Mallorca

Naturetrek Tour Report

22nd - 29th April 2025



Avocets by Simon Satchell



Little Bittern by Simon Satchell



Mediterranean Flycatcher by Dave Jackson



Wryneck by Simon Satchell

Tour report and photos by Simon Satchell & Dave Jackson



Tour participants: Dave Jackson (Leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Summary

This tour was a resounding success with target species seen including Blue Rock Thrush, Booted Eagle, Eleonora's Falcon, Wryneck, and the star of the show – Little Bittern. A male showed at close range from the hotel hide most mornings and a female at S'Albufera Marsh showed so well out in the open that we almost walked straight past without noticing!

We visited all the key sites including Cap de Formentor where both Scopoli's and Balearic Shearwaters were observed along with four Blue Rock Thrushes, one remarkably close. We were entertained by the antics of Avocets, Black-winged Stilts and Kentish Plovers with migrant Wood Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstone, Little Stint and Sanderling added to the list of waders seen.

We were delighted to hear and see Turtle Dove and Common Crossbill at Son Real and we were fortunate to observe Cinereous and Griffon Vultures feeding on a carcass at Cúber Reservoir. One picnic stop coincided with a fall of flycatchers including Spotted, Mediterranean and both male and female Pied though they were all upstaged by a 'most wanted' Wryneck as it perched in clear view showing all aspects of its cryptic plumage.

Our lasting memories will be the stunning views of Cattle Egrets adorned with peachy plumes, very close Squacco Heron with its blue bill, Black-crowned Night Herons all in breeding plumage and the endearing bubbling calls of Little Egrets from their nesting colony.

Day 1

Tuesday 22nd April

Gatwick - Mallorca

With flights on time from three UK airports we were on our way to the hotel just after 3pm for the 45 minute drive north to our accommodation overlooking Pollensa Bay. Everyone checked in efficiently leaving us sufficient time to visit the private hide overlooking S'Albufereta Marsh before dinner. Zitting Cisticola, Serin and House Sparrow were seen around the hotel grounds and three Moorhens strutted over the lawn near the swimming pool. A bedraggled bird popped up from the narrow waterway, shook itself after a bathe and flew across the pool in front of the hide – a Moustached Warbler making a fantastic start to the tour. Greater Flamingo and Black-winged Stilts waded around a distant pool and Cetti's Warbler delivered its abrupt, explosive bursts of sound from dense cover.

The air was filled with swifts and swallows and after our first all-you-can-eat buffet an estimated 3,000 hirundines came down to roost in the reedbeds.

Day 2

Wednesday 23rd April

Bóquer Valley – S'Albufereta.

Partial sun with slight breeze 12-22°C

The keen birders were up at dawn and down to the hide getting their day lists off to a good start with herons, egrets and flamingoes on the marsh. The dawn chorus of Blackbirds and House Sparrows interspersed with the jingling song of Serin featured throughout our stay.

A pair of Audouin's Gulls graced the shore, much to the delight of those who were early for our 8.15 departure to the Bóquer Valley. We were disheartened to find the nearby pocket park - a well-known migrant hotspot where a rich tapestry of wildflowers had flourished after recent rains - being trimmed back by a man with a brush-cutter. Hoping the mowing was limited to the area around the playground, we parked at the base of the valley to return later. Above the hum of machinery, the calls of at least two Wrynecks echoed, though the birds themselves remained hidden from view.

A Mediterranean Flycatcher was photographed in the car park before a Greenfinch took exception to it as we started the walk up the valley, where a Balearic Warbler gave the briefest of views before disappearing into a shrub. Dark clouds looked threatening as we reached the valley proper where good numbers of Crag Martins explored a suitable nest crevice. A little further on a Blue Rock Thrush was an excellent find as it perched on a huge boulder before flying closer and lost to view.

A Wren was heard as we walked the lower part of the valley and Sardinian Warblers popped up ahead of us as Ravens croaked and circled overhead. A singing Balearic Warbler in Dwarf Fan Palms couldn't be pinned down and we turned our focus to the sky where Common Kestrels and two black shapes appeared in the distance heading in our direction – Black (Cinereous) Vultures. They circled round giving amazing views as they soared away and out of sight. On the way back down the path they were joined by four Ravens and a controversial raptor that the group collectively agreed was a Marsh Harrier.

