

Mallorca

Autumn in the Balearics

Thu 3rd – Thu 10th October 2019



Trip photos (clockwise from top left): Greater Flamingos • Peeking Balearic Warbler • Audouin's Gull • Red-knobbed Coot • photos © Fernando Enrique/Limosa

**Report compiled by tour leader:
Fernando Enrique**

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Tour Leader: Fernando Enrique

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Day 1 Thursday, October 3rd 2019

Coming from different UK airports, all group members arrived on time at Palma Airport. With luggage collection completed, we emerged into a sunny and warm day, we hit the road eventually heading north-east across the island towards our hotel base near Port de Pollença, perfectly situated close to some of the best birding sites on the island.

After a lovely lunch by the pool of the hotel, we only had to drive five minutes in order to get to S'Albufereta, the second most important wetland on the island. The time we spent in the area was a nice introduction to Mediterranean birding, with Sardinian Warblers, Cetti's Warbler, Zitting Cisticola and Firecrest moving around in the bushes. But also a good example of how good migration can be in Mallorca, with several migrants noted, including Common Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Hoopoe and a noisy Wryneck. After our "share" of small birds we focused our attention on the marshes in front of the tower hide. The light wasn't the best, but we managed to find a good selection of marshland birds, including good numbers of Greater Flamingos, Marsh Harrier, several Western Swamphens, noisy Black-winged Stilts and a small flock of Wood Sandpipers.

On the way back to our bus, we found a flock of Black-headed Gulls which after a more detailed inspection revealed at least a couple of Slender-billed Gulls. After an excellent start to the tour, we headed back to our hotel to discuss the plan of action for the next day and enjoy our first (of many) lovely dinners.

Day 2 Friday, October 4th 2019

We awoke to a beautiful day with clear blue skies and no wind. Our destination today was the Boquer valley, a spectacular place surrounded by limestone mountains and a well-known place for migrants, which arrive over the sea from the north and funnel inland along the valley. But before getting there we stopped at the beach overlooking the Pollença bay, where we scanned the breakwaters in search of two of our target birds, Audouin's Gull and the Mediterranean race of European Shag. We found them within a couple of minutes and enjoyed great views at close range. Other birds here included Kingfisher and a flyover Yellow Wagtail. The olive grove between the car park and the farmhouse held good numbers of Sardinian Warbler, Common Redstart, Greenfinch, Serin and at least three Mediterranean Flycatchers, a recent split from the similar-looking Spotted Flycatcher, although the Mediterranean birds are paler and more clean-looking, sometimes showing no streaking on the breast. A beautiful Blue Rock Thrush was singing from the top of the building, providing the best views of the trip. We moved onwards and upwards along the valley, enjoying the landscape and the interesting Mediterranean vegetation, with plentiful of Dwarf Fan Palms, Mastic, Wild Olive Tree and many other species adapted to this harsh environment.

With the temperatures rising it was time for some raptor action and it didn't take too long before some members of the group found the first Booted Eagle flying over the ridge, joined by another three birds and performing spectacular sky attacks when a Marsh Harrier decided to fly over the valley. A noisy Wryneck showed really well on an exposed branch for several minutes. Suddenly, a Balearic Warbler called briefly from the bushes and we focused our attention on this skulking endemic. It took us a while but we finally managed to get good, although brief, views of this range-restricted bird. Another call, this time up in the sky, caught our attention. A small group of at least seven Eleonora's Falcons was seen over the ridge, including some dark morph birds. With another target bird in the pocket we decided to head back for a lunch break after a very productive morning walk.

We spent the rest of the day at another section of S'Albufereta marshes, stopping along the way at a nearby olive grove where we found at least eight Stone-curlews and several Red-legged Partridge. The water levels at S'Albufereta were lower than usual but we noted a nice selection of waterbirds including Teal, Little Grebe, Great Egret, Little Egret or Kingfisher. After a long and successful day we headed back to our hotel for a well-deserved rest, enjoying a great "Mexican Night" at the restaurant.

