

Birding in Mallorca (November 2004)

We missed peak migration season (mid Sep – mid Oct) in *Mallorca (Majorca)* and visited during the first week in November. We stayed in the north-east of the island, outside *Port d'Alcudia* in a two-bedroom apartment with good self-catering facilities (*Garden Lago, Avenue de Tuca*). This is important as at this time of year much of the *Alcudia* tourist industry is shut down and there are limited facilities to eat out as many of the cafes, bars and restaurants have closed for the winter. Most of the good birding sites are in this area and we were only 10 minutes drive from *Albufera Marsh*, perhaps the premier birding site on the island. The other good place to stay would be *Port de Pollenca*, which is about 15 minutes drive north of *Alcudia*. This was slightly more alive at this time of year and there was a better selection of places to eat. However, the restaurants in *Port de Pollenca* were a little more up-market.



Garden Lago, Avenue de Tuca

We travelled from London Heathrow (LHR) on BMI and had convenient flights out leaving LHR at 11:15 on a Saturday morning (Oct 30th). The return flights were also convenient, leaving Palma at 11:50 am and getting back to Heathrow at 1:30 pm. Thus, there was very little traffic on the way up to Heathrow and we did not have to get up too early. We left the car at Park4Less outside Heathrow (£60 for the week). The flights were £153 return including taxes and there is plenty of choice of car rental. We pre-booked a car on the Internet with Europa Rentacar for €128 for the week and used about €90 in petrol to drive about 850 km in the week.

So what was the first bird seen as we got out of the plane at Palma Airport? Not surprisingly, this was a **House Sparrow** but it was inside the terminal building feeding on crumbs at the café. On the way out of Palma towards Alcudia we saw **White Wagtail**, several **Kestrels** and a lot of **House Sparrows**. There were a few **Greenfinch** and **Goldfinch** on route and the occasional **Wood Pigeon**. On approaching Port d'Alcudia, the road runs through *Tucan Marsh* and the lake was full of **Waterfowl**, **Grey Heron** and **Little Egret**, worth checking later. The apartment complex was on the side of a man-made lake which had **Mallard**, **Yellow-legged Gull** and **Black-Headed Gull** with the occasional fly-by made by **Grey Heron** and **Little Egret**. It was

getting late by the time we unpacked and darkness was soon upon us (about 7 pm). However, the clocks went back on the first night so darkness ensued at about 6 pm for the rest of the week. We went to the supermarket to get in supplies and then out to dinner at a local café just down the road.



Purple Swamp Hen (Tucan Marsh)

The first week in November is not a great time for migrants as most have gone through and few of the summer visitors were still present. On Sunday, Diana visited Alcudia market (about 10 mins drive) so I decided to find out what was in *Tucan Marsh*. Access to one part of the marsh is from the main road from *Port d'Alcudia to Palma (PM 60)*. You can pull off and park in a couple of places and then walk along the edge of the road to view the marsh. Early on a Sunday morning this was not too dangerous and was quite rewarding. Just out of the car, I was greeted by a **Fan-tailed Warbler** about 5m away looking me in the eye and flicking its tail madly. It then leapt from the bush as I went for the video camera, did a buzzing (zit-zit-zit) display flight (hence **Zitting Cisticola**) and disappeared into another bush. I then heard a different buzzing sound and saw a blue-grey streak flash from one bush to another. I eventually found the bird and identified it as a male **Sardinian Warbler**. I then collected all my gear together (camcorder, camera, bins, tripod and scope: we birders do not travel light) and marched along the road. The bushes were alive with buzzing sounds of two varieties announcing the presence of **Sardinian** and **Fan-tailed Warblers**, often heard but not so easy to see and a real challenge to photograph. Approaching the first piece of water to the north of the main road, I was greeted by a very loud chorus of **Cetti's Warblers** and the high-speed blue flash of a **Kingfisher**. Sitting on top of the tangle of shrubs and roots were 7 **Little Egrets** and 4 **Cattle Egrets** affording a good comparison as one of each were in the same field of view. There were also 3 **Grey Heron** and numerous **Coot** on the water. At the edges of the reeds were **Moorhen** and then my presence

flushed a **Greenshank** from the muddy edges. Checking the mud revealed two **Common Sandpipers**, a **Green Sandpiper** and another **Greenshank**. Then came the thrill of the morning, a slight movement in the reeds and out into full light came a majestic **Purple Swamphen**. The bird moved around the edge of the reed long enough to get a short video clip and then disappeared. Looking up, I saw a **Turtle Dove** fly over the road and a little more distant over the marsh was a **Sparrow Hawk** flying with the characteristic flap and glide. There were also **Blackbird**, **Song Thrush**, **Robin**, **Greenfinch**, **Goldfinch** and a single **Reed Warbler** present. The bushes were also full of leaf warblers, mainly **Chiffchaff** with the occasional **Willow Warbler**. The pools on the south of the road contained about 200 **Coot**, numerous **Moorhen**, 50+ **Little Grebe**, 60+ **Grey Heron**, 20+ **Little Egret**, 30+ **Cormorant**, the omnipresent Mallard and a few **Pochard**. All in all, this was a good morning in fair weather (no wind, partly cloudy, about 20°C).



