

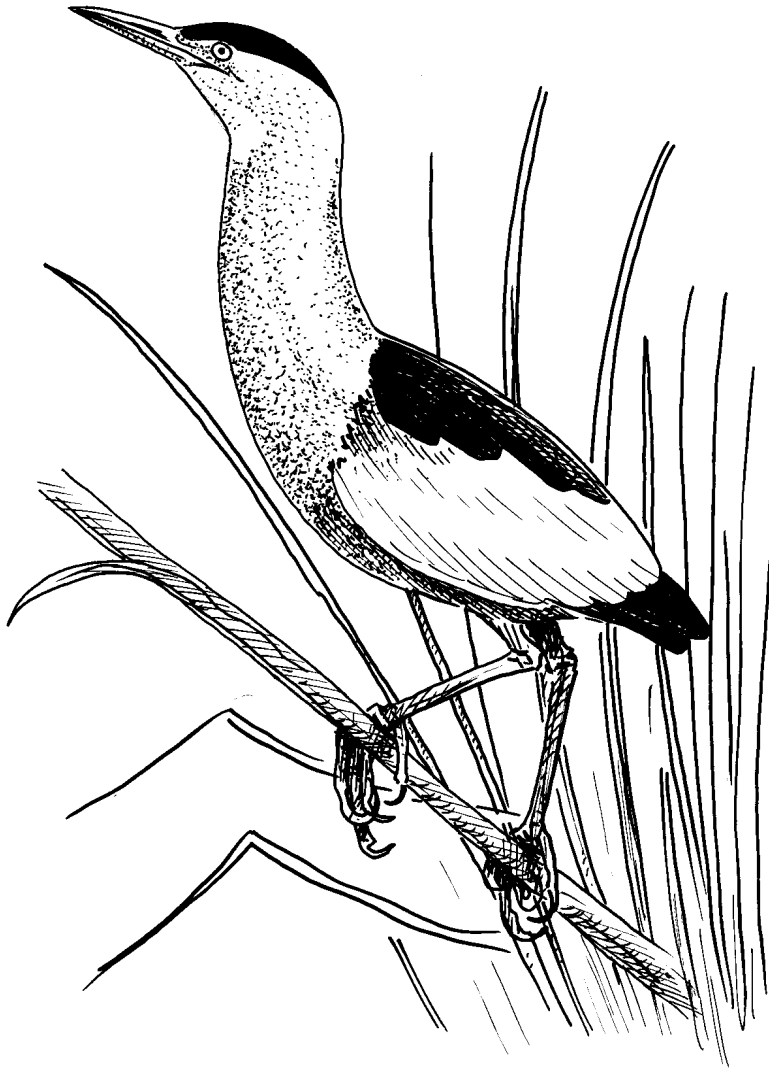
Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Spring in Mallorca
22 April – 1 May 1993

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List of participants

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Front cover: little bittern

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During the course of the holiday, a cheque for £225 was given to the Grup Balear d'Ornitologia i Defensa de la Naturalesa (GOB). A thank you letter from GOB's Xesca Crespi is printed at the end of this report, outlining some of GOB's present and future conservation work (not in the web version).

SPRING IN MALLORCA APRIL 1993

Thursday 22 April - Heathrow to Puerto Pollensa

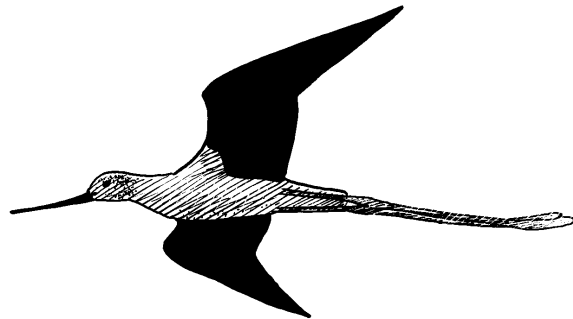
A pleasant flight with British Midland took us to a cool Palma, where the vehicles for the rest of the week were waiting as planned. After a few moments juggling with the luggage and bunjy ropes we set off for the hotel at Puerto Pollensa.

Suitably refreshed, we took a short drive to a nearby river running through olive groves and farmland; here were many swallows feeding and resting while on migration while in the bushes willow warbler, garden warbler and chiffchaff were all chasing insects around the olives and scrub alongside the water.

Friday 23 April - Albufera and Albufereta

Puerto Pollensa is one of the most popular venues for birdwatchers as it is ideally placed for visiting the best sites on the island and is a peaceful town with a beautiful bay surrounded by rugged mountains, quite unlike the Mallorca one may have imagined from glossy brochures.

