



Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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**Menorca 'Fam' Trip
22 – 26 October 2015**

This is a record of a familiarisation ['fam'] trip to Menorca kindly provided free of charge by the Spanish and Menorcan Tourist Boards. There have been many previous Honeyguide wildlife holidays on Menorca, on which I have been leader several times, including in October 2013 (and the same was true for some other participants), but it was still a pleasure to revisit and have the opportunity to see some new places and unfamiliar parts of places I already knew. Several of the 'new' sites would be very good to incorporate, especially Son Saura del Nord and the circuit of Es Grau.

Report and photos by Chris Gibson.

Cover photos

Top: Cap de Cavallería looking east, and lichens on rock at Es Grau.

Middle: Greater Flamingo - one of three at Fornells; Migrant Robin - numerous everywhere; Black Redstart - an abundant late autumn migrant.

Bottom: Friar's Cowl *Arisarum vulgare* and Audouin's Gull, Mahon Harbour, almost too close to photograph.

My fellow participants: Jan Tomlinson – Gourmet Birds, Bob Buckler – Wingspan Bird Tours, Ian Nicholson – Naturetrek, and Tremaine Moore – Saga

This was the first time that the tourist boards have run a birdwatching fam trip on Menorca. My impression is that they are ramping up their efforts to attract 'high quality' tourism based around the natural qualities of the island: although this has always been a feature of Menorcan tourist industry especially since its declaration as a Biosphere Reserve 20 years ago, the impending (next summer) consideration by UNESCO for World Heritage status (based around archaeological features) is giving an added boost.

Such was the interest in this new venture we were featured on both Menorca TV and in the local paper. The TV crew interviewed a couple of us, which gave me the chance to say not only why we choose to go there, but also to highlight the essential differences between Honeyguide and other companies, in particular the contributions we make to local conservation efforts.

Our guide for most of the time was Javi Mendez, a local independent bird and walking guide (Menorca Walking Birds www.menorcawalkingbirds.com). He was excellent, knowledgeable about birds, plants and most other wildlife, engaging and helpful, and we are happy to recommend Javi to anyone who needs a guide while on a private visit to Menorca.

We stayed at the Hotel Artiem Audax in Cala Galdana, a seven-storey spa hotel on the western edge of town by the water. This is most definitely not a 'Honeyguide hotel', although we were treated very well in the short time we were there.

The weather and timing: October is a lovely time on Menorca. For us it was warm, often sunny, typically around 24°C (a little higher in full sun) and 18-20°C at night. Rather breezy one day, otherwise calm. A few spots of rain on the first morning and last afternoon, with torrential rain overnight before we left. However, the previous week had been very wet and stormy.

However if we go again in the autumn, the first half of October is preferable to the second. On this late trip, there were fewer invertebrates and flowers, and no real display of the 'second spring' despite the previous rains. Birds were similar to earlier trips, with big migratory movements of thrushes, robins and blackcaps, a good range of water birds, but fewer sub-Saharan migrants. The main difference between early and late October was the huge arrival of Black Redstarts at the end of the month.

Day 1 – 22 October

Mahon – walking tour with Alberto Fernandez (Menorcan Tourist Board) and a boat trip around the harbour. **Son Saura del Nord** – a new site to me: a lovely wetland close to Son Parc, and one of Javi's favourite sites. Easily accessible with short walk along the Cami de Cavalls, but needs to be visited early morning or late afternoon to avoid looking into the sun. Extensive reedbed with open pools which apparently hold water most of the year. Lots of calling from Purple Gallinules while we were there; also good for Zitting Cisticolas and Great White Egrets. Definitely worth a couple of hours at least at any time of year. On the approach by road, there is a permanent pond in the golf course – easy to stop, and worth a look: there were several Red-crested Pochards among the Mallards and Coots.

Day 2 – 23 October

S'Albufera des Grau is a familiar site, but Javi's local knowledge expanded the opportunities for me. We parked just after the Interpretation Centre (where we were shown the promo video – not especially interesting for Honeyguiders I think, unless it happened to be raining, but toilets welcome, as is the labelled collection of endemic plants in the garden). Visited the eastern hide first, where we have been before; then out to the western hide and followed a circularish tour to the most inland point of the lagoon and back through the Shangri-La shrubland (the Santa Madrona route, leaflet available). Easy walk on tracks, total of maybe 4km and gives better views of birds than we have had previously, especially given that not looking into the sun. Most interesting birds were Osprey, several Ferruginous Ducks and a Red-knobbed Coot, which from its neck collar comes from a captive breeding scheme in Doñana, via an introduction to Albufera in Mallorca.



