

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Discovering Menorca
5 – 12 April 2003

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Participants

Pete and Rita Peters	High Wycombe
Christine and Mick Daws	Wigmore, Kent
Kitty Blair	Edinburgh
Keith and Joyce Ball	Sale, Cheshire
Clive and Carol Rates	London
Mary Parrilla	Richmond, Surrey
Brian Morris	Lewes, Sussex
Rachel Hamilton	Suffolk

Leaders

Ivan Nethercoat and Robin Hamilton

Our hosts at Matchani Gran

Shaun and Jenny Murphy

The group was joined by John Seymour, historian and Menorcan resident, and by Santí Catchot from the Balearic Ornithological Group (GOB). Santí was there because, as with all Honeyguide holidays, £25 of the price of the holiday was put towards a conservation project, in this case for GOB's work in Menorca. The cheque for £300 given to GOB from this holiday brings the total to £4945 contributed to GOB by Honeyguide holidays in the Balearics. The total contributed to conservation projects in Europe from all Honeyguide holidays is now £29,800 (at the end of this holiday season). A thank-you letter from GOB appears at the end of this report.

This report was written by Ivan Nethercoat and Robin Hamilton.

Front cover illustration by Will Woodrow. Other illustrations by Rob Hume.

Discovering Menorca 5 – 12 April 2003

Saturday April 5: Arrival and Matchani Gran

It is always the case that one leaves the UK for the Mediterranean with thoughts of the weather, but when you are leaving the country in the grip of one of the warmest and sunniest springs for a long time those thoughts are heightened and images of your partner appearing on Holidays from Hell come to mind. There were some small dramas at Luton airport, juggling the contents of hand baggage to keep below the maximum of 5 kilos per person. A day-bag containing two telescopes was ruled out of order as overweight by the zealous check-in officer and when we cheerfully slung the telescopes over our shoulders she said 'You won't get that through security. They don't like anything that shape!' In the event, there was no trouble at all. Perhaps early morning just wasn't her best time!

So it was that we left Luton for Menorca. We arrived in bright sunshine greeted at Mahón Airport by a kestrel and the first of many yellow-legged gulls. There was a strong northerly wind blowing though, but Shaun, our genial (and shivering) host assured us that it was day 3 of a three-day *Tramuntana*, strong winds that regularly blow across the island from the north.

Matchani Gran is the epitome of customer service; we were immediately made to feel at home, welcome and relaxed by Shaun, Jenny, his wife and Susie, together with Rosie and Seamus, the dogs. Shaun's welcoming introduction was accompanied not only by complimentary drinks but also by the determined song of a Cetti's warbler, a flitting Sardinian warbler in the bushes and a timely fly-past by a hoopoe. After being escorted to our well-equipped rooms and given a few minutes to settle in we had a delicious introduction to Jenny's cooking. Then we were off, exploring the stony fields surrounding the farm. The fact that some of us were wearing most of the clothes we had brought did not deter our enthusiasm.

The soil here lies thin on top of limestone. Most of the fields are grazed but the first one has been denied to the sheep and donkeys to give the orchids and other spring flowers time to do their stuff before being digested. The immediate impact is from the drifts of asphodel now in full flower but we were quickly struck by the fact that the little daisies that were scattered through the meadow, just like a lawn at home, were in fact a delicate shade of pinkish-mauve. On close inspection they turned out to be a different species altogether, the annual daisy, *Bellis annua*. We quickly got our 'eyes in' and found that sawfly, mirror and yellow bee orchids all grew among the giant asphodel, together with tassel hyacinth, starry clover and Bermuda buttercup (not a buttercup at all, nor from Bermuda!). There was blue pimpernel too, the blue form of our scarlet pimpernel (we looked through a lens at the glistening hairs on the edge of the petals), the strange flower of friar's cowl and the tiny silvery rosettes of *Evax pygmaea*.

Birds were a little quiet but the wind also made it hard to keep a steady view. (We kept reminding ourselves of Shaun's promise that it only lasts three days!). Thekla lark, hoopoe, wheatear, linnet and stonechat all looked good in the bright sun and a stone-curlew briefly took to the air, giving us a view of its wild, gangling flight. Greenfinch, goldfinch and corn bunting were much in evidence, feeding on the tall asphodel stalks or singing from the bushes and wires. It was the insects however that proved most entertaining, from weirdly distended, flightless, oil beetles to an Egyptian locust and dung beetles, all seen well. The dung beetles were very common with several pairs showing great strength and determination in rolling their enormous dung balls through the vegetation.

