I bet this is a wonderful place for a swim during the hotter season. Now it was freezing. We did not see an awful lot of birds along the walk through the valley apart from a couple of **Kestrels** (Tornfalk) and some more **Crag Martins** (Klippsvala). Down by the cove we saw one **Blue Rock Thrush** (Blåtrast) flying past.

Yes, we were unlucky with the winds this day, but I am sure this is a very good place for birding normally and otherwise it is such a beautiful place so a visit is absolutely mandatory anyway and we certainly can't complain.

I would guess that it is possible to do this walk in just a couple of hours if time is short, but that would be a pity. Again, we spent around 6 or 7 hours in the area. Do the birding slowly. The walk is not more than around 7 kilometres, there and back again.

Day 4 (9/4-08)

(Tramuntana Mountains)

We hired a scooter the evening before and were that way not depending on the opening hour of the rental office which opens rather late (9 or so). The goal for the day was to cover the most interesting areas of the Tramuntana Mountains, both with respect to birds and cultural sites. The route was: Pollenca, Lluc monastery, Embassement de Cuber, Soller, Deia, and Valldemossa. The return trip was going to be across the northernmost parts of the central plains. After being lost for a short while in Pollenca we headed out on the mountain road towards Lluc. Just outside Pollenca the first **Booted Eagle** (Dvärgörn) was seen. It was a dark phase. Just a couple of hundred meters further on we stopped to scan an interesting area and here we heard the first **Red-legged Partridges** (Rödhöna) from a small hillside along the road. There were about 3-4 of them. Further along the road close to the Mortitx valley we saw again 2 **Booted Eagles**, this time of the light phase. Getting further up into the mountains we made a stop in an interesting area with pine forest at the top of a big valley that we could overlook. From here we saw the first **Black Vultures** (Grågam), 4 of them flying together along the ridge of the valley. It was a spectacular sight!

After this we went to the Monastery of Lluc and while resting in the courtyard we could see 3 **Booted Eagles** soaring up in the mountain, all of light phase. After Lluc we headed for the Embasement de Cuber in the higher parts of the mountains. This area is famous for its raptors. During the time we spent here we did see 4 **Black Vultures** and one **Booted Eagle**, but again it was rather windy so maybe not many raptors were up flying. At the end of the reservoir by the dam, we heard a couple of **Red-legged Partridges**, but other than that it was fairly quiet.

After this we went to Soller and then Deia and finally Valldemossa and not much in terms of birds are worth mentioning here apart from one more **Black Vulture** just before Valldemossa. The trip and the villages were very beautiful, though.

Heading back to Alcudia we past through Santa Maria and just outside on the way towards Binissalem we spotted a couple of **Stone Curlews** (Tjockfot) in an Almond grove and just a couple of hundred meters further in the same grove we finally got to see a couple of **Red-legged Partridges** (Rödhöna). Quite unlike their close relative in the east, the Chukar, they are not found among rocks and boulders but rather in open fields and agricultural areas. They are very nice birds!

Day 5 (10/4-08)

(Artà Peninsula)

This morning it was quite cold and the morning clouds were a bit more than only slight overcast. On the way towards Artà peninsula the weather looked threatening. Heading towards Artà we stopped to scan the small harbour of Can Picafort and saw here 4 **Shags** (Toppskarv) of the race *desmarestii*. Along the larger road (MA-12) just after Can Picafort we saw and heard several **Corn Buntings** (Kornsparv) on the wires. We went to a place described in Hearl's guide along the coast by Colonia de Sant Peré (The place no 2 in the part about Artà). This whole area looked very promising, with a rich shrub-landscape and nice opening valleys towards the coast. Perfect for stop-over of passerines. Our primary goal for this site was the Marmora's Warbler. The weather quickly improved as we walked slowly along the track that goes between the high mountain ridge and the coast and we saw a pair of **Blue Rock Thrushes** (Blåtrast), several **Sardinian Warblers** (Sammetshättä), **Wrens** (Gärdssmyg) and **Serins** (Gulhämpling). Also the call of a **Wryneck** (Göktyta) was heard. Approximately one kilometre along the track we managed to spot two **Marmora's Warblers** that we then could study for a while. Mission accomplished.