The workers were now out in force and were obliterating what was left of the flower meadow so a change of plans as we headed to the supermarket to choose our picnic lunch, and some fish for the gulls. We spread our lunch on a convenient picnic table on the stony beach and waited for the gulls to find the fish. It wasn't long before an Audouin's Gull quickly swooped down and devoured two of the fish taking us all by surprise. The photographers were prepared for the next gull to finish off their anchovy offerings, this time being digitally captured.

A short break back at the hotel and we were out again to the hide at Sa Barcassa where breeding Black-winged Stilts, Pied Avocets and Kentish Plovers were on every exposed island and Greater Flamingoes - stately adults adorned with pink plumes and striking black-and-white immature birds - moved with such grace they couldn't help but amaze. A flock of eight Stone-Curlew landed on an island occupied by a breeding pair of Yellow-legged Gulls. Marsh Harrier, Great Egret and a Purple Heron were noted from the viewing platform and the jangling call of Corn Bunting came from a nearby tamarisk.

On the way back to the bus a Swallowtail butterfly landed and was joined by another, both avoiding the attention of a Spotted Flycatcher.

After an hour of rewarding birding, the promise of dinner and a cool beer lured us back to the hotel, where we reviewed the day's sightings over drinks before taking our reserved table for another leisurely buffet meal. Those keen for more birding witnessed 13 Night Herons returning from their daytime follies as darkness fell.

Day 3

Thursday 24th April

S'Albufera Marsh.

Sun, breezy 14-24°C

Early risers were treated to an adult male Little Bittern from the hotel hide and not-so-early risers struck lucky with the bird active and flying around the pool from the hide windows. A Cetti's Warbler blasted out its song from an exposed perch, neither bird behaving as they would do later in the day.

A supermarket shop for our picnic lunch and on to S'Albufera Marsh where the heronry was in full swing. Blackcrowned Night Herons, Cattle and Little Egrets grunted and bubbled to each other while a Little Bittern flew across the canal and landed out of sight before revealing itself to all; a relief for those who missed the early morning sighting at the hotel. Glossy Ibises looked splendid in the morning sun while a distant Hoopoe repeated its monotonous call as we made the 800m walk along the canal to the visitor centre. A Moustached Warbler sang but couldn't be located. We reached the first hide where a Squacco Heron came increasingly closer to the hide showing its beautiful steel-blue bill.

A pair of Iberian Yellow Wagtails displayed in front of the hide before our focus was drawn to an over-sized 'moorhen' - Western Swamphen out in the open showings its remarkable size and colour. Formerly called Purple Gallinule, these large rails are recovering after severe declines in parts of their range.

As the hide filled with visitors, we made space and moved to hide 2 where Kentish Plovers were nesting and Little Ringed Plovers were engaged in territorial disputes. A distant coot had the telling nodules on its forehead of Red-knobbed Coot although the red was much reduced and is more pronounced on breeding birds.

A *calidrid* wader drew much attention from a keen young local and his older relative who'd seen it from another hide while we were watching it against the light. We'd tentatively identified it as a Sanderling although out of context waders can look thinner and more attenuated in hot climates and odd plumages can also throw up some interesting and educational challenges. We considered all possibilities before returning to the same conclusion - the lack of a hind toe confirmed our initial thoughts.

As we were debating its identity a Marbled Duck revealed itself and perched on a rock and began to preen and a Greenshank dropped in almost unnoticed among the stilts. Along the canal a Common Coot drew close scrutiny and close by, another coot, this time Red-knobbed, showed no concern as it wandered up to us.

We returned to the visitor centre for lunch where a Swallowtail in the butterfly garden gave the photographers the run around.

We visited two more hides and eight Wood Sandpipers flew over our heads, we observed flamingoes and terns attacking avocets, and spotted a distant Osprey perched on a post before it took flight. The second hide offered closer views of nesting stilts, avocets, and flamingos.

Walking along the canal to a viewing platform, we watched various egrets flying by. Black-crowned Night herons were also very active, displaying a territorial behaviour none of us had witnessed before. As we reached the car park after a full and fulfilling day, a Hoopoe was still calling from beyond the trees.

Day 4

Friday 25th April

Hotel hide, Cap de Formentor, Bóquer Valley, S'Albufereta

Sunshine 14-24°C

The Little Bittern showed well again for those in the hide after first light with the usual Cetti's Warbler singing and a female Pied flycatcher appeared just after the finder of the bittern had left to get his camera! Thankfully, both birds were still present on his return.