We gathered in the sitting room to discuss the day's observations and then Shaun was master of the barbecue for the evening meal, delivering steaks cooked to perfection to suit all tastes.

It was a clear evening and the wind was apparently dying down so a few hardy souls followed Robin's enthusiasm onto the balcony to look at the rings of Saturn and the moons of Jupiter and to listen to scops owl. While the owl and the planets performed well the wind had not listened to Shaun and was still blowing with a very cool edge.



Sunday April 6: Son Bou and Torre d'en Gaumes

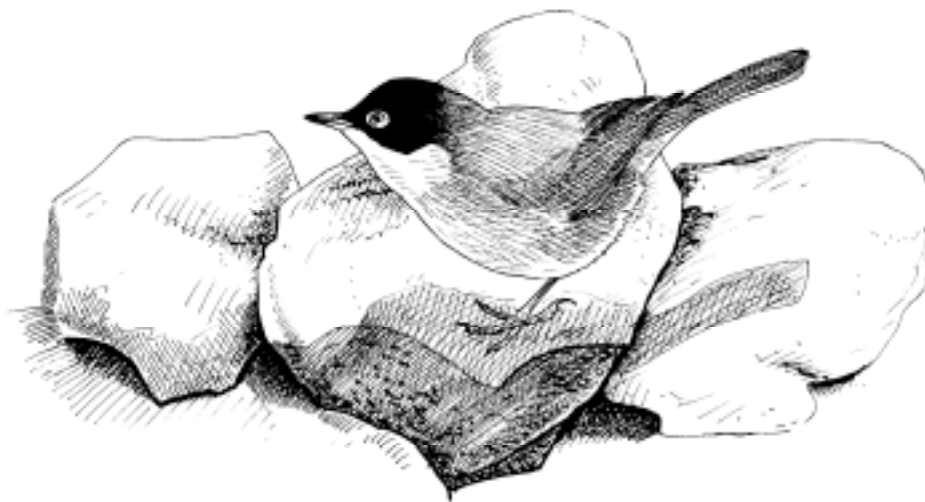
The wind kept up overnight; nevertheless, some of us were entertained from our beds by the Scops owl again, by the wild calls of the stone-curlews and, in the early morning, by a wake-up-call from a Cetti's warbler right by the house.

There was a quick stroll up the drive before breakfast for the early risers, with the wind still cool but now coming more from the south west.

After an excellent breakfast, the pattern of the week was set as we gathered for departure and Shaun took our orders for dinner in the evening. Then we set off to Son Bou, a large wetland on the island's south coast, bounded by sand dunes, and wonderfully wild and unspoilt despite the holiday development on its edge.

The sand dunes, on their seaward side, carry many of the species familiar from British dunes such as marram grass and sea holly, together with patches of the strap-shaped, fleshy leaves of *Pancreatium maritimum*, the beautiful white sea daffodil, due to flower later in the year. On the landward side the dunes are quite scrubby, with bushes of tamarisk, tree mallow, Phoenician juniper and mastic tree - related to the pistachio nut - which we came to know so well during the week. Being on the south coast of the island, these scrubby dunes can be the first landfall for migrants. Right on cue were willow warblers flitting in the coastal pines and in the bushes all the way along the dunes, a sign of migration in progress.

The day became very warm as the clouds cleared to leave us in full sun for the rest of the day. The butterflies began to show and we had our first sighting of the more orange continental race of the speckled wood. Hummingbird hawk moths fed among the myriads of bees visiting the downy, bright yellow bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus creticus*) covering the dunes. The songs of Cetti's and fan-tailed warblers (or, for the nomenclatural purists, 'zitting cisticolas') were much in evidence and we had good views of stonechats and Sardinian warblers (*below*) with plenty of opportunities to become familiar with the latter's scratchy, insistent song.



The warmth of the sun made the sea very tempting and those who ventured towards the edge discovered that, for as far as we could see, the shoreline was littered with thousands of small dark bluish creatures. These leaf-shaped ovals were about 4 cms long with a curved 'sail' and squishy underside fringed with little tentacles. They were quickly recognised as by-the-wind-sailors (*Verella spirans*), related to the Portuguese Man-o'-War, though much smaller and less painful. Kitty found another strange object on the beach: the sand was scattered with little rounded balls looking like small broken pieces of doormat. They turned out to be the battered and water-worn remains of the rhizome of *Posidonia*, one of the few truly marine higher plants, which grows in abundance at various places around the island. (Shaun later told us that these little 'sea balls' are known locally as 'nuns' f**ts'!)