Our first full day took us to two of the best wetland sites on the island, just a few miles from the hotel. Albufereta is a marsh that is well known for its birds and flowers and has the advantage of having an abandoned house alongside with a balcony that conveniently overlooks the lake and marsh. Black-winged stilts nest here and feed alongside herons and egrets in the lake while the grassland on the shore is home to Iberian yellow wagtails and beautifully marked stonechats. A small area of limestone is the impoverished home of mirror orchids and serapias (tongue orchid), one of the few places where we saw orchids, as well as star clover and wonderful wild Allium.



On to the Albufera and a contrast of management in that this special area is now a Natural Park, thanks to the local conservation organisation GOB. On the edge of the park are some disused salt pans that are often a favoured place of migrating waders. Here were wood sandpiper, little ringed plover, black-winged stilt and the noisy great reed warbler. Close inspection of the road was also rewarded with some fine mole crickets.

In the reserve itself we were accompanied to the sound of nightingale, Cetti's warbler, serin and great reed warbler, a real Mediterranean chorus. Much to our surprise were two black vultures flying very high overhead into the northern mountains.

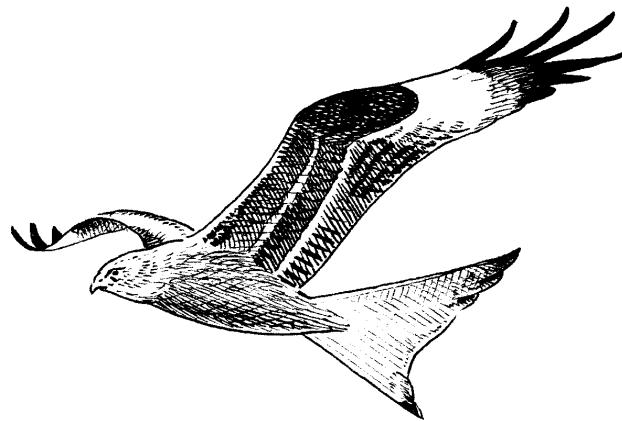
Saturday 24 April - Ternelles

The mixed weather was against us today. Only open on Saturday mornings, Ternelles is a beautiful valley and channel for many migrant birds if the weather is right. Our journey started off OK, with woodland birds such as firecrest, wren, pied flycatchers and spotted flycatcher. The weather soon gave up on us and even the trees proved inadequate in their protection and we had to take shelter under the bridge over the dried up

river bed. Eventually the rain stopped and we had lunch among the asphodels before a walk back to the vehicles. Marsh harrier, booted eagle and peregrine performed overhead but there was no sign of the giants of European birds, the black vulture, often sighted on this walk.

Sunday 25 April - Mountains

Today was due to be the trip to Cabrera but strong winds and rain cancelled all boat trips. Instead we headed into the mountains, stopping at viewpoints along the way to look for birds of prey but heading for the reservoir at Cuber and then on to the botanic Gardens at Alfabia. The drive was spectacular, especially from Cuber onwards when the hairpin bends took us up 3000 feet of mountain in a few miles. Unfortunately the gardens were closed, despite what it said in the guide books! Some of the birds did perform, however, with very good views of black vulture and red kite.



A welcome stop in a nearby town for coffee ended in near disaster when John got back in the car and thought his well travelled hat was a bit smelly only to discover that the car was almost on fire! An electrical fault had developed and smoke was pouring out of the steering column. A short 'phone call to the hire company and a new car was delivered within the hour, not bad for Sunday service!

While waiting for the new car, the minibus took the rest of us to the Albufereta for the evening. Quail were, as usual, heard but not seen, trying to avoid the hunting marsh harrier, perhaps. Nearby, little egrets were feeding alongside grey herons and stilts while in the reeds the swallows were starting to roost.

Monday 26 April - Albufera

The wet and windy weather continued but got better to the south of Pollensa so it was decided to visit the Albufera again as there were many areas we had not had time to visit before. Because of much needed re-surfacing, the road to the visitor centre was closed to traffic. As luck would have it, the rain decided to come down as we were half way between the car and the centre. The group was now proficient at donning waterproofs at a moments notice and on we went!

The visitor centre is in the centre of the marsh and has several hides within easy reach as well as some interesting paths through the marsh. This is a truly superb reserve, like a 4000 acre Minsmere with reeds 15 feet high! The rough weather had brought in some migrant birds that were trying to re-fuel on their journeys north. Curlew sandpiper, wood sandpiper and black tern as well as the resident moustached warblers and marsh harriers were here but perhaps the most impressive birds were the swallows and swifts. Literally thousands of these birds were feeding only a few feet above the ground in enormous flocks. Seeing these birds on migration in such huge numbers is a magical sight and really makes you realise why areas such as this are so important for the birds that may be making their way to our gardens.