We left at 8:15 a.m. to avoid traffic on the winding road up to Cap de Formentor, arriving about 40 minutes later - though we still failed to beat the cyclists to the top. A pair of Peregrines put on a spectacular flying display, and both Scopoli's and Balearic Shearwaters skimmed the sea below.

A pair of Rock Thrushes gave distant views around a natural rock arch, and another landed on a nearby fence adorned with locks - a gesture of affection left by visiting couples. (Blue Lock Thrush?)

Good numbers of swifts and hirundines circled overhead, though there was nothing rare or unusual among them. After an hour and a half of blissful sunshine watching amazing birds and equally absorbing parking manoeuvres, we left for the lower levels, stopping at Cases Vella on the way. Various flycatchers, a Firecrest, and a Cinereous Vulture were seen before a coffee stop near the beach. A Firecrest called and showed very well as we walked the short distance to the café.

A supermarket stop for picnic supplies and back to the pocket park where the wildflower destruction was complete, though watching House Sparrows feeding on the drying grass seeds was a slight benefit.

We ate our lunch as flycatchers ate theirs, the difficulty for us being identifying Spotted from Mediterranean in differing light conditions. An estimated count of 55 European Bee-eaters flew over calling and a Wryneck was a most welcome find as it extracted ants from a tree hole with its long tongue. Time had flown by and it was 3.30 by the time we thought about returning to the hotel for a comfort break before another visit to Sa Barcassa. A Little Stint attracted unwanted attention from the aggressive Avocets and Kentish Plovers, a Hoopoe flew backward and forwards at a distance and a Corn Bunting was seen well as it called from a shrub.

Day 5

Son Real, Depuradora

Sunshine 22°C

An early birder was rewarded with the only sighting of Barn Owl for the week while others were awoken from their slumbers to the sound of spectators cheering on cyclists racing past at 5.30am. The Little Bittern performed admirable before flying to the stream next to the complex. It was re-located and was photographed at close range catching shrimps.

We left at 8:50 a.m. for Son Real, collecting lunch on the way. Signs at our destination warned that the road would be closed after 2:30pm as a major cycle race was underway. Hoopoes were calling, and one was located perched on a fence, offering extended views. We were surprised to hear Turtle Doves and one was located on a dead tree, purring softly. Crossbills were both seen and heard. Orchids were in bloom, and a Woodchat Shrike perched high in a distant tree.

Down at the beach, we observed Kentish Plovers, shearwaters on the horizon, and a Nightingale that briefly showed in flight. Pyramidal and Mirror Orchids were also noted. Hoopoes continued calling and interacting as we arrived back at the visitor centre and Corn Buntings were in song.

We decided to leave early due to the road closures and had lunch at Depuradora. Highlights there included a pair of Black-necked Grebes - a write-in for the checklist - alongside Little Grebes. A pair of Woodchat Shrikes were also present, and a Stone-curlew called and was located in a corner of a field. A Peregrine stooped into a flock of swallows, later returning with what looked like a full crop. Two Marbled Ducks dropped in and Little Ringed Plovers were displaying.

We left at 3:30 p.m., encountering many road closures. The satnav sent us in circles until police directed us to the autoroute. We dropped five off at the hide where the Little Stint was still present, along with close Greater Flamingoes and an Osprey landed on a nesting platform

We gathered at the usual time to complete the checklist before dinner and made plans for mañana.

Day 6

Sunday 27th April

Cúber Reservoir - Lluc Monastery.

Some early showers, cloud, sun 9 - 22°C

We set off at 8:15 toward the Tramuntana Mountains, enjoying lighter traffic and fewer cyclists than the previous day—though the roads were still far from empty. Our first stop offered a magnificent vista out to sea, with a Wren singing and showing nicely in the morning light. We noted several flycatchers before arriving at the first Cúber car park, which was already full. Vultures started drifting over the distant ridgelines—one after another, all turned out to be Griffons. A frog was calling in a small stream below the dam, and a Blue Rock Thrush showed well as three fit group members walked the reservoir circuit. Blackcaps were busy in the trees, a Booted Eagle cruised overhead

Saturday 26th April

and a falcon flew past quickly - though we didn't get a perfect view, size and colour suggested Eleonora's. Crag and House Martins were feeding over the water. An Osprey shook itself dry (we'd probably missed the unsuccessful dive) before landing in a dead tree and a colourful Necklace Ground Beetle stumbled across the path having some difficulty making progress. Meanwhile, the walkers had completed the circuit and spotted a Cinereous Vulture feeding on a ridge which was eventually pushed off by a Griffon.

