

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich NR7 0PX

Telephone: 01603 300552

www.honeyguide.co.uk E-mail: chris@honeyguide.co.uk



Autumn Birds in Mallorca
1 – 8 October 1994

**Autumn in Mallorca
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List of participants

Peter and Jean Maynard
Tim Parsons
Misha Saunders
Phil Long
Gerry and Phyll Wills
Quentin Mair
John Fowler
Ken Palmer

Leaders: Ivan Nethercoat and Chris Durdin

Illustrations by Rob Hume
Front cover: hoopoe

Report written by Ivan Nethercoat and the flowers section by Chris Durdin.

During the week the group was able to contribute to the conservation of the wildlife we enjoyed by way of a donation of £320 to the Grup Balear d'Ornitologia i Defensa de la Naturalesa (GOB). This was made up of £25 per person plus £20 from Margaret Biggs who had booked to come but had to pull out due to indifferent health.

This is 'serious money' for a small but hardworking organisation like GOB, as Graham Hearl of GOB put it. There is a thank you letter from GOB at the end of this report. We had the pleasure of Graham and Irene Hearl's company several times during the week.

Autumn in Mallorca 1 – 8 October 1994

October 1994 was the first year that Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays took a group to the island of Mallorca in autumn. This is the perfect place to experience the excitement of migration with a hint of the exotic. Here moorhens swim alongside purple gallinules, and autumn lady's tresses grow beneath circling black vultures.

The weather too can be an experience, from wild storms to a beautiful sunrise in a matter of hours. This group experienced most bits in between as well but it all added to the week and made sure that nothing was too predictable.

Thank you for your company and for making Honeyguide's first autumn trip to Mallorca so enjoyable. We hope to see you on other holidays in the future.

Best wishes

Ivan Nethercoat and Chris Durdin

Saturday 1 October – Heathrow to Puerto Pollensa

British Midland flight BD163 took us from Heathrow to Palma. Over the island the plane approached the airport from the west giving everybody a wonderful view of the dramatic mountain range that forms the northern edge of the island and the town of Puerto Pollensa, the town that was to be our base for the next seven days.

After picking up our self drive vehicles, a minibus and an Astra, after an hour's drive the group arrived at the Hotel Pollentia in the early afternoon. This allowed us time to unpack and make a short trip to the nearby marsh of Albufereta. The weather had changed to rain but the marsh has an abandoned house with balcony that overlooks the lake so we stayed dry and comfortable as we watched marsh harrier, little egret and a flock of tree sparrows.

Sunday 2 October - Boquer Valley and Albufera

Little egrets and Audouin's gull were in front of the hotel before the group assembled for the drive to the Boquer valley. This famous valley is very close to the town and was to become a regular site to visit before breakfast for a few die hard birdwatchers. Today it was again a little damp but still a very pleasant walk. The morning was spent here looking for any migrant birds that may have been channelled down the valley on their long journey south and while these were not present in large numbers the resident hoopoe and elusive migrant wrynecks proved very obliging and gave very good views for everybody through the telescopes.

The afternoon was spent at the Parc Natural de S'Albufera, a 4000 acre wetland reserve a few miles from the hotel. The reserve had been very dry all summer and had only recently had any quantity of rain. This meant that the pools had little food for waders and herons so the main areas of the reserve were a little quiet. The first hide did allow superb views of an osprey; perched right in front of us it looked magnificent through the telescopes, especially for those of us who had not seen the bird before.



Osprey over little egret and black-winged stilt at Albufera

The water treatment works at the back of the reserve had an unusual visitor in the form of a lesser black-backed gull. It has to be said that the black-necked grebes, ruff, hoopoe, Cetti's warbler and whinchat proved more popular but for Mallorca the gull is a rare bird and was of great interest to the locals on the island.

Monday 3 October - Formentor Peninsula and Casas Vellas

The north east tip of the island has a lighthouse perched atop spectacular cliffs. It is this piece of land that southbound migrants first head for.

The Formentor peninsular was our destination, both the lighthouse and a farm halfway along the peninsular famous for migrant birds – Casas Vellas.

The lighthouse is at the end of a dramatic road and overlooks the breeding cliffs of the beautifully aerodynamic Eleanor's falcon. These birds deliberately breed late so as to feed their young on migrant birds trying to reach land and from here they can be seen playing on the wind, perfectly at home on the strong updraughts above the cliffs.

Casas Vellas is an area of open fields and fig orchards. A welcome refuelling stop for migrants and an interesting area of woodland and open hillside. Here were lots of redstarts 'flycatching' alongside spotted and pied flycatchers, wheatears, resident and very obliging firecrests and Mallorcan race of crossbill.