A little rocky offshore island gave us good views of shags, so that we could clearly see the distinctive white underside of the Mediterranean race, *desmarestii* and two large gulls strutting at the water's edge were very obliging first sightings of Audouin's gulls. As we watched, a group of swallows flew in over a turquoise sea populated by Cory's and Balearic shearwaters.

We climbed over the dunes and turned our attention to the reedbeds and brackish pools of the wetland behind. There were shoveler, coot and moorhen on the pools and families of mallard; bright white

splashes showed us both cattle and little egrets and we had brief but clear views of the exciting but elusive purple gallinule. Two or three times, purple herons showed themselves at the edges of the pools and then, as we were turning back for lunch, one treated us to a wonderful leisurely fly-past.

The walk was rounded off with a prolonged but distant view of a booted eagle soaring above the hills behind the village.

Lunch was taken in the shade of the Aleppo pines on the dunes, followed by a coffee and loo stop at a beach café, where some of our faltering attempts at Spanish were rebuffed as the waiter turned out to be German!

Our next visit was to the monument at Torre d'en Gaumes. In the afternoon the birds became quiet but the site was very interesting from the historical point of view, with clear and informative interpretation boards. There were botanical highlights too, such as a magnificent display of pale periwinkle scrambling through the dappled shade under some bushes, a very striking patch of small-flowered bugloss and opportunities to become familiar with some of the common but unfamiliar species in evidence on the island such as three-cornered leek, wild madder and the dandelion-like *Hyoseris radiata*. Our first sighting, here, of a scarce swallowtail butterfly, with its curious, striking, streamlined markings proved, surprisingly, to be the only one of the week.

A pale-phase booted eagle hung on the air above the car park and, as we moved to the other side of the site, another appeared, this time of the dark phase.

The views from the top of the hill here were glorious: not a cloud in the sky and clear views to the coast and beyond. Birds being a little thin on the ground we headed back to Matchani Gran and the final instalment of the day's excursion when Brian and Robin saw a young Moorish gecko crawling over a stone in the garden.

A review of the day was followed by a welcome and delicious dinner and then by some more star-gazing, but in much warmer conditions, and this time with a spectacular close fly-past by a barn owl.

Monday April 7: Es Mercadel Depuradora, Tirant and Cap de Cavalleria

The cool wind was back with a vengeance before breakfast, keeping small birds at bay and deterring all but a hardy few from venturing out. At breakfast we had a little celebration to mark Pete's birthday, and to receive the daunting request that 'his day' should be crowned with a 'lifer' – a tall order for such a long-standing and well-travelled birdwatcher. We promised to try!

After breakfast the air was markedly warmer but the wind still quite strong. So, after making our, as usual, impossible choices from the wonderful dinner menu, we set out for the north of the island. Aiming for our first stop, a small *depuradora* (water treatment plant) just outside Es Mercadel, we had to take a rather circuitous route because the road was blocked. This unassuming set of pools is a magnet for waders and hirundines on migration and a good spot for birds of prey too.

True to form, the air over the pools was full of swallows and house martins with swifts high overhead. We scanned the flocks for red-rumped swallows and pallid swifts but there were no confirmed sightings. Green, wood and common sandpipers were here with Iberian yellow wagtails. Little ringed plover also showed very well, posing for the telescope in good light, while overhead a pale-phase booted eagle gave an impressive display. As we were leaving, our first Egyptian vulture came over as if scanning the pools for carrion. From time to time, a tiny, new-born foal and his mother proved a serious distraction.

Some of the group elected to walk along the lane a little way, to be picked up by the minibuses when we set off. They were rewarded with flower-rich verges, spectacular with banks of carmine coloured Italian sainfoin and the sulphur-yellow daisy, *Urospermum dalechampii* and, in damp hollows and ditches, the large-leaved buttercup, *Ranunculus macrophyllus*.

A short drive farther on took us to the seasonal wetland at Tirant, on the way, sharp eyes spotting the first red kite of the week. The wet weather earlier in the year now had paid dividends for wildlife at Tirant as the fields were filled with shallow water covered with sheets of the white flowers of water crowfoot.