Wetland at Son Saura del Nord; male ferruginous ducks with a coot

Cami de Tordonell: minor road between Fornells Road and Favaritx Road

Javi introduced us to a lovely quiet side road, about four kilometres long, running through a typical agricultural landscape, and apparently the best site on the island for Red-footed Falcons; also Quail, Tawny Pipit etc. Not easy to park for walking, apart from on the bend about 300m before its junction with the Favaritx road.

Fornells Salt Pans

I have always looked over these on the approach to Fornells, and occasionally stopped. We were taken along the public shore route (accessed from the first right turn on arriving at Fornells) to see them more closely. Good for egrets, Kentish Plovers and other waders, with 3 Greater Flamingos just offshore. But would not recommend for a group – some squelchy mud and rock scrambling, lots of biting flies, and a large, loose German Shepherd.

Tirant – a very familiar site to me, unusual only because it was holding water (and birds): on my previous autumn visits it has been very dry and birdless. Torrential storms in early September were apparently the reason.

Cap de Cavallería – another familiar site, but a useful walk eastwards from the point. We have always gone west, but the easterly route is less heavily trampled and gives excellent views of the cliffs flanking Fornells Harbour. Useful to note for autumn trips the abundance of *Arum pictum* (right), quite a lot in flower, immediately seaward of the lighthouse wall. The café/ecomuseum at the start of the peninsula has closed down, but a new one has been established in the lighthouse buildings. Although it was closed when we were there, it will be a useful rest point: the sign says entry to the interpretation centre is €3, opening times May & October 10:00-15:00; April, open by request at Es Mercadal Town Hall. Not clear whether the café is open any differently; presumably that will be free to get in. We were there until sunset, giving spectacular views west along the north coast.



Binimel-la – although nearly dark, we stopped in here to pick up those on the horse-riding fam trip. Javi talked me through the walk there and along to Cala Pregonda, which sounds really exciting, especially botanically. It is covered in the new flower book (see page 6).

Addaia Lagoons/Mongofre Nou – although we didn't visit I discussed options with Javi. It seems access to the private part is still unreliable or difficult. Our more recent approach of following the Cami de Cavalls to the west seems the best, but Javi suggested that the point we usually reach is only a few hundred metres from Addaia, and a very good bar. It could therefore be a good option to take the group as far as that, then dash back for the bus (maybe 20 mins walk then 10 mins drive) – this would avoid the group having to endure the sometimes very bumpy road more than once.

Day 3 – 24 October

S'Algar – we had a few minutes while waiting for our boat to look at the Punta des Rafalet, to the east of S'Algar harbour. Windswept limestone headland, probably quite rich florally, and worth a poke into in spring for migrants and flowers, and autumn for migrants. A good vantage point for watching shearwaters.

Illa de l'Aire – a special trip for us, to the offshore island, via a 20 minute diving-boat trip out of S'Algar. Little infrastructure on the island, just an unmanned lighthouse, a central track, and a hut where the ringing station is based.

Ringling migrants takes place April-May and Sept to mid-Nov, with some targeted summer ringing of Audouin's Gulls etc. We had a ringing demonstration for an hour, with numerous Robins and Song Thrushes, and a few Blackbirds, Blackcaps, Black Redstart, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest and Firecrest.

The real speciality of the island, the all-black Lilford's Wall Lizard, was extremely abundant and relatively tame everywhere (photo in wildlife lists).



Firecrest ringed at Illa de l'Aire; Illa de l'Aire looking back to Punta Prima

Exciting though this four hours was, I would not recommend it as a Honeyguide destination – the boat requires significant organisation as it is used primarily for divers; getting on the boat at the S'Algar end needs a bit of agility; the crossing even on a quiet day like ours could be rather swelly and upset some travellers; not everyone enjoys ringing; and apart from the lizard there is nothing that cannot be seen elsewhere with less effort. If there happened to be a keen ringer or herpetologist in a group, then in theory it could be offered, but I would suggest contracting Javi to organise and lead that half-day excursion.