Day 3 Saturday, October 5th 2019

The group met after breakfast for a full day in the Tramuntana Mountains. This imposing range of limestone mountains stretches along the north coast of Mallorca and is home to some of the most emblematic birds on the island, including good numbers of Black and Griffon Vultures, our main targets. We made several stops on the way to Cuber reservoir, adding to our list a few forest birds such as Firecrest, the local race of Crossbill, Cirl Bunting and loads of Song Thrushes, which arrived the previous night in huge numbers. We left our vehicle at

the car park near the reservoir, getting out was different matter, and made our way to the start of our walk. In the vegetation around the reservoir we could hear Common Crossbills calling everywhere, with some allowing great views while feeding on the ground or on top of the pines. Then we heard a familiar call from a nearby tree, another Wryneck. But he wasn't alone, since we heard another two, possibly three birds calling within a couple of hundred meters. The first bird showed really well for several minutes, something that will become a common feature throughout the trip.

With a blue sky and perfect weather conditions, we soon found the first raptors. A pale morph Booted Eagle flew overhead and a couple of Red Kites were seen flying over the ridge where, after a bit of scanning, we found our first vultures of the trip. We were lucky enough to see both species flying side by side, which gave us the opportunity to compare their distinctive silhouettes. Other birds seen in the area were Common and Black Redstarts, Serin, Cirl Bunting and Blue Rock Thrush. We enjoyed a tasty picnic lunch before heading towards lower elevations, where we spent the rest of the afternoon looking for one of the rarest and most sought-after species on the island, the impressive Bonelli's Eagle. Thanks to an ongoing reintroduction project, there is now a small population in the north of the island and after a bit of searching, we found an adult bird perched on the cliff face which offered good scope views. The perfect way to end the day.

Day 4 Sunday, October 6th 2019

It was another warm and sunny day when we left the hotel for our next destination, the Parc Natural de S'Albufera, the most important wetland of any Mediterranean island. A 2200-hectare freshwater marsh with extensive reedbeds and home to some of the most sought-after species of the trip. We parked in the small car park and walked up the path towards the visitor centre, stopping along the main channel where we had excellent views of several Black-crowned Night Herons. We also found our first Western Swamphen of the day and a couple of Kingfishers. Just before the visitor centre, an interesting call from one of the small channels caught our attention. A Moustached Warbler, the star of the reserve, showed briefly before disappearing into the dense vegetation. After checking the recent sightings and using the facilities at the visitor centre, we headed to the hides at Sa Roca, where a nice selection of ducks and waders welcomed us. Common Teal, Shoveler, Pintail, Wigeon, Shelduck were seen in good numbers but the highlight was a group of 32(!) Marbled Ducks, one of the rarest ducks in Europe, with fewer than a hundred breeding pairs. Other birds included Western Swamphen, dozens of Black-winged Stilts, Wood Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover and Marsh Harrier.

Our next target was the highly localized Red-knobbed Coot, a bird with a tiny and fragmented distribution in southern Spain and, thanks to a reintroduction project, Mallorca. We found half a dozen birds from the bridge, some of them allowing really good views. At the same bridge, another Moustached Warbler played hide-and-seek with us for a few minutes, but we managed to get decent views of this skulker. After lunch we paid a visit to Es Cibollar pools in search of waders. This is probably the best place for waders on the island and it didn't disappoint us. Dozens of Spotted Redshanks, Greenshanks, Black-winged Stilts, Common, Little and Kentish Plovers and smaller numbers of Dunlin and Curlew Sandpiper were present on these shallow ponds. With limited time we left this part of the reserve and drove to the southern edge of the marshes where we visited the water treatment plant, that usually attracts some interesting birds. Here we found our only Common Pochard of the trip, several Common Snipes, Wood Sandpiper, Glossy Ibis, Booted Eagle and a nice selection of migrants, including Whinchat, Northern Wheatear and Reed Warbler. After another brilliant day, we returned to our hotel where we relaxed until our next assault on the dinner buffet.