Most of the group went to the regular RSPB/GOB meeting after supper.

Tuesday 4 October - Cuber and Mortixt

The minibus left for the day for repairs and was replaced by a luxurious Ford Scorpio with all mod cons. As this left us with fewer car seats than people, Irene Hearl and her car joined us to fill the gap.

A clear bright day and a trip to the mountains. The Sierra de Tramuntana forms the northern coast of the island and is home to many endangered plants and animals including one Europe's scarcest and largest bird, the elusive black vulture.

Within a few minutes drive from Pollensa the road starts to climb and twist its way into the hills. The first stop allowed a dramatic view back toward the town and the spectacular valley we had just left. This was made all the more dramatic by a low flying booted eagle that came to look at what we were doing while a cirl bunting sang from a nearby bush.

Further on, the viewpoint at Escorca proved an eventful stop with stunning scenery, a glimpse of booted eagle and black vulture, a chance for some of the party to sample the local liquor and for others to take their chances leaping out of the way of a bus and onto a wall with a very big drop on the other side. So with adrenalin and alcohol in our veins we moved on to our main destination, the reservoir at Cuber.

This area is a magnet for birds of prey and allows easy walking in the shadow of Mallorca's largest mountain. Birdwatching in the mountains is always unpredictable and can quickly change from being very exciting to very quiet. Today we had both extremes but everyone eventually had good views of the black vulture with the added bonus of watching Eleanora's falcon and osprey bathing in the reservoir. There were good views of the migrant rock thrush on the pylons as we walked back, plus the resident blue rock thrush and peregrine falcon.

Swallowtail butterflies were also seen and Chris persuaded Quentin to exercise his bad back and photograph a nice specimen of autumn lady's tresses.

This was followed by a visit to the quiet valley of Mortixt, a path between ancient olives making a landscape that time seems to have forgotten. There were scores of the pink merendera bursting from their bulbs beneath the rocky soil, strange tree spurges and more autumn lady's tresses spiralling delicately.

Wednesday 5 October – free morning and return to Albufera

A very wet and windy night carried on into the morning. It was market day in Puerto Pollensa which several of the group visited in the morning. Others returned to Casas Vellas in the hope that the rough weather had brought down some tired migrants. Venturing out in fairly heavy rain it became obvious that this was the week of the redstart. Fields that had one or two birds in a few days earlier were now host to many more, exact numbers were not counted as the weather did not really improve, we just got very wet!

Lunch at the hotel gave a little more time for the weather to improve and in the afternoon the group set out for Albufera marsh again, this time to head for a different hide. The Xisco Ilya hide is at the far northern edge of the park, about a mile and a half from the centre. Walking over the main bridge in the park on route to the hide we stopped to look down the canal and were greeted with a wonderful purple gallinule feeding in the open. These birds were re-introduced to the park a few years ago and have apparently done very well but they remain generally elusive and are easily lost in 4000 acres of reedbed. The birds we saw had no rings on their legs and were presumably offspring of the re-introduced birds.

The rest of the day was spent at the hide, this time with a good number of birds. Highlights were the very obliging marsh harriers and osprey and an unexpected great white egret. A little bittern flew down the path in front of us on our walk to the hide but was not seen by everyone.

After dark, back in Puerto Pollensa, a scops owl was found near the police station.

Thursday 6 October – Cabo Salinas and Salinas de Levante

Another windy day but clear for our trip to the furthest point south on the island. The habitat here is very different to the north. Here the land is flat and dry with stony fields and scrub amongst small arable fields. The road to the lighthouse cuts through a good selection of this habitat and often allows good views of migrant birds on either side of the road. The first stop on the road and five stone-curlews flew across the field, a wonderful start to the day. Thekla larks were singing very close to the road, and Eleanor's falcons were flying overhead. Heliotrope, autumn squill and madder were also added to the flower list on our way to the lighthouse and lunch.

The headland proving quiet for birds, we made our way on to the Salinas de Levante. This is a large area of old and working saltpans and an excellent area for waders and migrants. Here were flocks of 50+ black-winged stilts and 23 flamingos, as well as ruff, wood and green sandpiper, marsh harrier and a magnificent *Argiope* spider.

Friday 7 October – Formentor & Casas Vellas, or Albufereta

Our last full day. Before breakfast three of the party headed for nearby Cala san Vicente, a small holiday resort on the north coast that is often a good sight for Marmora's warbler. None appeared this morning but we were rewarded with a young red-backed shrike.