Cala des Rafalet – the itinerary had us down for a walking tour of Binibequer/Punta Prima in the hands of Natalya from the Tourist Board (Javi had other commitments), but we rebelled and persuaded her to take us to a site recommended by Javi earlier. What a delight! A short track walk north along the Cami de Cavalls from just outside S'Algar brought us to a hole in the wall, signed to the beach, and that track took us down a beautiful wooded ravine to the most bijoux beach, surrounded by rocky cliffs. A real hidden gem, with a wow factor; potentially good for migrants, and flowers in spring (including *Cyclamen balearicum*). The pond on the right just after the gate after the driveable part of the approach track is a breeding site for Balearic Green Toad, and the verges have a good range of orchids. And only ten minutes' drive from Matchani Gran, so a potential addition to the pre-breakfast walks.

Cala Galdana – we asked to get back to the hotel before it was completely dark, so I took the opportunity to explore the paths around the hotel. Just past the hotel, the road ends in a car park, from which 120 solid wood steps take you into the clifftop pine forest. Around the top there is a circular walk of about 1.5km with other tracks radiating off it. Apparently Naturetrek goes there in spring, and it is good for orchids and other flowers, though usually quiet bird-wise. Lovely views over the cove from the track as well; the Cami de Cavalls runs close to the circular route from just outside the hotel, but apparently the two path systems do not meet up until quite a lot further on, so there is no real way to avoid the big staircase.

Day 4 – 25 October

Son Bou – another familiar site but one to which again Javi added a new dimension. In the past we have explored beach and east end of the marsh from the beach car park, then gone round to the car park at Torre Soli Nou to explore the back marsh. With Javi, we started at the latter and walked right round the back and west of the marsh, and along the beach to the beach car park where the bus met us, an attractive, diverse walk of maybe 5km, taking in some lovely pools and habitats I was previously unaware of. I would be inclined to try the same with a group, leaving them in the beach café while I walked the 15mins or so back by the direct route to collect the bus.



Cala des Rafalet; Broad Scarlet; *Lysimachia minoricensis* at Pas d'en Revull, the only known plant in the wild in the world.

'Upper Algendar Gorge' – actually down the Pas d'en Revull (on the Cami Real), into a side-branch of Algendar Gorge, then down to the main gorge, before it becomes private. Again familiar from my past two trips, but Javi pointed out many of the endemic plants on the way, including the only example of *Lysimachia minoricensis* known in the wild. Wonderful landscape, although the path not in good condition after the rains a couple of months ago: as part of the Cami Real, it will probably be restored over the winter. An essential visit for botanists, as the main concentration of non-socarrell endemics on the island. The approach road from Ferreries is a bit rough on the last couple of hundred metres before the car park; however there is a suitable parking area before it gets rough opposite the entrance into Pas d'en Revull.

Resources

We were given a copy of an exciting new book on the **Plants of Menorca (Pere Fraga i Arguimbau et al, 2014)**. While it is somewhat idiosyncratically laid out, and not a critical flora (it doesn't for example deal in sufficient detail with *Limonium*), it is the best single volume available. Unfortunately it is not for sale – it was produced as an educational tool under the EU LIFE-Reneix programme. It also contains a number of botanical excursions, several of which could be incorporated in future trips.

An additional idea

Our typical April trips, with a focus on migrant birds and spring flowers, would benefit from the inclusion of some of the new sites/walks.

Another good option is a later spring tour, mid-end May. This would focus on the summer birds, insects and especially the endemic plants of the island. This would be an itinerary taking in a few of the old favourite sites, but mainly based around the new sites/routes, which would produce a wide range of the most exciting endemics, especially of the gorges and the exposed headlands.

Wildlife seen on the fam trip

BIRDS

Little grebe
Great crested grebe
Mediterranean shearwater
Cory's shearwater
Cormorant
Mediterranean shag
Gannet
Cattle egret
Little egret
Great white egret
Grey heron
Greater flamingo
Wigeon
Gadwall
Mallard
Teal
Pintail
Shoveler
Ferruginous duck
Pochard
Red-crested pochard
Red kite
Egyptian vulture
Marsh harrier
Booted eagle
Osprey
Common kestrel
Peregrine
Purple gallinule
Water rail
Moorhen