Next stop was targeted at Thekla Lark and therefore we went to Ermita de Betlem (again look in the guide, no 3). On the way there just after passing Artà a sparrow of good size for the **Cirl Bunting** (Häcksparv) flew across the road just in front of us. We stopped and could confirm our first guess and study both male and female. At this place also yet another **Hoopoe** (Härfågel) (one of my favourite birds) was seen. The road up to Ermita de Betlem is very beautiful, it goes through very nice olive and almond groves and climbs in a narrow winding road up the mountain hill until you reach a quite different environment. At this slightly higher altitude the landscape is changed into low and scarce vegetation with patches of bare rock. We followed the track towards the small reservoir as described in Hearl's guide but did not manage to find any Thekla Larks. The habitat is perfect though. A couple of **Stonechats** (Svarthakad buskskvätta) were seen, but these are seen often all over the island.

After this we headed all the way back past Alcudia for (a very late) lunch and then out on Formentor peninsula. Formentor is very beautiful also and we did not have time to see the whole area, but had to go back to Alcudia to return the scooter. We did not reach the Formentor lighthouse and did not see any Balearic Shearwaters (Balearisk lira) but only two

more **Blue Rock Thrushes** (Blåtrast). The Formentor Lighthouse is supposed to be one of the best places to see Shearwaters so a visit there is probably fruitful.

Day 6 (11/4-08) (S'Albufera)

We decided to visit S'Albufera once more since we did not cover the whole area the first time and also we did see a lot of birds there. This time around was even better, we saw around 65 species during this visit alone. Apart from the same species as the first time we added for example: **Squacco Heron** (Rallhäger) by the main canal a couple of hundred meters into the area, **Bittern** (Rördrom) seen landing briefly, **Little Bittern** (Dvärgrördrom) heard from the boardwalk along the canal before entering the reception area, 2 **Collared Pratincoles** (Rödvingad vadarsvala) from the second viewing platform on the south going trail, **Lapwing** (Tofsvipa), **Ruff** (Brushane), ca 20 **Whiskered Terns** (Skäggtärna) and **Sand martins** (Backsvala). The day was very successful! We actually saw (or heard) all European Herons at this single visit. Not bad! We also saw one **Golden Eagle** (Kungsörn) flying over the marsh. The bird had some kind of strings hanging from the feet, suggesting that it might be an escaped individual and is therefore not included in our species count. Golden Eagles are apparently rare on the island.

Day 7 (12/4-08) (Around Port d'Alcudia)

Last day. Our pick-up time for going to the Airport was 11:30 am so we only took a short stroll around Port d'Alcudia, along the coast and up to the lagoon. By the coast, one new species for the trip, **Sandwich Tern** (Kentsk tärna) and by the lagoon one more, **Common Sandpiper** (Drillsnäppa). From the bus one **Red kite** (Rödglada) was spotted and that was all for us.

The return trip was perfect and we returned very satisfied from this short but bird-intense trip!

All in all we had a very good trip in every aspect, we did miss some of the potential species but all together we managed fairly well with 93 species in total and for me, Per, 12 new species to the "lifers list" and 16 for Teresa!

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Species List

	English name	Swedish name	Note
1	Little Grebe	Smådopping	A few in S'Albufera.
2	Great Crested Grebe	Skäggdopping	A few in S'Albufera
3	Cormorant	Storskarv	A few at several locations
4	Shag	Toppskarv	4 at Can Picafort Harbour
5	Bittern	Rördrom	One seen in S'Albufera
6	Little Bittern	Dvärgrördrom	One heard in S'Albufera