Day 5 Monday, October 7th 2019

The weather forecast wasn't very promising today with strong winds and rain, especially in the north of the island. So we made a wise move and headed south where we avoided the bad weather for most of the day. Our first stop on the way south was at S'Illot salt pans. A small, traditional saltpan complex that attracts waders and herons. There were lots of Wood Sandpipers, Black-winged Stilts, Little Ringed Plovers, Kentish Plovers and several Common Snipe, while a Marsh Harrier and a Booted Eagle flew above us, showing really well. We continued our drive, eventually reaching the central plains, where our main target was an Iberian Grey Shrike that has been seen in the area for a couple of weeks. We couldn't find the shrike, but we added a good selection of farmland birds to our ever-growing list, including Thekla Lark, Corn Bunting, Zitting Cisticola, Serin and the first wintering flock of Skylark. Red Kites were common with at least ten birds noted in the area.

After a coffee break we reached the Levante salt pans. Probably the largest area of salt pans on the island and a popular birding destination. It was a bit quiet when we arrived but with some perseverance we found some good birds, including dozens of Greater Flamingo, a couple of Curlews, a very obliging Bluethroat, which was a lifer for some members of the group, Black-necked Grebes, Shelduck, 70+ Avocets and the only Little Stint of the trip. We enjoyed a lovely "menu del dia" at a local restaurant before heading towards the southernmost point in Mallorca, Cape Ses Salines. Our timing was just perfect, since after a few minutes of our arrival a fishing boat passed in front of us and very close to the shore, attracting dozens of Yellow-legged Gulls, Audouin's Gulls and

at least 40 Scopoli's Shearwaters, our main target here. We had a long drive ahead of us, so we left this lovely spot and headed back through some small Mallorcan towns away from the tourist areas, giving us a feel of the "real" Mallorca.

Day 6 Tuesday, October 8th 2019

An early start was needed in order to get to the Formentor peninsula at first light and avoid the crowds, especially the cyclists, that visit this popular destination on a daily basis. Our first stop was the Albercutx tower, a fortress built in 1628 to protect the Bay of Pollença from the numerous pirates in the area. This is a great location for Balearic Warbler and, sure enough, after five minutes we found a bird singing from the top of a Dwarf Fan Palm, joined by a second individual on the other side of the road. We had the place to ourselves and spent the next few minutes enjoying the amazing views of the bay and the Tramuntana mountains. On the way down we had great views of male and female Blue Rock Thrush and a nice comparison between Black and Common Redstarts.

After a very scenic drive we arrived at Cape Formentor lighthouse, the northernmost point of the island and one of the best places to see Eleonora's Falcon. A couple of minutes after our arrival, we found several birds flying over the cliffs, but they didn't seem very interested in the numerous migrants in the bushes in front of the lighthouse. Common and Black Redstarts, Robins and Willow Warblers were noted, when suddenly a big bird came flying low over the sea and landed on an exposed rock - a Short-eared Owl migrating in the middle of day! Needless to say, the group was amazed by such an unexpected encounter. Cars were now queuing back down the road from the car park, so we decided to leave the place and we drove towards the center of the peninsula, where we stopped at Casas Vellas, adding a couple of migrants and a few resident forest birds such as Firecrest, 'Balearic' Common Crossbills and Sardinian Warblers. After lunch we headed out again and spent the rest of the day at S'Albufereta where we found a nice mix of forest birds and migrants including Firecrest, Sardinian Warbler, Song Thrush and Blackcap. On the surrounding marshes we noted species such as Greater Flamingo, Pintail, Western Swamphen, Marsh Harrier and Black-winged Stilt. On the way back to the hotel, an Audouin's Gull that had taken residence on the beach in front of the car park showed extremely well, allowing great photo opportunities.