Among this carpet of flowers and tall rushes, mallard were swimming and the air was full of swifts, swallows and martins. A few little egrets were feeding and preening and a small group of black-winged stilts were elegantly strutting to and fro to feed in the shallows. We had the first good views of fan-tailed warbler. A surprise to us here was a white stork; we later heard that it had been there throughout the winter though this species is not a common visitor to the island.

While the stork was attracting our attention an osprey flew in from the coast, ousted a kestrel from its perch on top of a pylon and proceeded to devour its morning's catch. The kestrel tried in vain to regain its perch but eventually gave up and sulked on a nearby cliff.

The wind was still strong and lunch was beckoning, so off we set for the lighthouse at Cap de Cavallería. The route took us through lush grazing land over which we were able to watch a splendid male marsh harrier hunting. The vegetation changes again *en route*, from hills with rocky outcrops topped by blue rock thrushes to low windswept vegetation, home to equally windswept pipits and chats. Some of the group had excellent views of blue rock thrush and the scrubby bushes were good stonechat and wheatear perches.

At the Cap we searched for windproof shelter among the rocks and for somewhere that was not prickly to sit on. The sun was strong but the wind cool so the overall temperature was very pleasant here. After we had had lunch, we moved on to the cliff edge where we expected to be blown back inland, some of us making a small diversion into what appeared to be a cave but turned out to be a tunnel through the rock leading to an alarming opening in the cliff face above a precipitous drop into the sea! To our great surprise and comfort we found a spot that was perfectly sheltered from the wind, allowing us all to take in the magnificent cliffs and roaring sea. The sea was racing between two small islands, churning up food from the bottom. Here, playing on the wind and fishing were clouds of gulls and shearwaters. The light was perfect and through the telescope all enjoyed the shearwaters' aerial mastery of maritime winds. Most of them were Cory's, but among them were also several of the smaller and more frantic Balearic shearwater. This is similar in size and habits to our Manx but is now a separate species and the subject of much research by the Spanish conservation organisation, S.E.O.

The extreme exposure to salt-laden winds on the Cap gives rise to strange vegetation: huge clumps of the grass *Ampelodesmos mauritanica*, hedgehog-like cushions of the plants of the *socarrells*, adapted to deter even the most persistent of grazing or browsing animals. In a sheltered corner we found one of the Balearic endemics, the dragon arum *Dracunculus muscivorum*. The flower spathe was bedraggled and over but had clearly been spectacular. At the other end of the scale, we were charmed by the tiny cushions of the sea lavender, *Limonium minutum* and the delightful pink daisy flowers and fleshy leaves of *Senecio rodriguezii*.

On the way back from the Cap we looked again at the blue rock thrush and took a turning up the hill to the viewpoint where a new visitor centre and museum have opened recently, with a little café and shop. Here we could stock up on maps and guide books and clarify the identity of the shrub bearing hard, yellow, tomato-like fruit, abundant in the fields around. '*Semilla de diablo*' turned out to be *Solanum sodomaeum*, or Sodom Apples; we got the message that they were definitely not to be eaten!

By the time we returned to Matchani Gran, the air was warm and the wind had dropped. Clive startled everyone by qualifying for a complimentary glass of brandy – which he probably needed – for being the first this season to use the swimming pool.

The daily review and logging of our observations was followed by another spectacular dinner, with a toast to Pete, the birthday boy. Had he had a lifer? There is always tomorrow! During dinner, it was clear that the sun was going to set in a cloudless sky and so, in spite of the light from the airport behind, we managed to get a rare and very beautiful view of Mercury as it dropped down to the western horizon.

Tuesday April 8: Mahón, S'Albufera Es Grau and Es Castell

The day dawned dull and cold so the planned morning visit to Mahón for sightseeing and souvenirs seemed particularly appropriate. Shaun's suggestion that we should take a trip in the glass-bottomed boat around Mahón harbour to see at close quarters the evidence of the extraordinary naval history of the island seemed a good one but it was thwarted by the fact that these tours don't start until May 1st. There was some compensation in good views of both Audouin's gulls and Sandwich terns in the harbour, and everyone had an interesting morning, shopping, visiting the markets and the gin factory, looking at churches and at the fascinating architecture of the town. On the way home, we paid an interesting visit to a local pottery which Shaun had arranged for us; a very useful source of presents and mementos. We stopped at the top of the drive to look in a little field renowned for its orchids. There were beautiful mirror, sawfly and yellow bee orchids there, together with the charming bumblebee orchid. Under a rusty bit of iron we found not only a mouse's nest, with a cluster of squirming babies but also a young scorpion, warming itself on the iron.

