

**ORNITHOLIDAYS TOUR TO SPAIN – THE ISLAND OF MENORCA**  
*Mediterranean Migration*

**19 - 26 April 2013**



**Leader: Mike Witherick**

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### **A Personal Diary**

#### **Friday, 19 April**

Our fully-laden Monarch flight left London Gatwick on time and arrived on schedule. Our approach to Mahon airport afforded an excellent view of much of the island. Everywhere seemed much greener than on some previous tours. Within an hour of touching down, we had collected our baggage and completed the paperwork with respect to vehicle hire. The drive to Matchani Gran is a short one and having been greeted by Lorenz, we had the difficult task of deciding which rooms we would occupy – choice can often be a time-consuming business! By the time we had unpacked, Lorenz had our lunch ready – a tuna salad followed by barbecued chicken and a glass of verdejo.

We met up at 4.30 pm to walk the fields and the drive. The fresh north-easterly wind was not really conducive to spotting small birds. However, we did record three species of raptor – Red Kite, Western Marsh Harrier and Common Kestrel. There were many Common Swifts patrolling just above the fields – was their migration being thwarted by the strength and direction of the wind? Other sightings included Common Nightingale, Eurasian Hoopoe, Woodchat Shrike and Common Redstart.

With plenty of time in hand before our evening meal, we decided to make the short drive down to Binidali on the south coast. On the rocky limestone edge of the cliff, we saw a pair of Blue Rock Thrush, a Thekla Lark and a Northern Wheatear. Down on the shore, there was a Little Egret keeping company with two Audouin's Gulls. Out at sea, there were a number of Scopoli's Shearwaters showing their typical rolling and rising behaviour. A Shag and several Yellow-legged Gulls flew by.

We met up at 7.30 pm for another substantial and most acceptable meal. The checklist was completed whilst we were still at the table. Given the early start to the day, there was a certain keenness to retire early.

#### **Saturday, 20 April**

We walked the drive for the best part of an hour before breakfast. The north-east wind was still blowing, so our expectations of coming across tired migrants were somewhat thwarted. A Turtle Dove 'purred' on a telegraph wire. Two Stone Curlew took flight as soon as they had spotted us. Other new sightings included Sand Martin and Willow Warbler.

After breakfast we drove to Son Bou and spent much of the remainder of the morning looking out over the almost completely reeded-out lagoon. A pair of Western Marsh Harriers patrolled the reedbeds; a Eurasian Hobby flew in and caused a certain amount of consternation amongst the smaller birds. Grey Heron, Cattle Egret, Mallard, Common Moorhen and Eurasian Coot were seen for the first time. Twelve Little Egrets strung out along the top of a stone wall was a memorable sight. Over the meadows, Zitting Cisticolas declared their territories, while Barn Swallows, Common House Martins and Common Swifts hunted for insects at low levels. Cetti's Warblers were vocal and occasionally glimpsed. Along the hedgerows, there were Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchat and Corn Bunting.

We eventually drove to the beach – its golden sand and blue offshore water were a sight to behold. On the beach, there were Audouin's and Yellow-legged Gulls, the former giving particularly good views. A European Shag was busy fishing close to the shore.

Later, I drove to the airport to pick up Sue who, as previously arranged, was joining us a day late. A late but substantial lunch was taken around 2 pm.

At 3.30 pm we set off for the north coast of the island, with Mongofre as our destination. Before we had reached the inlet, we spotted our first Booted Eagles and were delighted to find a small flock of Red-footed Falcons that were using telegraph wires as perches from which to hawk for insects. The good news

continued when we found that the gates to the Mongofre reserve were open. For the last five or six tours, these gates have been padlocked. Water levels were high, but there was enough exposed mud and shallow water to hold good numbers of Wood Sandpiper, Ruff and Common Greenshank. There were lesser numbers of Black-winged Stilt and Common and Green Sandpipers. Two Ospreys were seen in flight, and a little later we watched one of them perched in a dead tree. A Purple Heron also showed well. In terms of ducks, there were plenty of Mallard, small numbers of Shelduck and a pair of Gadwall.

On the drive back to Matchani Gran, we stopped to admire the Red-footed Falcons once again. Our arrival back at base allowed us the luxury of 90 minutes of R and R before meeting up for evening meal. We did the checklist afterwards, noting that a day that had started quietly eventually allowed us to see more than 50 species.