Coot
Red-knobbed coot
Stone-curlew
Lapwing
Kentish plover
Little ringed plover
Ringed plover
Snipe
Jack snipe
Greenshank
Common sandpiper
Green sandpiper
Dunlin
Audouin's gull
Black-headed gull
Yellow-legged gull
Sandwich tern
Rock dove/feral pigeon
Woodpigeon
Collared dove
Scops owl
Kingfisher
Hoopoe
Skylark
Thekla lark
Swallow
House martin
Crag martin
Water pipit
Meadow pipit

Grey wagtail
White wagtail
Robin
Black redstart
Stonechat
Blue rock thrush
Blackbird
Song thrush
Mistle thrush
Cetti's warbler
Zitting cisticola
Sardinian warbler
Blackcap
Chiffchaff
Willow warbler
Firecrest
Goldcrest
Great tit
Raven
Starling
House sparrow
Chaffinch
Greenfinch
Siskin
Goldfinch
Linnet
Corn bunting

REPTILES

European pond terrapin – abandoned nest
Italian wall lizard

Lilford's wall lizard
black form from Illa de l'Aire



MAMMALS

Black rat – nibbled pine cones
 Rabbit - droppings
 Pine marten - droppings
 Pipistrelle sp.

AMPHIBIANS

Balearic green toad - calling
 Stripeless tree-frog – calling

WILD PLANTS (F – flowers; S – seeds or fruits)

<i>Adiantum capillus-veneris</i>	<i>Digitalis dubia</i>	<i>Pistacia lentiscus</i> S
<i>Allium commutatum</i> S	<i>Dittrichia viscosa</i> F	<i>Plantago crassifolia</i> F
<i>Mammaranthus retroflexus</i> F	<i>Dracunculus muscivorus</i>	<i>Plantago lagopus</i> F
<i>Ampelodesmus</i>	<i>Ecballium elaterium</i> F S	<i>Polycarpon tetraphyllum</i>
<i>mauritanicus</i> S	<i>Equisetum ramosissimum</i>	<i>Portulaca oleracea</i> S
<i>Arbutus unedo</i> S	<i>Erica multiflora</i> F	<i>Posidonia oceanica</i>
<i>Arisarum simorrhinum</i> F	<i>Euphorbia characias</i>	<i>Punica granatum</i> F
<i>Arisarum vulgare</i> F	<i>Euphorbia dendroides</i>	<i>Quercus ilex</i> F
<i>Artemisia caeruleascens</i>	<i>Ferula communis</i>	<i>Reichardia tingitanus</i> F
<i>Arthrocnemum</i>	<i>Ficus carica</i> S	<i>Rhamnus alaternus</i> S
<i>macrostachyum</i>	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> F
<i>Arum italicum</i>	<i>Galactites tomentosa</i>	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> var.
<i>Arum pictum</i> F	<i>Glaucium flavum</i> F	<i>palaui</i> F
<i>Arundo donax</i> S	<i>Hedera helix</i> S	<i>Rubia peregrina</i> S
<i>Asparagus acutifolius</i>	<i>Heliotropium europaeum</i> F	<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i> F S
<i>Asparagus albus</i> S	<i>Hyoscyamus albus</i> F	<i>Salicornia ramossissimum</i>
<i>Asparagus horridus</i> S	<i>Juncus acutus</i> S	<i>Santolina</i>
<i>Asphodelus aestivus</i> S	<i>Juniperus oxycedrus</i> S	<i>chamaecyparissus</i>
<i>Asplenium sagittata</i>	<i>Juniperus phoenicea</i> F S	<i>ssp. magonica</i> F
<i>Aster tripolium</i> ssp.	<i>Lagurus ovatus</i> S	<i>Sarcocornia fruticosa</i>
<i>pannonicus</i> F	<i>Launaea cervicornis</i>	<i>Sarcocornia perennis</i>
<i>Atriplex portulacoides</i>	<i>Laurus nobilis</i>	<i>Scabiosa maritima</i> F
<i>Bellis sylvestris</i> F	<i>Limonium echioides</i>	<i>Scirpoides holoschoenus</i> S
<i>Borago officinalis</i>	<i>Limonium ferulaceum</i> F	<i>Sibthorpia africana</i>
<i>Cakile maritima</i> F S	<i>Limonium minutum</i>	<i>Silene vulgaris</i> F
<i>Calicotome spinosa</i>	<i>Lobularia maritima</i>	<i>Smilax aspera</i> F S
<i>Capparis spinosa</i>	<i>Lonicera implexa</i> S	<i>Solanum villosum</i> F S
<i>Carlina corymbosa</i> S	<i>Lotus cytisoides</i> F	<i>Sonchus tenerimus</i> F
<i>Chamaesyce serpens</i> F	<i>Lysimachia minoricensis</i> S	<i>Spergularia media</i> F
<i>Chelidonium majus</i>	<i>Mentha pulegium</i> F	<i>Sporobolus pungens</i>
<i>Chenopodium murale</i> F	<i>Mercurialis ambigua</i> F S	<i>Suaeda vera</i>
<i>Cichorium intybus</i> F	<i>Olea europaea</i> S	<i>Thapsia gymnesiaca</i>
<i>Clematis cirrhosa</i> F	<i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i>	<i>Typha domingensis</i> S
<i>Conyzanthus squamatus</i> F	<i>Pancratium maritimum</i> S	<i>Ulmus procera</i>
<i>Crithmum maritimum</i> F S	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i> F	<i>Urginea maritima</i> S
<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> F	<i>Phillyrea angustifolia</i> S	<i>Verbascum sinuatum</i>
<i>Daphne gnidium</i> F S	<i>Phillyrea latifolia</i> S	<i>Verbena officinalis</i> F
<i>Daucus hispanicus</i> S	<i>Pinus halepensis</i> S	<i>Viola stolonifera</i>