We had lunch back at Matchani Gran – another of Jenny's perfect quiches – and we then drove up to the north east of the island to the coastal nature reserve at Es Grau. Clouds loomed all day though they did not release any rain. Nevertheless, the birds were noticeable by their absence. Fortunately the

plants were on good form. The first surprise was an enclosed little sandy cove densely packed with a colony of *Posidonia oceanica*, which we were able to examine at close quarters as the origin of the strange 'sea balls'. We followed a boardwalk across a saltmarsh dense with shrubby glasswort and sea purslane and with a fine crop of annual glasswort or marsh samphire beneath, all very reminiscent of saltmarshes at home. The boardwalk led us to a sandy track through Aleppo pine woodland. We saw butcher's broom and honeysuckle here; chaffinches were abundant in the treetops and, in the woodland, the shrubby glasswort was winding 2 metres or more up through the trees. The walk opened up into a sandy hillside, again with plentiful sawfly orchids, bright yellow tree spurge, *Euphorbia dendroides* and three species of pink and white *Cistus*. A deceptively attractive mauve trefoil had the foul smell of tarmac and is commonly, and altogether reasonably, known as pitch trefoil. Looking down over the water, there were coot and moorhen, the ubiquitous yellow-legged gull and a great crested grebe.

Tonight was Shaun and Jenny's night off so it was arranged that we should eat at a restaurant in Es Castell, a small town on the edge of Mahón harbour. Walking from the car park, we watched kestrel and both common and pallid swifts flying in under the eaves of the buildings in the town square and what must have amounted to thousands of house sparrows coming in to roost in two of the trees in the square. Against the slightly surreal background of Manchester United's televised match against Real Madrid, our excellent evening meal was taken in a charming Spanish restaurant. We were very glad of Mary's highly competent Spanish, particularly in negotiating our way through the intricacies of the delicious menu of local dishes.

Wednesday April 9: Mongofre Nou and Cap de Favàritx

No wind! A sunny bright and calm morning and, in the warm air, the Aleppo pines gave off a rich resinous scent that made us all really believe, at last, that we were in the Mediterranean. The sound of a nightingale singing had everyone in high spirits as we set off for the northeast corner of Menorca and the private reserve at Mongofre Nou. A quick stop by the side of the road where it passed through interesting meadows proved very productive. This was obviously home territory for a pair of peregrines which kept calling to each other and passing low over nearby trees. We had fine views of a marsh harrier too, following the hedgelines and quartering leisurely over the fields. Its passage was so steady that we were able to follow it easily with the telescopes and seemed to turn Keith's mind to thoughts of a possible future optical birthday present. There were distant views of raptors migrating high overhead as well and, all the time, quail and corn bunting sang from the fields and hedgerow bushes. A little farther on the road passes cliffs of red sandstone with limestone lying on top and a blue rock thrush perched on top of that. Two buzzards – the only two of the week – and a dark-phase booted eagle also flew over.

Mongofre is a small cove with disused saltpans at the landward end, all forming a network of shallow pools with low bushes – a wader paradise. Ruffs, showing distinctly reddish legs, marched through the water alongside redshank, also with red legs, wood and green sandpipers and black-winged stilts (*right*). There were lots of little ringed plovers but no Kentish. The light was now very bright and the sun caused a heat haze over the water that made distant viewing a challenge! Nevertheless, a wood sandpiper obligingly stood still for long enough for Rita to get a thoroughly good look at it. A pair of interesting looking ducks caused some amusement when they turned out to be Bahama pintail, presumably escaped from captivity. A greenshank seemed to have a very short bill until a clearer view allowed it to be seen in full. However a hasty call of 'water rail' proved the point that anyone can get it wrong when someone had the sense to mention that the beak was short and yellow. Sure enough the blue-grey 'rail' walking along the shore in a heat haze was in fact a very obliging spotted crake! Closer views with no haze of this normally very secretive bird were excellent and counted as 'almost a lifer' for Pete. (Sorry it was a day late!)