### **Sunday, 21 April**

Our pre-breakfast walk along the drive produced one new species – Pied Flycatcher. An overnight thunderstorm and a change of wind direction had apparently cleared the skies of swallows and swifts. European Greenfinches seemed to have multiplied.

After breakfast, we loaded our picnic lunch box and then made all speed along the island's spine road to Es Mercadal. Here we turned off and headed towards Fornells. We missed the vital turn-off to a small sewage treatment plant, but soon recovered the situation. At the plant, there were three species of sandpiper – Common, Wood and Green – as well as Common Greenshank. The next part of the itinerary involved making a number of stops around the margins of the Tirant wetland. From one of the vantage points we added two new duck species to the tour list – Red-crested Pochard and Northern Shoveler, while a Great Cormorant was spotted in a tree looking decidedly sorry for itself in the slightly damp weather.

From there we drove out to the northernmost point of Menorca – Cap de Cavalleria with its impressive vertical limestone cliffs backed by extensive limestone pavements. On the way to the cape, we saw some more Red-footed Falcons. A small flock of Common Linnets flew around the lighthouse; we saw our first Stonechats while Thekla Larks gave good views. We found a small area where we could park off the road, enjoyed the scenery and consumed a most acceptable picnic lunch. During the break, an Egyptian Vulture flew close by.

Afterwards we went to a location where in previous years there has been a small colony of European Bee-eaters. There was neither sight nor sound of them. Maybe it is still too early for them to be around. We vowed to check again later in the week. We decided to move on into a rather different habitat – a mixed forest of pine and oak. Here we had fairly close views of a Firecrest. Our route from Sa Roca took us fairly directly towards Alaior but along an ever narrowing lane flanked by formidable stone walls. Our transit through the town was a trifle circuitous, but soon we were entering the resort of Son Bou once again. Our visits to the same two locations as yesterday failed to yield any new sightings. Down on the beach, we once again enjoyed good views of Audouin's Gulls.

Our final stop of the day was on the coast at Binidali where we saw Blue Rock Thrush and Northern Wheatear. Not far out to sea we watched both Scopoli's and Balearic Shearwaters as they skimmed the waves in search a meal. As we drew up in the car park back at base, a Black Kite flew by. Such was the timing of our return that we were able to enjoy a couple of hours of relaxation before meeting to complete the checklist before dinner.

### **Monday, 22 April**

Pre-breakfast birding along the drive convinced us that there had not been any change in the bird situation overnight. The only migrants spotted were Pied Flycatchers. Eurasian Hoopoes were very vocal, so too European Turtle Doves.

After breakfast, we made all speed to Es Grau, where a scan of the deserted beach revealed the presence of a lone Eurasian Oystercatcher. We then drove in the Albufera Nature Reserve where we spent the remainder of the morning. Out on the waters of the reservoir we saw Common Pochard, Great Crested and Little Grebes. During the course of a fairly gentle walk, we were able to watch two Purple Gallinules, one nest building and the other feeding on the roots of reeds. In both activities, they showed great dexterity with their

pink feet. Florally, there were great splashes of colour – reds, oranges, yellows and purples. We found some Bee Orchids and saw a couple of Swallowtail butterflies.

We returned to base for lunch which starred quite a substantial steak. Afterwards, we allowed ourselves an hour in which to recover! At 3 pm we drove to Cap Favaritx, where the intention was to spend some time scanning the sea for shearwaters, but this was truncated by the apparent absence of those species. Nonetheless, the cape offered much to be admired - the barren shales and slates at the very end of the headland contrasting with the lush fields of yellow and reddish purple flowers further inland.

With time in hand, we decided to revisit Mongofre but to concentrate on the old salt pans on the west side of the inlet. A little way short of them, we flushed two Red-legged Partridges. At the pans, there were Common Ringed Plovers and some Curlew Sandpipers at various stages in the transition to their red breeding plumage. Also present were Wood and Common Sandpipers, as well as Little Ringed Plover.

We arrived back at Matchani Gran at 6.15 pm which left us an hour to relax and smarten up before doing the checklist, as yesterday, in the garden.