Day 7 Wednesday, October 9th 2019

We spent our last full day exploring a new area of the island, the Artá Peninsula. This mountainous area is a smaller version of the Tramuntana mountains, with valleys covered in Mediterranean scrub and patches of pine woodland. We took a path close to the coast on one side and shadowed by huge cliffs on the other side, giving us great views of Shag and Audouin's Gull and at the same time Blue Rock Thrush, Crag Martins and Black Vultures. This combination of habitats produced a fantastic list of birds at the end of the morning, which included Osprey, Booted Eagle, several Wrynecks, Crossbill, Common Redstart, Firecrest and Zitting Cisticola. A short stop at S'Illot salt pans added a few waders to our day list, Wood Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper and Kentish Plover, just to name a few.

Time for a lunch break after a productive morning, followed by a short drive up to the mountains to a nice forested area by one of the few rivers on the island. This proved to be a good move since the temperature was very pleasant and the bird activity was fairly good too. Grey and White Wagtails were new for the trip and numerous finches came down to drink, including Linnet, Greenfinch, Serin and Chaffinch. Up in the sky we found a solitary Red Kite surrounded by Crag Martins, a Marsh Harrier, two Booted Eagles and good numbers of Black Vultures, some of them flying directly overhead. It was BBQ night at the hotel so we called it a day and returned to our headquarters for a well-earned rest.

Day 8 Thursday, October 10th 2019

With limited time this morning and after another lovely breakfast, we packed our bags in the bus and said our farewells to this wonderful corner of the island. Successfully navigating Palma we arrived at the airport with ample time to say our farewells and relax before the flight back to the UK and the end of a very enjoyable and successful trip. Thanks to all party members for such a good trip, made even more enjoyable by the great birds, your humour and enthusiasm and we look forward to seeing you all again on another Limosa tour very soon!

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED
(109 species)

- Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*
Small numbers at S'Albufera and S'Illot.
- Garganey** *Spatula querquedula*
One bird at S'Albufera.
- Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*
Common at S'Albufera and S'Illot.
- Gadwall** *Mareca strepera*
Common at S'Albufera.
- Eurasian Wigeon** *Mareca penelope*
Three birds at S'Albufera.
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*
Common and widespread. Seen daily.
- Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*
Half a dozen birds at S'Albufera.
- Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*
Recorded on most wetlands with at least 100 birds at S'Albufera.
- Marbled Teal** *Marmaronetta angustirostris*
One of the highlights of the trip. Our best count was 32 at S'Albufera.
- Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina*
A single male at the water treatment plant.
- Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa*
Small numbers recorded on three dates.
- Scopoli's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea*
More than 40 were seen from Cape ses Salines, some of them very close to the coast following a fishing boat.
- Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
Common on most wetlands
- Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*
One bird at S'Albufera.
- Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*
Two birds noted at Salinas de Levante.
- Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus*
Common at Salinas de Levante and S'Albufereta.
- Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*
Three birds at S'Albufera.
- Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus*
Amazing views of one bird at S'Albufera.
- Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*
Great views of 12-15 birds roosting at S'Albufera.
- Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*
Common, seen daily.
- Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*
Seen on most wetlands and rivers.
- Great Egret** *Egretta alba*
Small numbers noted at S'Albufera and S'Albufereta.
- Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*
Common, seen on most wetlands
- European Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*
Recorded along the coast on four dates, especially common at the Artá peninsula.
- Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*
One birds recorded on our first day.
- Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*
Two birds noted at the Artá peninsula.
- Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus*
Common on the Tramuntana mountains.
- Cinereous (Black) Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*
Common on the Tramuntana mountains and a single bird noted at Artá.
- Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus*

One of the most common raptors with several birds seen daily.

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata*

One adult bird seen near Mortitx.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Small numbers seen daily.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Small numbers noted on five dates.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Several birds heard on three dates.

Western Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Common at S'Albufera and S'Albufereta, some of them providing great views.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Seen daily.

Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*

Six birds noted at S'Albufera, two of them provided excellent views near the bridge.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Seen on most wetlands

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicanus*

Eight birds near our hotel in Port de Pollença.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Common (and noisy) on most wetlands.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

More than 50 birds at Salinas de Levante.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Small numbers on three dates.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Recorded on three dates, especially common at S'Albufera.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Small numbers noted on three dates.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

No less than 30 birds were noted at S'Albufera, with smaller numbers noted on two dates.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Two birds seen at Salinas de Levante.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

One bird at S'Albufera.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Small numbers on three dates.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

One bird at Salina de Levante.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Several noted on three dates.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Several birds noted on three dates.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Common migrant wader, good numbers recorded on four dates.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Small numbers noted on four dates.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

At least 15 birds at S'Albufera.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Single birds noted at S'Albufera, S'Illot and S'Albufereta.

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*

At least two birds in a flock of Black-headed Gulls near Port de Pollença.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Common, seen on most days.

Audouin's Gull *Ichthyaeetus audouinii*

Recorded almost daily along the coast, always in small numbers.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Common, seen daily.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Seen daily.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Common throughout the trip

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Seen daily.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Totally unexpected. A bird arrived flying from the sea and landed on a rock for several minutes at Cap Formentor.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Single birds noted on five dates.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Small numbers noted on four dates.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Surprisingly common. One bird at S'Albufereta, one at Boquer valley, at least three at Cuber reservoir and three at Artá peninsula.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Common, seen almost daily

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*

One of our target species. Seven birds at Boquer Valley and five near Cap Formentor provided great views.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

Small numbers noted on five dates.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Seen or heard daily.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*

Heard several times and seen really well on the central plains.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

A couple of flocks seen on the central plains.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Common migrant. Seen daily.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Several at Boquer Valley, Tramuntana mountains and Artá peninsula.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Heard almost daily with a few birds seen.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Relatively common migrant during our stay. Noted on five dates.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

First one of the autumn at Artá.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

We had to work hard for this skulker. Two or three birds seen at S'Albufera.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

One bird at S'Albufera and one at S'Illot.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Seen on five dates.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Small numbers heard or seen on three dates.

Balearic Warbler *Sylvia balearica*

We had good views of several of this beautiful endemic at Boquer valley and Albercutx tower.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

Probably the most common warbler, seen daily.

Common Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

One of the most common forest birds. We had great views of these tiny beauties every day of the trip.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Surprisingly scarce this year, with only one bird seen.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Very common. Big flocks seen on a daily basis.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Common, seen daily.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Lots of migrants arriving during our stay. Recorded daily during the second half of the trip.

Mediterranean Flycatcher *Muscicapa tyrrhenica balearica*

This distinctive subspecies, considered a full species by some authors, was noted at Boquer valley, where we had excellent views of 3-4 birds.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Huge wave of migrants arriving during our stay. By the end of the week they were literally everywhere.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

Great views of this usually shy species at Salinas de Levante, where a single bird showed really well.

European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Surprisingly scarce this year, with only a couple of birds noted.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Single birds noted on two dates.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Fairly common migrant, noted on five dates.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitaria*

Common in the mountains and sea cliffs.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Only one bird near the water treatment plant.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Common. Seen daily

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Common migrant, noted on five dates.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Very common

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Only one bird seen at Port de Pollença.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

One bird on our last full day.

White Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Three birds noted on our last full day.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common in forested areas.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Seen daily.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Noted on most dates.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

The local race *balearica* was very common in forested areas, especially the Tramuntana mountains.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Small numbers on three dates. Including several displaying males

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Recorded in good numbers on the central plains.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

Single birds were noted on two dates.

BUTTERFLIES

Common Swallowtail *Papilio machaon*

Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus*

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*

Cleopatra *Gonepteryx cleopatra*

Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*

DRAGONFLIES

Common Bluetail *Ischnura elegans*

Western Willow Emerald *Chalcolestes viridis*

Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*

Blue Emperor *Anax imperator*

Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope*

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*

Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii*

Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*

Violet Dropwing *Trithemis annulata*

REPTILES

Mediterranean House Gecko *Hemidactylus turcicus*

Red-eared Terrapin *Trachemys scripta*