The prize-winner in the 'call of nature list' for the week was a beautiful stripeless tree frog which sat snoozing obligingly on a rock in full sun. This was missed by many in the dash for lunch so Brian led a few back to look at it again in the early afternoon and Clive, Carol and Robin were also rewarded with a ring ousel, a rarely seen migrant on Menorca. Those that stayed with the minibuses had their reward too, though: a very lively hedgehog, trotting along the track. We saw several squashed on the road during the week. These are all the introduced Algerian hedgehog, characterised by the much paler

spines and larger ears than our own species and Joyce, who saw it running, remarked that it had a taller gait, also characteristic. It has even been put by some into a different genus, *Aethecinus*, as opposed to our hedgehog, *Erinaceus*.

The warmth was bringing out the butterflies. We had several excellent views of the now familiar southern speckled wood but the highlight for many were some beautiful Cleopatras, of both sexes, the male almost unbelievably bright in the sunlight.

After Mongofre the road continues eastwards to Cap de Favàritx. Apart from Hottentot fig, growing in pink and yellow profusion against the grey, this stark, slaty headland is almost devoid of vegetation, but it does provide a great viewing site for both Cory's and Balearic shearwaters.

Before supper, we had a short talk, packed with fascinating information and insights, by local historian John Seymour. He covered the essentials of the island's prehistory, very much in evidence everywhere in the form of complex stone constructions and monuments, and he followed that with a clear chronicle of the waves of invasion and colonisation which have together formed the character of the island that we see today. As she went downstairs after dinner, Chris called us down. Her sharp eyes had spotted a bat that had taken up residence hanging from a beam above the terrace. A decorator's ladder enabled us to have a wonderful close view. What at first seemed like pointed, pricked ears, turned out to be the tragus, (the pointed protrusion from the middle of the ear) with the enormous ears themselves folded along its back as it slept. When it began to stir, it put its ears up in the 'normal' position and showed itself clearly as a grey long-eared bat. It steadfastly refused to 'echo-locate' into our bat detector, but it had left by morning and we didn't see it again.

Thursday April 10: Algendar Gorge, Naveta d'es Tudons and Monte Toro

A dull, cool and generally unpromising early morning quickly turned into a glorious warm, calm and sunny day.

The Algendar Gorge is an example of Menorca's famous and spectacular *barrancas* or ravines, carved by ancient watercourses into the limestone rock that makes up the southern part of the island. The environment in the *barrancas* is humid and sheltered compared with the exposed limestone plateau above and the ubiquitous wild olive here gives way to holm oak and pine. Algendar Gorge lies on the south coast, running inland from the tourist resort of Cala Galdana, and is home to breeding Egyptian vulture, booted eagle and peregrine.

On arrival, we were greeted by excellent views of a hoopoe calling from pines on the cliff above the car park. Our route then took us along the streamside at the bottom of the gorge, passing through a mosaic of small fields with banks of dense woodland and shrubby vegetation and hillsides clothed with holm oak and pine rising on either side.

The weather was glorious and at first the birds were a little quiet, particularly the warblers. We soon got our ears tuned to the high-pitched song of firecrests in the treetops and, rounding a bend, we had a perfect woodchat shrike posing beautifully, almost too near for the telescopes, and for long enough for everyone to get a view. This was the first of these birds that we had all seen well, another sign of late migration. A fine clump of arum lily (presumably a garden escape) adorned the streamside below the shrike's perch.

Our journey was accompanied all the way by booted eagles and Egyptian vultures but as the gorge narrowed their presence became even more obvious. A pair of booted eagles were calling raucously and displaying very close overhead, even landing briefly on the side of the gorge close enough for very good telescope views.

The limestone cliff faces become more spectacular and Rachel gave us an insight into the botanical knowledge of Shakespeare by showing the group rock samphire growing on the cliffs. This is the species referred to in King Lear but rock samphire, smelling strongly as it does of shoe polish, is not the samphire that is eaten today. Marsh samphire, which we had been looking at on the saltmarsh at Es Grau would not need a rock climber to collect it, but the discussion prompted some further research and it seems that the strong flavour was attractive to the London society of Shakespeare's day and it was collected from the cliffs at Dover, to make a pickle. So Shakespeare's botanical knowledge was not as shaky as some botanical folklore would have us believe!

As we stood below the cliff, a booted eagle flew across the gorge immediately pursued by a peregrine shooting out of its cave on the hillside. Its job of deterring the eagle done, it soon returned to the nest above our heads.