Look in any field guide and you will see many different races of yellow wagtail. The bad weather of the last few days brought many of these races to the island and some of the males of the Scandinavian race *thunbergi* (grey-headed) were particularly impressive.

Before returning to the hotel, we drove to the water treatment works at the back of the reserve. This is not the prettiest area on the island but it does seem to attract some interesting birds. From the hide we were able to watch up to 15 black terns, some feeding very close and others sat alongside a gull-billed tern and three whiskered terns. Here too were one or two recently released white-headed ducks, a very rare bird in the wild in Europe.

Tuesday 27 April - Formentor Peninsula

The north eastern tip of the island is an impressive peninsula of mountains and hairpin bends. First stop was the Mirador, a spectacular viewpoint with a sheer drop to the sea hundreds of feet below. From here, crag martins fly at eye level or below and the blue rock thrush sings out his song using the cliff face to amplify his voice.

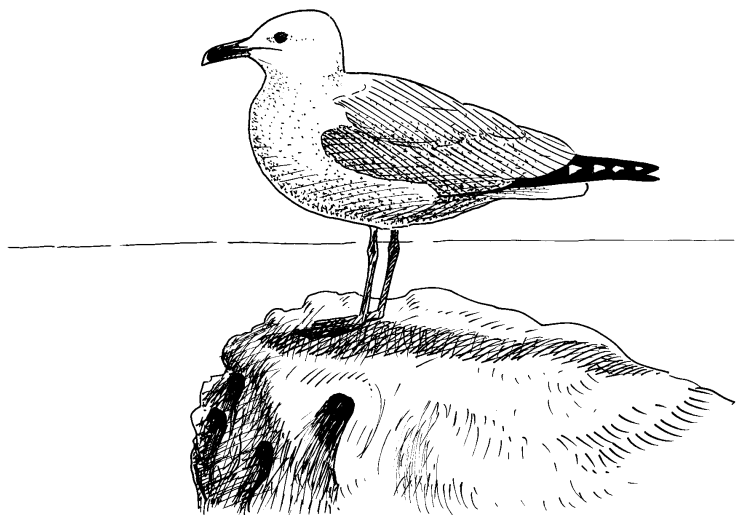
On to the lighthouse at the end of the range for more wonderful seascapes but very few migrants. From here though Cory's shearwater were easy to spot from our high viewpoint and as we were watching an osprey flew close to the cliff below us. Two alpine swifts were playing on the wind over the hills as the car park began to get busy so we then made our move on to Casas Veyas, a small farm that straddles the road to the lighthouse.

The open fields and fig trees are a magnet for birds and a good spot for seeing some of the woodland species. Pied flycatcher, whinchat and redstart were feeding among the figs while higher up the hill we were very fortunate to get some very close views of both subalpine warbler and the elusive Marmora's warbler. On the way back to the car, the path winds through the pine woods and is a good spot for the Mallorcan variety of crossbill. These are often very approachable and today was no exception. Ron's superb telescope was soon set up on a bird that was feeding in a nearby tree allowing everybody very detailed views of these superbly adapted birds.

Wednesday 28 April - Cabrera

At last, a chance to get onto the island of Cabrera, the first National Park of the area. A long drive to the south of the island and the port was bathed in sunshine but the wind had not died down. We joined a school party aboard a small boat and set sail. Last year this trip was made on a flat calm sea and was very pleasant. This year the sea was a little less pleasant! Yours truly was distinctly off colour by the time we reached the island and spent most of the journey in the smallest room on the boat. In between feeling ill there were some very close views of Cory's and Mediterranean shearwater as well as Audouin's gull, an important breeding bird on the island.

Our time on the island was cut short but once recovered we went for a pleasant walk along the main valley. The weather was warm and sunny for a change and the fields at the bottom of the valley had tawny pipit, whinchat, wheatear and flocks of corn buntings with a peregrine overhead. This is a beautiful island with a lovely atmosphere and again we were fortunate to



be able to make this journey that is still off the itineraries of most tours to Mallorca. We were pleased hand over Honeyguide's cheque to Xesca from GOB; she had joined us for the trip having kindly arranged it for us.

The return journey was much more pleasant and again the shearwaters came very close to the boat

Thursday 29 April - Mountains

As if to emphasise the point that the weather is changeable, today was spent mainly in torrential wind and rain. In an attempt to beat the weather we headed for the Torrente de Pares on the northern shore of the island. I'm not sure if John has recovered from this drive yet with its amazing number of hairpin bends, leading to a popular tourist area. The sight is very spectacular but does get very busy with people. We arrived before the crowds and left to find that the bends we had approached with difficulty in an eight seater minibus were now being taken with apparent ease by 50 seat coaches!