After breakfast the party split into botanists and birdwatchers. The botanists headed for the Albufereta and mountains and the birdwatchers to the Formentor peninsula.

Along the Formentor the first stop was the Mirador, a dramatic watchpoint on the coast giving dramatic views both along the Formentor and back toward Puerto Pollensa. From here one looks down on crag martin and Eleanor's falcon, while on the ground were some good specimens of *Arum pictum* in flower.

From here we went on to a small lay-by alongside the Formentor road that is below the nest site of some Eleanor's falcons. Excellent views of the birds through the telescopes and dramatic flying displays rewarded us before moving on to the lighthouse. The car park here was very busy and not very conducive to birdwatching but we checked out the bushes on the headland before moving back to the quieter and more relaxed Casas Vellas.

Today's fall at Casas was not of redstarts but chiffchaffs and blackcaps with a few willow warblers. The feeling in the air was one of excitement; with all the migrants around it felt as though anything could turn up. Here too were wheatears, lots of black redstarts, a pair of very obliging hoopoes as well as tree pipit and the first of the winter song thrushes.

A quick stop on the way back at the Mirador finally tracked down the amazingly elusive Marmora's warbler.

Meanwhile, at the Albufereta, the delicate flowers of *Narcissus serotinus* among the pink of merendera were captured on film. There was another osprey, and a quail exploded from under our feet, a real piece of luck. Sea daffodils were flowering or in seed along the edge of the beach.

Graham and Irene Hearl joined us for supper this evening. Following supper, there was another meeting at our hotel for the birdwatchers on the island. As this was hosted by Graham in his role as the honorary rep for the RSPB and for the Balearic conservation organisation, GOB, we took the opportunity to present your donation to help conservation on the island. Thanks to Quentin for making an excellent presentation on behalf of the group.

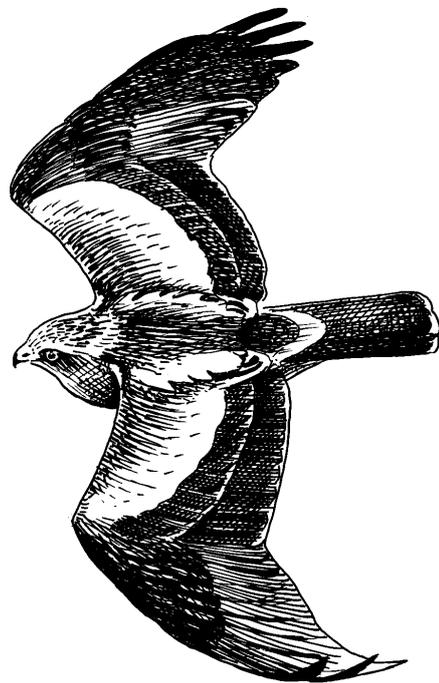
Saturday 8 October

Our last day. It turns out that our red-backed shrike is a very good record for the island and a description is required for GOB. A quick trip before breakfast allowed three of us to get some more views on which to base a more accurate description.

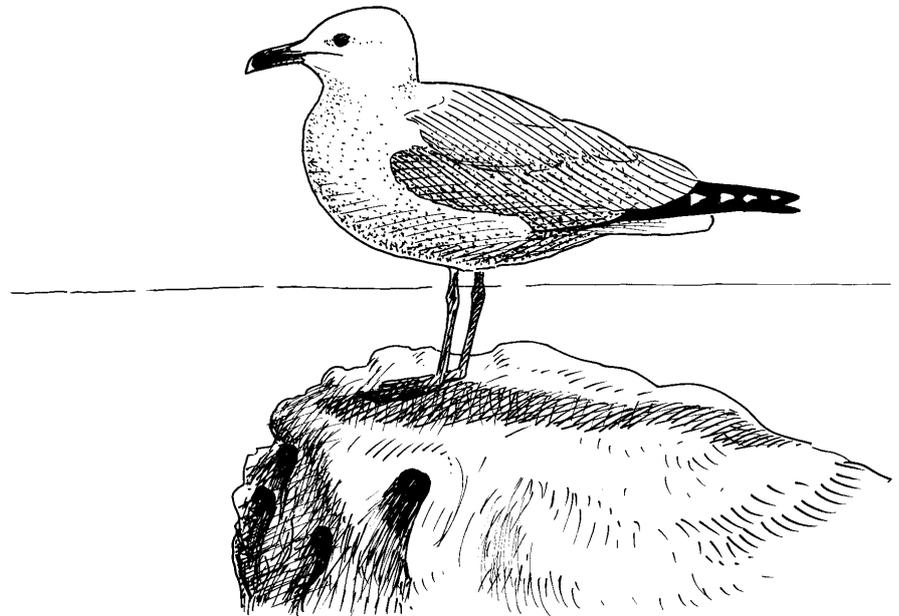
After breakfast it was time to pack suitcases and head for the airport.