*Formentor Peninsula
(Majorca)*

Sunday afternoon was spent on the *Formentor Peninsula*, north-east of *Port de Pollenca*. There are two good birding sites here (*Boquer Valley and Casas Veyas*), as well as the steep cliffs at *Cap de Formentor*. We did not have time to visit the Boquer Valley so that was reserved for another day. We drove to *Casas Veyas*, a combination of fig trees, sheep fields and pine woods with hills beyond. However, while this is good in migration and breeding seasons, it was a little quiet on the last day of October. We did see **Raven** over the hills, **Starlings**, **Wood Pigeon** and **White Wagtails** in the paddocks and **Robins**, **Goldfinch** and **Chiffchaff** in the fig trees. We drove out into the hills and these were alive with **Black Redstart**, **Robins** and **Stonechat**. We stopped at a viewpoint and had a first winter **Ring Ouzel** in the crags. We then heard a bird of prey crying and were greeted by two **Eleanora's Falcons** displaying overhead. Sea watching from the cliffs was impractical but further displays by three **Eleanora's Falcons** and a wonderful sunset closed the day in style.



Cattle Egret
(Albufera Marsh)

Monday November 1st was a public holiday (All Saint's Day) but still quiet on the roads. We decided not to go too far and headed up the road to the *Albufera Marsh*, which was of course closed. Not wishing to climb the locked gates, we drove to the pumping station and checked out the old salt pans on the edge of the marsh. We walked the track and flushed several **Cetti's** and **Fan-tailed Warblers**. There were **Black-winged Stilts**, **Little Stint** and **Kentish Plover** on the pools and another **Purple Swamphen** on the edge of the reeds. In the reeds were **Marsh** and **Sedge Warbler** while the surrounding trees and bushes contained **Greenfinch**, **Chaffinch**, **Chiffchaff**, **Sardinian Warbler** and **Great Tit**. A single female **Marsh Harrier** was patrolling the reed beds and an **Osprey** flew overhead. We then drove to the *Albufereta Marsh* between *Alcudia* and *Port de Pollenca*. It was difficult to find a good observation point but we stopped at the *Torrent de Albufereta* and found 3 **Ringed Plover** on the mud. We drove round to Nightingale Road (re *Gosney Guide: thanks go to John Wilson for the lone*) which produced **Yellow Wagtail**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Linnet** and **Great Tit**. The pools could be scoped from the road but this only produced **Coot**, **Mallard**, **Grey Heron** and **Little Egret**. There was, however, a group of 8 **Cattle Egret** in a sheep enclosure nearby. We then decide to go to *Cala Sant Vincenc*, north of *Pollenca*. This is a very small quiet resort that produced nothing worthy in birding initially other than a **Shag** on the rocks. After having a look round and failing to find anywhere to buy an ice-cream, we returned to the car. A last glimpse over the bay produced a single gull than came in and landed on the rocks nearby. Yes, you guessed correctly, an **Audouin's Gull**! Camcorder in hand, I marched off to get video only to be thwarted by the other four people at the resort who walked onto the rocks and frightened it off (Cela Vie!). However, on the way back we called at the beach and two **Gull-billed Terns** flew by.



Audouin's Gull
(Cala Sant Vincenc)

Tuesday looked stormy in *Alcudia* so we tried the other side of the island (*Arta and Porto Colum*). The *Arta Mountains* is a good site for **Thekla Lark** and we found three, which obligingly called as they flew off to confirm their identity. There were also **Black Redstart**, **Robins** and a **Rock Sparrow** there. A **Short-toed Eagle** flew over and a **Blue Rock Thrush** made a fleeting appearance. It was then off to *Porto Colum* on the south east coast, a good site for **Marmora's Warbler**. We were to have a patient vigil for the afternoon looking for and trying to film what is a very nervous grey "Dartford" Warbler. This is like watching paint dry but eventually, one popped out of the scrub flew 20 metres and dived back in. The quiet buzzing noise similar to the Dartford Warbler gave away the location and we had sufficient views to confirm this was a **Marmora's Warbler**. We had one more 10 second encounter in 3 hours and gave up trying to get pictures. Needless to say, the scrub was full of **Robins**, **Sardinian Warblers**, **Stonechat**, **Linnet** and **Greenfinch**. The stony ground produced two very obliging **Thekla Lark** and again a single bird drifted onto the rocks, so I managed to get video of another **Audouin's Gull**.