Lunch was spent inside a rain lashed minibus alongside the reservoir at Cuber. After lunch a few of us braved the wind to get some fresh air and took a walk to the quarry. John took great delight in a snowball fight as we went along but to our surprise we were also greeted by a close fly-past of a lone black vulture in what were the most appalling conditions for a large bird of prey. The rain eased off to allow brief views of rock thrush at the quarry but made up for it as we walked back to the bus and successfully drenched all of us.

Friday 30 April - Free day & return to Albufera

A free day for shopping, sightseeing or birdwatching! The party did its own thing in the morning and met up again in the afternoon for another visit to the Albufera. Each visit here is different and something new always turns up. Today was no exception with all the usual birds plus some very close, summer-plumaged curlew sandpipers and spotted redshanks but the real stars were a couple of very obliging little bitterns. These birds are usually very difficult to see but here they were feeding out in the open a matter of feet away, a fitting end to a very pleasant and very enjoyable week thanks to some good birds and some great company. Who needs good weather!

FLOWERS AND PLANTS

A few of the more interesting flowers found included squirting cucumber, friars cowl, Italian arum, *Cyclamen balearicum*, star of Bethlehem, tassel hyacinth, yellow bartsia, pyramidal orchid, mirror (or mirror of Venus) orchid, asphodel and hollow-leaved asphodel, sickle medick, star clover, Bermuda buttercup (*Oxalis pres-capre*), crown daisy (both yellow and yellow/white), field gladiolus, a 'spiny pincussion' *Astragalus balearicus*, Greek spiny spurge, Mediterranean spurge, giant fennel and the widely escaped Hottentot fig. In the wetlands there was giant reed as well as common reed; greater birdsfoot trefoil and the leaves of sea squill were noted.

Trees and shrubs included kermes & holm oak, carob, judas tree, Aleppo pine, Phoenician juniper, funeral cypress, a tree heath *Erica multiflora* and spring heath *Erica herbacea*, and the dwarf fan palm *Chamaerops humilis*. Several cistus species were probably *C. albidus*, *C. monspeliensis* and *C. salvifolius*. A range of more exotic Mediterranean species included jacaranda, canary date palm and date palm, lemon and orange trees, pepper tree, mimosa, rubber tree, oleander and prickly pear.

A list of flowers and other plants noted on the holiday, compiled by Jumbo Burrough, is available from the Honeyguide office. The above are some highlights from these notes.

HOLIDAY BIRD LIST

Little grebe	Turtle dove	Greenfinch
Cory's shearwater	Scop's owl	Goldfinch
Mediterranean shearwater	Alpine swift	Linnet
Cormorant	Swift	Crossbill
Shag	Pallid swift	Cirl bunting
Bittern	Hoopoe	Corn bunting
Night heron	Wryneck	Ortolan bunting
Little bittern	Short-toed lark	Reed bunting
Squacco heron	Thekla lark	
Cattle egret	Sand martin	Total: 112
Little egret	Crag martin	
Grey heron	Swallow	
Purple heron	House martin	
Shelduck	Tawny pipit	
Wigeon	Tree pipit	
Mallard	Red-throated pipit	
Gadwall	Yellow wagtail (various races)	
Teal	White wagtail	
Garganey	Wren	
Shoveler	Dunnock	
Red-crested pochard	Nightingale	
Pochard	Redstart	
Red kite	Whinchat	
Black vulture	Stonechat	
Marsh harrier	Wheatear	
Booted eagle	Rock thrush	
Osprey	Blue rock thrush	
Kestrel	Blackbird	
Peregrine	Cetti's warbler	
Quail	Fan-tailed warbler	
Water rail	Moustached warbler	
Moorhen	Great reed warbler	
Coot	Subalpine warbler	
Black-winged stilt	Marmora's warbler	
Avocet	Sardinian warbler	
Little ringed plover	Whitethroat	
Kentish plover	Garden warbler	
Little stint	Blackcap	
Curlew sandpiper	Willow warbler	
Snipe	Bonelli's warbler (heard)	
Spotted redshank	Chiffchaff	
Redshank	Firecrest	
Wood sandpiper	Spotted flycatcher	
Common sandpiper	Pied flycatcher	
Black-headed gull	Blue tit	
Audouin's gull	Great tit	
Yellow-legged (herring) gull	Woodchat shrike	
Gull-billed tern	Raven	
Whiskered tern	Starling	
Black tern	House sparrow	
Woodpigeon	Chaffinch	
Rock dove	Serin	