Birds seen 1 – 8 October 1994

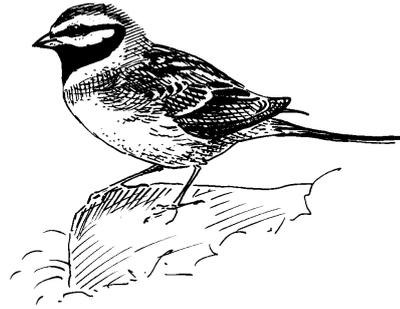
Little grebe
Black-necked grebe
Cory's shearwater
Cormorant
Shag
Little bittern
Cattle egret
Little egret
Great white egret
Grey heron
Greater flamingo
Teal
Mallard
Pochard
Honey buzzard
Black vulture
Marsh harrier
Sparrowhawk
Booted eagle (*right*)
Osprey
Kestrel
Eleanora's falcon
Peregrine
Red-legged partridge
Quail
Water rail
Moorhen
Coot
Oystercatcher
Black-winged stilt
Stone-curlew
Little ringed plover
Ringed plover
Kentish plover
Little stint
Dunlin
Ruff



Snipe
Spotted redshank
Redshank
Greenshank
Green sandpiper
Wood sandpiper
Common sandpiper
Black-headed gull
Audouin's gull (*right*)
Lesser black-backed gull
Herring gull
Rock dove
Woodpigeon
Scops owl
Kingfisher
Hoopoe
Wryneck
Thekla lark
Skylark
Sand martin
Crag martin
Swallow
House martin
Tree pipit
Meadow pipit
Wren
Robin
Black redstart
Redstart
Stonechat
Wheatear
Rock thrush
Blue rock thrush
Blackbird
Song thrush
Cetti's warbler
Fan-tailed warbler
Reed warbler
Marmora's warbler
Sardinian warbler
Garden warbler
Blackcap
Chiffchaff
Willow warbler
Firecrest
Spotted flycatcher
Pied flycatcher
Blue tit
Great tit
Red-backed shrike
Raven
Starling
House sparrow
Tree sparrow
Chaffinch



Serin
 Greenfinch
 Goldfinch
 Linnet
 Crossbill
 Cirl bunting (*right*)
 Reed bunting
 Corn bunting



Autumn flowers in Mallorca 1-8 October 1994

This section of the report gives a flavour for how the autumn has a special interest for botanists visiting the Mediterranean. Most in the list were in flower during our visit, and we also saw a range of cultivated flowers and shrubs typical of the Mediterranean such as bougainvillea, jacaranda, hibiscus, lantana, trumpet creepers and common morning glory *Ipomoea purpurea*. The list is very incomplete for trees.

Names follow those in Dr Elspeth Huxley's Illustrated Flora of Mallorca, with alternative English names or Latin names from other references in brackets.

Ferns

Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*
 Rustyback *Asplenium ceterach*

Flowers, trees and shrubs

Phoenician juniper *Juniperus phoenicea* Cabo Salinas
 Sea purslane *Halimione portulacoides* Albufereta, Salinas de Levante
 Saltwort (Prickly saltwort) *Salsola soda* fields near Salinas de Levante
 Maiden's bower (virgin's bower, fragrant clematis) *Clematis flammula*
 Yellow horned poppy *Glaucium flavum* On the beach at Cabo Salinas, seed and leaves only
 Sweet alison *Lobularia maritima* Albufereta, and common on roadsides in the south of the island
 (Wall pennywort / navelwort) *Umbilicus* sp. Lots of leaves but flowers well over so not identified to one of the two species on Mallorca
 Carob or locust bean *Ceratonia siliqua* a tree was in the Boquer valley.
 (Bird's-foot restharrow) *Ononis ornithopodioides* a sticky yellow restharrow
 Tree spurge *Euphorbia dendroides* Mortixt
 Gum mastic *Pistacia lentiscus* Boquer valley and elsewhere
 Daphne gnidium Cuber, and in flower at Mortixt
 (Balearic St John's Wort) *Hypericum balearicum* Mortixt and elsewhere, this shrub was not always in flower.
 (Squirting cucumber) *Ecballium elaterium* Boquer valley
 Prickly pear *Opuntia ficus-indica*
 Pomegranate *Punica granatum* Near the start of the Boquer valley
 (A willowherb) *Epilobium tetragonum* subsp *tournefortii*
 A large yellow umbellifer, possibly *Ridolfia segetum* Albufereta
Erica multiflora this shrub heather was seen mainly from the vehicles
 Sea lavender *Limonium minutum* Salinas de Levante
 Wild madder *Rubia peregrina* over walls in the south of the island, berries only.
 (Pink convolvulus) *Convolvulus cantabrica* Albufereta
 Heliotrope *Heliotropium europaeum* roadsides
 Vervain *Verbena officinalis* roadsides
 Henbane *Hyoscyamus albus* Cab Salinas