Ivan and a few intrepid walkers went ahead for a 'reccé', but soon returned to call everyone on. A short distance farther up the gorge, we rounded a corner to a spectacular rocky hillside where a group of four

Egyptian vultures were flying low overhead. They wheeled and jostled above us and eventually an adult bird landed on the cliff and posed in the sun for the telescopes while everybody had a close view and marvelled at its brilliant colouring.

Returning down the gorge, we had time to look at some more plants. There were spectacular spikes of the brilliant yellow *Verbascum creticum* (related to mullein), and several clumps of graceful summer snowflake.

Lunch was taken a short drive away at one of the *miradors* – viewpoints – on the cliff-top, providing a dramatic view over the bay of Cala Galdana and, a bonus, excellent eye-level views of alpine swifts.

The Naveta d'es Tudons is one of the many ancient monuments on the island and has been reconstructed since its excavation in 1975. It takes the form of an upturned boat and, crawling inside with a torch one can see the double-layered structure of this unusual and mysterious stone tomb. Peering into a hole in the wall with the torch also illuminated a nest of delightful black rats. These are smaller and have larger eyes and ears than the regular brown rat and are much prettier and more engaging animals. They are also a lot rarer.

The path to the monument took us through a field spectacular with weeds of cultivated land. We examined poppies, vetches and clovers, corn marigold, three-leaved toadflax, small-flowered catchfly and the pink-like tunic flower. Under the gaze of a migrating marsh harrier we paused to admire another of Chris's finds – a branched broomrape.

The weather was clear and bright, with little wind, so we decided to grasp the opportunity to visit Monte Toro. This high point of the island is a full 358m high and stands well above the surrounding landscape. From the peak here one can see all of the island and set into context the sites we had been visiting.

This evening, before dinner, Santí Cachot of GOB, (*Grup Balear d'Ornitologia i Defensa de la Naturalesa*), the Balearic equivalent of the RSPB, joined us to receive the donation from Honeyguide towards the work of GOB and to give us a fascinating insight into the issues facing Menorcan wildlife, and the projects and successes of GOB.

Friday April 11: Es Mercadel *Depuradora*, Tirant, Fornells and Sa Roca

With cool and cloudy conditions again and a promise of rain from Shaun we set off for a second visit to Tirant, this time along the old Kane road that we had heard about from John Seymour. Although greeted by red kite and booted eagle as we arrived, the *depuradora* was a little quieter than earlier in the week but still allowed good views of little ringed plovers, wood and green sandpipers and black-winged stilts.

The Tirant wetlands had more harriers today, again on migration, and as we arrived a superb purple heron and three whiskered terns, striking in their summer plumage, fed briefly before moving on.

We sat on the rocks among the *soccarells* below the Moorish tower on the headland at Fornells and ate our lunch in the company of blue rock thrushes, with a number of painted ladies flying in, buffeted by the on-shore breeze. After lunch, we briefly explored Fornells and, following Mick's lead, spent a few moments dabbling among the rocks in the shallows at the edge of the harbour. Sea anemones and barnacles recalled British rocky shores and myriads of tiny fish sparkled just below the surface. We rounded off our contact with this famous resort with a welcome cup of coffee and then drove on to our final destination of the week, Sa Roca.



Sa Roca is an area of Aleppo pine and holm oak woodland, with a magnificent understorey of tree heath, strawberry tree (*Arbutus*) and *Cistus*. The woodland was almost devoid of birds but compensated for it by an abundance of orchids: sawfly, mirror (*left*), bumblebee and yellow bee, the finest small-flowered tongue orchids of the week, with their little pink tongues hanging rudely from the flower and the spectacular violet limodore. At the top of the hill, we came upon the extraordinary sight of a cage fungus, *Clathrus ruber*; an orange-red basketwork of foam-like tissue, decaying to a black slime, clearly attractive to flies. Best of all, though, was the dramatic red parasitic flower erupting in abundance from the base of purple *Cistus*. It is related to the famous giant tropical flower, *Rafflesia*, and we can corroborate the observations of last year's group; the plants at Sa Roco are undoubtedly associated with the purple *Cistus*, not the white, and do indeed have pale pinkish-white flowers with crimson scales, not cream flowers with orange scales. This points firmly to a record for *Cytinus ruber*, not *Cytinus hypocistis*, the only *Cytinus* species apparently previously recorded for the island.