### **Tuesday, 23 April**

For a change, we drove down to Binidali to watch the sunrise. Three male Blue Rock Thrushes declared their territories along the cliff top; a good number of Scopoli's Shearwaters were seen heading west, while two smaller shearwaters (possibly Yelkouan?) moved in the opposite direction.

After breakfast, we took the spine road to Ferreries where we turned off south for the delightful coastal resort of Cala Galdana. We visited three 'miradors'. The first afforded us a stunning view down onto the marine inlet with its clear blue water. Here we marvelled at the aerobatics of both Pallid and Alpine Swifts in the freshening wind. The second 'mirador' gave us a view out to sea which was apparently bird less apart from some Yellow-legged Gulls and a lone Scopoli's Shearwater. The third afforded views tantalisingly obstructed by nearby pines. We then drove down into the centre of the resort, made a short walk and then relaxed over a mid-morning coffee and biscuits at a café on the promenade. Our eventual exit of Sant Galdana was a somewhat circuitous one!

From there we drove to the head of the Algendar Gorge, parked the vehicle and then walked gently down this ravine increasingly deeply cut into the limestone. A pleasant surprise early on was a good view of a Black Stork flying across the gorge. As for other birds, House Sparrows abounded, making use of natural nesting holes in the limestone, Common Nightingales and Cetti's Warblers declared their presence, whilst Blackcaps preferred to sing from cover rather than show themselves. Egyptian Vultures patrolled the overhead skies at various altitudes. After about a kilometre, we entered the grounds of an 'estate' owned by Lorenz's father. The house had an extensive terrace which afforded splendid views across the confluence of two gorges. Here the airspace was occupied by displaying Common Ravens, Alpine Swifts, Common Kestrels, Booted Eagles and Egyptian Vultures – clearly spring was in the air - their displays being made all the more impressive by the way they coped with the wind.

The plan had been that Lorenz would join us around 1 pm and cook us a barbeque lunch on a fire previously lit by a nearby farmer. In the event, the first happened but not the second. To make matters worse, Lorenz discovered that he had not brought the keys to the house. This meant that we did not have access to the paper or matches needed to light the fire. Thus we were forced to improvise a lunch from the items which Lorenz had brought that did not require cooking! In the end, we were more than sufficed and rounded off the meal with oranges and a sort of plum that Lorenz picked in the orchard below the terrace.

After lunch, we went back up the gorge and then drove up to the summit of El Toro – at just over 1,000 feet, it is the highest point of the island and commands a splendid panoramic view. Due to the freshening wind and increasing cloud, the views were not quite as clear as one would have wished, but nonetheless we were able to appreciate the intricacies of the island's coastline and the variety of landscapes contained within it.

Our final stop of the day was at the intriguing and remarkable well preserved Talayotic settlement at Torralba. Apart from a Eurasian Hoopoe and a nearby Peacock, there was little in terms of birdlife. We

reached Matchani Gran around 5 pm and then relaxed before doing the checklist in the garden and confronting another sizeable Menorcan dinner.

### **Wednesday, 24 April**

Pre-breakfast birding involved walking one of the fields and the drive, and was it quiet! Clearly, there were no new arrivals in this part of the island – thanks, one suspects, to the persistent north-easterly wind.

The itinerary for the day was to explore some unvisited parts of the island, with navigation provided by Wally. We started on the outskirts of Ciutadella with a visit to a peripheral industrial estate where we were happy to find a thriving colony of Spotless Starlings. Over 20 birds were seen. The next port of call was the Punta de Nati – a fairly flat, but stony headland which was home to a good number of Greater Short-toed Larks. A walk around the lighthouse brought us to some fascinating defensive constructions – did they date from the Second World War or were they earlier? We later learnt from Lorenz that they date from 1920.

Port Morell, on the north coast to the east, proved to be one of the more attractive resort developments. A zigzag inland brought us to the coast at La Vall, with its lovely beaches and pine-shaded car park, where we ate our picnic lunch. During an exploratory walk, I saw Egyptian Vultures, Booted Eagles. Woodchat Shrike and heard Great Reed Warbler.

After lunch we re-joined the spine road and made all speed to El Mercadal where we turned off to visit what we have come to refer to as ‘the bee-eater site’. Much to our delight we found that the some 10 birds had taken up residence since we last visited a few days ago. From there we visited several locations around the Tirant wetlands. A major surprise was to find a Greater Flamingo feeding in the middle of the main pond.