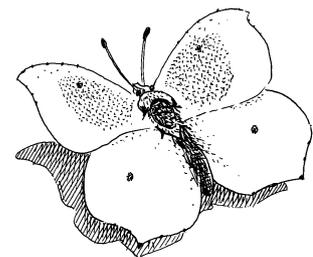
Black nightshade *Solanum nigrum* Albufera, in the car park
 (Verbascum sp) *Verbascum sinuatum* Albufereta
 (Scabious sp) *Scabiosa maritima* behind the Hotel
 (Southern daisy) *Bellis sylvestris* Cuber
 Golden sarnphire *Inula crithmoides* Albufereta
Dittichia viscosa this aster-like composite was common at the base of the Boquer Valley and at Albufera. Amazingly it is not illustrated in Blamey & Grey-Wilson.
 Field marigold *Calendula arvensis* roadsides in the south of the island
 Spanish oyster plant *Scolymus hispanicus* Cuber
 Chicory *Cichorium intybus*
Merendera filifolia common at Albufereta and Mortixt
 Sea squill *Urginea maritima* large spikes everywhere
 (Autumn squill) *Scilla autumnalis* in stone-curlew fields in the south of the island
Asparagus albus
Asparagus stipularis (*A. horridus*)
 Butcher's broom *Ruscus aculeatus*
 Sarsaparilla (Common smilax) *Smilax aspera* spiny shrub on hillsides
Narcissus serotinus This little gem of a daffodil was common at Albufereta
 Sea daffodil *Pancratium maritimum* at the top of the beach by the road alongside Albufereta and nearby
Crocus cambessedesii Cuber
 Dwarf fan palm *Chamaerops humilis* widespread
 Painted (autumn) arum *Arum pictum*
 Autumn lady's tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* Cuber and Mortixt

Grasses (very incomplete)

Ampelodesmos mauritanica many large clumps at Cuber
 Giant reed *Arundo donax* common
 Common reed *Phragmites australis* Albufera
 Bermuda grass *Cynodon dactylon* in the lawn at the Hotel Pollentia

Butterflies – a short list!

Swallowtail and cleopatra: Cuber
 Painted lady, red admiral, Lang' s short-tailed blue: Cabo Salinas



Cleopatra



Grup Balear d'Ornitologia i Defensa de la Naturalesa

L'ASSOCIACIÓ ECOLOGISTA DE LES BALEARS

DECLARADA PEL CONSELL DE MINISTRES D'UTILITAT PÚBLICA
MEMBRE DELS SEGÜENTS ORGANISMES D'ÀMBIT INTERNACIONAL:
UNIÓ INTERNACIONAL PER A LA CONSERVACIÓ DE LA NATURALES (IUCN)
OFICINA EUROPEA DEL MEDI AMBIENT (OEMA)

Verí, 1, 3r 07001 PALMA DE MALLORCA Tel.: (971) 72 11 05 Fax: (971) 71 13 75

Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays
36 Thunder Lane
Thorpe St. Andrew
Norwich NR7 0PX

22- November-1994

Dear Chris,

Re Honeyguide tour to Mallorca October 1994

We would like to express our gratitude for the extremely generous donation from Honeyguide and your clients resulting from your recent tour of Mallorca.

G.O.B. is a highly active but small conservation organisation and therefore donations such as this help enable G.O.B. to carry on the work of trying to protect the Mallorcan environment from the excesses of development and other pressures both commercial and natural.

The summer of 1994 in Mallorca was unusually hot, even for the Mediterranean, and resulted in a lot of areas being ravaged by fires. One of these areas included the G.O.B.'s only reserve of La Trapa near Andratx, all 75 Hectares of which were destroyed. Your valuable donation will help towards the new La Trapa project.

We trust Honeyguide will continue their association with Mallorca and look forward to their next visit.

Un afectuoso saludo de

Graham Hearl G.O.B./R.S.P.B. Liaison Officer.

GRUP BALEAR
D'ORNITOLOGIA
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