It was then back to the picturesque Kane road for the journey home. Our curiosity got the better of us as we drove past a tantalisingly high and well maintained stone wall, so we stopped briefly to peer over it from the minibuses to find an immense quarry - both extensive and deep - clearly visible the next day from the aeroplane.

At our last evening meal, delicious as ever, we reflected on people's highlights of the week: the spotted crane, the 'big' raptors, the ring ousel, the tree frog, the orchids, the parasitic plants - *Cytinus* and broomrapes.

Saturday 12th April: Home

The morning of departure was warm and calm and so too was England on our return. It had been a wonderful week; a strange one for birds with some migrants very obvious and others notable by their absence. Nevertheless, we had some brilliant views of birds, spectacular displays of flowers and not a drop of rain, a perfect mix only slightly marred by that three-day wind that stayed with us for most of the week. Final fond 'goodbyes' were accompanied by promises to keep in touch, exchange photographs, meet again....

Ivan, Robin & Rachel

Birds	Latin Name	Notes
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus rufico</i> ''''llis	Heard at Tirant
Cory's shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	Seen frequently out at sea. Cap de Cavalleria esp
Balearic shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>	Less frequent than above. Seen very close with Cory's at Cap de Favoritx
Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	Individual birds at coastal sites
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	9 birds at the far end of Son Bou, feeding with cattle and in wet fields
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	S'albufera and Son Bou
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Individual birds at Son Bou, Mongofre Nou, and S'albufera
White stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	1 bird at Tirant
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Wherever fresh water was present
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Individuals seen at Es mercadel, 7 Tirrant,
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Son Bou, Cap de Cavalleria. Several birds at Algendar Gorge
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	M & f Hunting at Son Bou, on migration at Cap de Cavalleria, Algendar Gorge
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Mongofre Nou
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>	Numerous sightings, mainly pale-phase birds. Also seen perched and displaying in Algendar Gorge
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Cap de Cavalleria, Tirant

Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Seen each day
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Cap de Cavallería road
Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Heard
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	At fresh water; Son Bou, Mongofre Nou, Algendar Gorge
Spotted Crake	<i>Porzana porzana</i>	Mongofre Nou
Purple gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	Son Bou
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Son Bou, S'Albufera
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Es Mercadel, Mongofre Nou
Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichnemus</i>	Around Matchani Gran
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Es Mercadel' Mongofre Nou
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	c10 birds at Mongofre Nou
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1 heard at Tirant
Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochrops</i>	Es Mercadel
Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Es Mercadel, Tirant
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	S'Albufera, Mongofre Nou
Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	Mahón harbour; 2 at Son Bou
Yellow legged gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	Numerous
Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	Algendar Gorge, plus numerous rock/feral birds throughout the island
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Occasional sightings across the island
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Numerous around Matchani Gran
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Heard at S'Albufera and Algendar Gorge
Scops owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	Heard from Matchani Gran
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Numerous sightings, some large flocks, over most of island
Pallid swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	Brief views in evening light at Es Castell
Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>	2 over Algendar Gorge
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Numerous, esp at Matchani Gran
Thekla lark	<i>Gallerida theklae</i>	Numerous
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Seen frequently in small numbers
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Seen with swallows
Tawny pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	Matchani Gran
Water pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	1 at Es Mercadel Depuradora
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Depuradora
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Es Mercadel, Mongofre Nou
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Heard at Algendar Gorge
Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Became more frequent toward end of week.
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Frequent
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Matchani Gran,
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Mongofre Nou, Algendar Gorge, Cap de Cavallería
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Numerous
Ring ousel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	Mongofre Nou
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Frequently heard
Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Frequently heard
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Numerous
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Algendar Gorge

Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Son Bou, less numerous than willow
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Numerous
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	Singing at Algendar Gorge
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Sa Roca
Woodchat shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	Seen frequently toward end of the week.
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Seen over most of the island. Group of 34 at Algendar Gorge.
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Frequent around Matchani Gran. Nesting in pylons
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Seen once at S'Albufera
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Numerous
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Numerous
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Numerous
Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	Refreshingly common

Butterflies

Large white
Painted lady
Green hairstreak
Speckled wood
Cleopatra
Small white
Red admiral
Scarce swallowtail

Reptiles & Amphibians

Stripeless tree frog
Moorish gecko
Wall lizard

Other insects

Hummingbird hawkmoth
Pine processionary moth caterpillars

Rhinoceros beetle
Oil beetle
Paper wasp
Egyptian locust