7	Night Heron	Natthäger	Several main canal S'Albufera
8	Squacco Heron	Rallhäger	One S'Albufera
9	Cattle Egret	Kohäger	Many in S'Albufera
10	Little Egret	Silkeshäger	Many in S'Albufera
11	Great White Egret	Ägretthäger	Several in S'Albufera
12	Grey Heron	Gråhäger	A few in S'Albufera and some other
13	Purple Heron	Purpurhäger	2 at different occasions S'Albufera
14	Glossy Ibis	Bronsibis	A few in S'Albufera
15	Shelduck	Gravand	A few in S'Albufera
16	Gadwall	Snatterand	A few in S'Albufera
17	Teal	Kricka	Several in S'Albufera
18	Mallard	Gräsand	Several in S'Albufera
19	Garganey	Årta	A few in S'Albufera
20	Shoveler	Skedand	A few in S'Albufera
21	Red-crested Pochard	Rödhuwad dykand	Many in S'Albufera and some other
22	Pochard	Brunand	A few in S'Albufera
23	Red Kite	Rödglada	One along the MA-13 near Inca
24	Black Vulture	Grågam	In total 10 Tramuntana
25	Marsh Harrier	Brun kärrhök	A few in S'Albufera
26	Booted Eagle	Dvärgörn	Boquer, S'Albufera, Tramuntana
27	Osprey	Fiskgjuse	3 in S'Albufera
28	Kestrel	Tornfalk	Seen all days in small numbers
29	Red-legged Partridge	Rödhöna	Pollenca, Cuber and Santa Maria
30	Water Rail	Vattenrall	A couple heard S'Albufera
31	Moorhen	Rörhöna	Several S'Albufera
32	Purple Gallinule	Purpurhöna	In total 7 in S'Albufera
33	Coot	Sothöna	Many S'Albufera
34	Crested Coot	Kamsothöna	Several S'Albufera
35	Black-winged Stilt	Styltlöpare	Many S'Albufera
36	Stone Curlew	Tjockfot	2 S'Albufera, 2 outside Santa Maria
37	Collared Pratincole	Rödvingad vadarsvala	2 S'Albufera
38	Little Ringed Plover	Mindre strandpipare	Many S'Albufera
39	Kentish Plover	Svartbent strandpipare	Many S'Albufera
40	Grey Plover	Kustpipare	1 S'Albufera
41	Lapwing	Tofsvipa	1 S'Albufera
42	Dunlin	Kärrsnäppa	2 S'Albufera
43	Ruff	Brushane	2 S'Albufera
44	Great Snipe	Enkelbeckasin	3 S'Albufera
45	Spotted Redshank	Svartsnäppa	2 S'Albufera
46	Common Redshank	Rödbena	1 S'Albufera
47	Greenshank	Gluttsnäppa	2 S'Albufera
48	Common Sandpiper	Drillsnäppa	1 Lagoon in Alcudia
49	Black-headed Gull	Skrattmås	2 S'Albufera
50	Audouin's Gull	Rödnäbbad trut	Common and seen in many places

51	Yellow-legged Gull	Medelhavstrut	Common and seen in many places
52	Sandwich Tern	Kentsk tärna	1 Beach of Port d'Alcudia
53	Little Tern	Småtärna	2 S'Albufera
54	Whiskered Tern	Skäggtärna	20 S'Albufera
55	Rock dove	Klippduva	Seen on several places
56	Woodpigeon	Ringduva	Common
57	Collared Dove	Turkduva	Common
58	Scops Owl	Dvärguv	1 heard beach of Port d'Alcudia
59	Common Swift	Tornseglare	Common and seen in large numbers
60	Hoopoe	Härfågel	Seen in several places
61	Wryneck	Göktyta	1 heard by coast Colonia St. Pere
62	Sand Martin	Backsvala	Several S'Albufera
63	Crag Martin	Klippsvala	Several places especially Tramuntana
64	Barn Swallow	Ladusvala	Common
65	House Martin	Hussvala	Common
66	Yellow Wagtail	Gulärta	S'Albufera, also iberiae
67	Wren	Gärdsmyg	Common
68	Robin	Rödhake	A few at some places
69	Common Redstart	Rödstart	1 outside Pollenca
70	Stonechat	Svarthakad buskskvätta	Common and seen at many places
71	Blue Rock Thrush	Blåtrast	Boquer Valley, Colonia St. Pere
72	Blackbird	Koltrast	Common
73	Cetti's Warbler	Cettisångare	Common at lower elevation
74	Fan-tailed Warbler	Grässångare	Common at lower elevation
75	Moustached Warbler	Kaveldunsångare	1 S'Albufera
76	Marmora's Warbler	Sardinsk sångare	Path outside Colonia St. Pere
77	Sardinian Warbler	Sammetshätta	Common
78	Blackcap	Svarthätta	2 Port d'Alcudia
79	Willow Warbler	Lövsångare	1 heard S'Albufera
80	Firecrest	Brandkronad kungsfågel	1 heard P. d'Alcudia, 1 heard Deia
81	Great tit	Talgoxe	2 S'Albufera. Not very common
82	Raven	Korp	Several Boquer Valley, Tramuntana
83	House Sparrow	Gråsparv	Common
84	Tree Sparrow	Pilfink	A few some places
85	Chaffinch	Bofink	Seen in small numbers
86	Serin	Gulhämpling	Common all over
87	Greenfinch	Grönfink	Seen in several places
88	Goldfinch	Steglits	Common
89	Siskin	Grönsiska	Boquer Valley, Port d'Alcudia
90	Linnet	Hämpling	A few S'Albufera
91	Crossbill	Mindre korsnäbb	1 Port d'Alcudia
92	Cirl Bunting	Häcksparv	2 male, female outside Artà
93	Corn Sparrow	Kornsparv	Several heard along lowland roads