Our final stop of the day was on the coast at the resort of Addaia. Here the development was found to be much less attractive than that at Cala Morell. So our exploration of previously unvisited parts of the island yielded us some memories of fine landscapes (both coastal and inland) as well as four new birds for the tour list.

We met up at 7.15 pm to do the checklist and this was followed by yet another substantial evening meal.

### **Thursday, 25 April**

It was agreed that there would be no organised pre-breakfast birding. Certainly, as it turned out, this was not a bad decision given the overcast and windy start to the day.

After breakfast, we drove down to the port at Mahon and bought our tickets for the 10.30 am harbour cruise. This left us with some 45 minutes in hand, sufficient time to climb up to the historic centre of Mahon, enjoy the view over the harbour, visit the covered market and have a cup of coffee. Because of the high seas at the entrance to the harbour, the cruise itinerary was curtailed a little. However, a good commentary made clear the excellence of this natural harbour and therefore why it had been fought over so many times in the past. The British possession of the port was manifest in quite a lot of the architecture, both military and civilian, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Another aspect of the British legacy was that a harbour-side distillery still makes gin according to a British recipe. In terms of birds, there was little to be seen, apart from a colony of Little Egrets and two species of gull – Yellow-legged and Audouin’s.

Once ashore, we returned to base by a rather longer routing that took us along the coast to as far as Binidali, where we turned inland. Sue provided the navigation. We lunched at 1.30 pm and took some time out until 3 pm - to wait and see what the weather had up its sleeve.

By 3 pm it had stopped raining so, on the recommendation of Lorenz, we decided to explore the Calascaves valley. The omens seemed good for as we were proceeding down the drive, four male Golden Orioles suddenly took flight ahead of us; a little further on we saw our first Montagu’s Harrier. The track down to the parking area at the head of Calascaves was a bit rough, but after a kilometre of walking we reached the shore. On either side, the limestone cliffs were pock-marked by caves, used in prehistoric times as a sort of necropolis. There were no new birds to be found, but this was compensated by the carpets of orchids (mainly Densely-flowered and Naked Man) that flanked the track. As we were driving back to the main road, a Common Quail flashed in front of the vehicle.

We finished off the field part of the day with a short visit to the cliff top at Binidali. Due to the easterly wind, the sea was seen to have been stirred into a considerable swell. Apart from a few passing Scopoli's Shearwaters, there was little by way of bird activity.

We met at 7.15 pm to do the checklist. This was followed by another excellent evening meal. Since it was our last evening, we were able to meet Jose, the chef, and to thank him personally. As usual, after the meal, Lorenz came in for another interesting chat.

### **Friday, 26 April**

The local forecast had suggested that the wind direction would turn southerly, and so we were keen to check out the drive before breakfast. In the event, the wind had only moved round to the east, and there was little evidence of an influx of migrants. Our best sightings were of a pair of Golden Oriole, a food-carrying Hoopoe perched on a wire, a female Western Marsh Harrier and a Woodchat Shrike.

We were all packed up by 9 am and so vacated our rooms. We were seen off the premises by Lorenz, filled and returned the hire vehicle, and then checked in. Our return flight to Gatwick left, and arrived on time.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Lorenz for making us so welcome at Matchani Gran. He proved to be an excellent host. Thanks also to his two members of staff - Kati and Jose.

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July 2013

## Itinerary and Weather

Friday, 19 April	London Heathrow > Mahon Matchani Gran & environs, Binidali Fine, but fresh NE wind 13 - 16°C
Saturday, 20 April	am: Son Bou pm: Mongofre Sunny periods 15 - 17°C
Sunday, 21 April	> Tirant wetland > Cap de Cavalleria > Sa Roca > Son Bou > Binidali Overcast with light drizzle, becoming warm and sunny 16 - 17°C
Monday, 22 April	am: > Es Grau > S'Albufera NP pm: >Cap Favaritx > Monfogre salt pans Fine, but chill N wind 16 - 18°C
Tuesday, 23 April	> Cala Galdana > Algendar gorge > El Toro > Torralba Fine, becoming windy 14 - 18 °C
Wednesday, 24 April	> Ciutadella > Punta Nati > Cala Morell > La Vall > Tirant wetland > Addaia Fine, but chill NE wind 16 - 19°C
Thursday, 25 April	am: Mahon harbour cruise pm: Calascaves & Binidali Overcast; some light rain. E wind 14 - 16°C
Friday, 26 April	> Mahon > London Gatwick Sunny periods 18°C

## CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Abundance Scale (no. seen on best day)
1 2h means seen on 1 day and heard on 2 other days	1 = 1 - 4 2 = 5 - 9 3 = 10 - 100 4 = > 100

The sequence and nomenclature of this list follow Collins Bird Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2010.