SOME NOTABLE CULTIVATED PLANTS

Aptenia cordifolia
Bougainvillea spectabilis
Hibiscus rosa-sinensis
Lantana camara
Mirabilis jalapa
Nerium oleander
Plumbago auriculata

FUNGI

cf Boletus sp. – a penny-bun
Septoria unedonis - Strawberry-tree leaf spot

BUGS AND BEASTIES

LEPIDOPTERA

Butterflies

Large white
Small white
Bath white
Clouded yellow
Cleopatra
Wall – poorly marked southern form
paramegaera
Speckled wood - south-western form *aegeria*
Red admiral
Painted lady
Long-tailed blue

Lang's short-tailed blue
Geranium bronze
Common blue – southern form *celina*
Southern brown argus
Small Copper

Macromoths

Hummingbird hawk-moth
Crimson speckled

Micromoths

Acalyptis minimella - Mines on the leaf of
Pistacia

Dragonflies & Damselflies

Lesser emperor
Migrant hawkler
Scarlet darter (Broad scarlet)
Common darter
Red-veined darter
Western willow emerald
Blue-tailed damselfly

Grasshoppers & Crickets

Egyptian locust *Anacridium aegyptiacum*
Red-winged grasshopper *Oedipoda miniata*
A conehead *Pyrgomorpha conica*
Mole-cricket *Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa* - calling
Field cricket *Gryllus bimaculatus* - calling

Mantises

Praying mantis *Mantis religiosa* – egg cases

True Bugs

Carpocoris mediterraneus atlanticus – an orange-brown shield-bug
Gonocerus insidiator - a box bug on *Pistacia*
Spilostethus pandurus - a red-and-black ground bug
Aploneura lentisci – an aphid bean gall on *Pistacia*
Forda marginata – an aphid twisted-leaf gall on *Pistacia*
Ceroplastes rubens – a pink wax scale-insect on *Pistacia*
Dactylopius cossus - a prickly-pear scale-insect
Prociphilus oleae – woolly aphid on *Olea*

Beetles

Blaps gigas - Large churchyard beetle
Chrysolina herbacea – a golden leaf-beetle
Coccinella septempunctata - 7-spot ladybird

Flies

cf *Clogmia albipunctata* - an owl-midge
Phytomyza phillyreae - mines on the leaves of *Phillyrea*
Machimus cf *rusticus* - a robber-fly
Dasineura asparagi or *turionum* – midge gall on *Asparagus horridus*
Asphondylia calycotomae – midge gall on *Calicotome spinosa*

Bees & Wasps

Xylocopa violacea Violet carpenter-bee
Polistes gallicus Paper wasp
Apis mellifera Honeybee
Silliana lhommei – a sawfly mine on *Phillyrea*

Spiders

Cyrtophora citricola Cage-web spider
Argiope trifasciata Large wasp-spider

Molluscs

Cerithium vulgatum - a marine gastropod



Egyptian locust