Thekla Lark (*Portocolom*)

Wednesday was wall to wall sunshine so we headed for the mountains. The first stop was just north of *Caimari* and this produced two **Booted Eagles**, several **Kestrel** and six **Crag Martin**. The bushes contained **Blue Tit** and **Blackcap** as additional species. We headed up the twisty road and stopped just short of *Lluc*. This craggy wooded area produced **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Crag Martin**, **Rock Dove** and **Jay**. We then took the road to *Soller* and headed for *Puig Major and Cuber Reservoir*. We saw **Water Pipit**, **Grey Heron** and **Yellow-legged Gull** but little else. You cannot go up the road to the Radar Station as this is guarded by the military. We had lunch and then went back through the mountains and turned off to go down to *Sa Calobra*. This is an amazing road that winds down a steep valley to a tiny resort on the coast. About a quarter of the way down there is a café and car park. As we pulled up and parked, two **Black Vultures** were combing the valley below us. They slowly rose up and were joined by a third. They provided a wonderful display right over us and then disappeared over the mountains to the south-east. That was definitely one of the trip highlights, a lifer for us.



Black Vulture (*Sa Calobra*)

We were now gathering quite a list. We went out early on Thursday to the *Albufera Marsh* arriving with the staff at 7:30 am (first light at this time of year). You cannot take the car in they told us, so we parked round the corner and walked along the main track into the reserve. The first treat was a clump of trees to the north of the main canal and less than 100 metres into the reserve. This was full of **Cattle Egret** still roosting (about 50-60) plus a few **Grey Herons** and **Little Egret**. A little further produced the first roosting immature **Night Heron** in the scrub on the north bank of the canal was soon followed by another 5 adults and several young birds. A little further down was another tree full of **Cattle Egret**. We walked further into the reserved and found a good selection of ducks on the pools (**Mallard, Pochard, Tufted, Shoveler, Gadwall** and **Teal**) but nothing out of the ordinary. From the first hide we had wonderful close views of **Moustached** and **Fan-Tailed Warblers** as they moved along the reedy edges and **Black-winged Stilt, Little Stint, Greenshank** and **Snipe** on the shallow pools. We walked round the corner and came face to face with a **Little Bittern**, which then saw us and disappeared into the reeds. An **Osprey** flew over and a **Marsh Harrier** was patrolling the reed bed. We also saw 3 **Tree Sparrows**, a **Water Pipit** and several **Kingfisher** on the reserve and then went back for an early lunch.



**Black-crowned Night
Heron [Adult]**
(Albufera Marsh)

**Black-crowned Night Heron
[Immature]**
(Albufera Marsh)

The afternoon was spent in the *Boquer Valley*, north of *Port de Pollenca*. This is a good hours walk, which is rough in, places so strong shoes or walking boots are recommended. You have to go through the farm, which includes three gates and a mad dog on a long chain. The middle gate is therefore a challenge to keep your trouser legs intact. The valley is a migrant trap in the Spring and early Autumn. In November, the valley was full of **Black Redstart, Sardinian Warbler, Robins, Goldfinch, Stonechat and Starling** with small numbers of **Collared Dove, Blackbird** and **Song Thrush**. There were close views of **Blue Rock Thrush** and a passage of **Crag Martin**. We also saw one **Wheatear**, two **Peregrine Falcons**, a **Raven** in the valley and an **Osprey** flew out to sea. There was also a haunting call that resounded through the valley made by elusive **Red-legged Partridge**, heard but not seen. The big surprise were three fairly obliging **Marmora's Warblers** affording good scope views in the scrub north of the wall but before the track descends down to the sea, even though Dave Gosney states that most people have failed to find them here. However, getting good video of these birds still remains a challenge as they disappeared shortly after mounting the camera on the tripod.



Blue Rock Thrush (*Boquer Valley*)

Friday arrived with wall to wall rain and hence time to write a trip report, as I just happened to have a laptop with me. The rain cleared at midday and allowed us to make a final trip. We drove south-west and visited *Salinas de Levante (Es Trenc)*. The weather stayed dry and we turned up several new species. On arrival, we saw 30+ **Greater Flamingo** feeding in the salt pans together with several **Shelduck** and 50+ **Black-winged Stilt**. There was also a female **Marsh Harrier** hunting over the area. We moved to the other side of the salt pans on the *Es Trenc Road* and found a shallow pool teeming with small waders (80+ **Kentish Plover**, 100+ **Little Stint**, 20+ **Dunlin** and 2 **Curlew Sandpiper**). Further back were **Redshank**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Curlew** and **Ruff**. In the fields behind, were **Red-legged Partridge**, **Sky Lark** and **Wood Lark** and in a small sand quarry were **Stone Curlew**, **Black Redstart** and **Sardinian Warbler**. Finally, at the coast (*Colnia de san Jordi*), we saw an **Audouin's Gull**.



Black-winged Stilt (*Salinas de Levante*)

In conclusion, we had a good week with mostly fine weather and a total list of **99 species** including **2 lifers** and **8 birds** for our **Annual European list** (now **336** for **2004**). There were

precious few migrants around at this time of year and most of the summer visitors had gone. However, the birding was still rewarding and some good video was obtained. We are planning another trip to Mallorca in the Spring (mid-May) or late September/early October to catch the birds we missed on this trip and have another go at filming **Marmora's Warbler**.

Paul and Diana Bowden (November 2004)