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Common Shelduck	2	2	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Mallard	5	3	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Gadwall	4	1	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Northern Shoveler	2	2	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Common Pochard	2	1	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Red-crested Pochard	2	1	<i>Netta rufina</i>
Red-legged Partridge	2	1	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>
Common Quail	1	1	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
Little Grebe	1	2	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	1	1	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Scopoli's Shearwater	4	2	<i>Calonectris diomedea diomedea</i>
Balearic Shearwater	1	1	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>
Great Cormorant	2	1	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
European Shag	7	1	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>
Cattle Egret	4	3	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Little Egret	6	3	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Grey Heron	3	1	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Purple Heron	1	1	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Black Stork	1	1	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
Greater Flamingo	1	1	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
Egyptian Vulture	3	2	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
Osprey	1	1	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Booted Eagle	5	3	<i>Aquila pennatus</i>
Red Kite	6	1	<i>Milvus milvus</i>
Black Kite	1	1	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	5	1	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	1	1	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	1	1	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Common Kestrel	8	1	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Lesser Kestrel	2	1	<i>Falco naumanni</i>
Red-footed Falcon	4	2	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>
Eurasian Hobby	2	1	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Peregrine Falcon	1	1	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Common Moorhen	4	3	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Purple Swamphen	1	1	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
Eurasian Coot	4	1	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	1	1	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Black-winged Stilt	1	2	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Stone Curlew	2 1h	1	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>
Little Ringed Plover	3	1	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Common Ringed Plover	1	1	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	1	2	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Wood Sandpiper	3	3	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Greenshank	3	3	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Common Sandpiper	3	1	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Ruff	3	2	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	8	3	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Audouin's Gull	4	1	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
Rock Dove	8	3	<i>Columba livia</i>

Common Wood Pigeon	8	2	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	8	2	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
European Turtle Dove	6	1	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Eurasian Scops Owl	- 2h	1	<i>Otus scops</i>
Common Swift	8	3	<i>Apus apus</i>
Pallid Swift	1	2	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
Alpine Swift	1	2	<i>Apus melba</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	7 1h	1	<i>Upupa epops</i>
European Bee-eater	1	3	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
Thekla Lark	4	1	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
Greater Short-toed ark	1	1	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Sand Martin	1	1	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Barn Swallow	8	3	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common House Martin	5	2	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
Tawny Pipit	2	1	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Common Nightingale	7 1h	2	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
Common Redstart	5	1	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Northern Wheatear	3	1	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Whinchat	2	1	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
European Stonechat	5	1	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
Common Blackbird	8	2	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Blue Rock Thrush	6	1	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Blackcap	3 2h	1	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Common Whitethroat	1	1	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
Sardinian Warbler	5 1h	2	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Cetti's Warbler	4 3h	1	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler)	2	1	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Eurasian Reed Warbler	1 1h	1	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Great Reed Warbler	- 1h	1	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
Willow Warbler	1	1	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	1	1	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Firecrest	1	1	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	3	1	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Pied Flycatcher	6	1	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Great Tit	7	1	<i>Parus major</i>
Coal Tit	1	1	<i>Pariparus ater</i>
Woodchat Shrike	8	1	<i>Lanius senator</i>
Common Raven	6	2	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Spotless Starling	1	3	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
Golden Oriole	2	1	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
House Sparrow	8	3	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Common Chaffinch	3	1	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Common Linnet	2	1	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	8	3	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
European Greenfinch	8	3	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Corn Bunting	7	2	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>

#### **BUTTERFLIES**

Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Small White	<i>Arlogeia rapaie</i>
Cleopatra	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croced</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Parage aegeria</i>
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machon</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>

#### **OTHER ANIMALS**

Italian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis sicula</i>
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This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.