We stopped at Lluc for lunch, spotting a few more vultures circling in the clearing sky beforehand. A short walk around the botanical gardens afterwards gave us Keeled Skimmer dragonfly, a Wood Warbler and a Nightingale that briefly perched on a stone wall. A Firecrest called and then gave good views as it busily fed in tall Aleppo Pines.

It was pretty busy at Lluc, so we made our way back to the hotel for a quick 10-minute recharge before heading out again to the Bóquer Valley. Before we'd reached the finca, we discovered a Blue Rock Thrush on a stone arch, and below the wall, a Common Redstart, a few more warblers and plenty of flycatchers. Ravens passed overhead, and a Booted Eagle, first observed flying over the finca, flew by at close range. A Peregrine made a dramatic appearance, followed by another (or possibly the same bird) almost directly overhead. A pair of Red-legged Partridges appeared from behind grasses in the field below, and a Hoopoe put in a welcome appearance to end the walk.

We had to drag ourselves away, dinner was calling - it was a very productive and worthwhile hour and a half.

Day 7

Monday 28th April

S'Albufera Marsh.

Overcast, sun 21°C

The Little Bittern was in its usual spot, while a Mediterranean Flycatcher made repeated sorties from a low fence. A singing Willow Warbler was also noted before breakfast.

At S'Albufera, a Squacco Heron had joined the very active heronry, and an Osprey flew low over the Gran Canal. The Squacco observed in front of the hide on our last visit remained faithful to its favourite spot, now sporting a bright blue bill, a remarkable transition into full breeding condition in just a few days. A Western Swamphen was seen briefly, and five Wood Sandpipers alighted out of sight.

Distant falcons remained unidentified as we moved hides for a closer look but couldn't be relocated. From a hide we'd previously not been in, a Little Bittern flew over, landed, and then flew back again and a Cormorant performed a convincing impression of a post before revealing its bill. From a nearby viewing platform, a falcon darted past, and we spotted our first Painted Lady butterfly in pristine condition.

After lunch, three Sanderlings mixed with a small flock of Common Ringed Plovers and another falcon, confirmed as Eleonora's by photographs, made an appearance. A female Little Bittern was active on floating reeds, providing excellent views for photographers as she caught small fish. It has indeed been a good year with at least five different Little Bitterns seen.

After another remarkable day, we returned to the hotel to pack.

Day 8

Tuesday 29th April

Albercuix – Palma.

Hazy sunshine 24°C

An afternoon flight gave us enough time to visit the tower at Albercuix for another chance to find the elusive Balearic Warbler, meaning an 8.15 start to beat the cars (but not the cycles, although they were in low numbers) We navigated the windy mountain road stopping near the approach to the watchtower. Built in the late 16th or early 17th century, its purpose was to warn of approaching pirates and now serves as a strategic birding spot. A brief flight view was all we could summon from the warbler although Blue Rock Thrush and Griffon Vultures were more obliging before we made our way back the hotel to check out.

We said our goodbyes to the lucky couple who were staying for a few more days before leaving for the airport for our journey back to the U.K. We'd had a remarkable and memorable week in Mallorca with mostly fine weather, incredible scenery, excellent company and birding to match!

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

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E = Endemic		April 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Squacco Heron	Ardeola ralloides			1	1			2	
Western Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	\checkmark		\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea					1			
Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea	\checkmark							
Great Egret	Ardea alba		\checkmark	\checkmark				\checkmark	
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	\checkmark							
Osprey	Pandion haliaetus	1		2		2	1	2	
Griffon Vulture	Gyps fulvus						\checkmark		\checkmark
Cinereous Vulture	Aegypius monachus		2		\checkmark			\checkmark	
Booted Eagle	Hieraaetus pennatus						\checkmark		
Western Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus		\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	
Red Kite	Milvus milvus		\checkmark			\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	
Western Barn Owl	Tyto alba					1			
Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops			2	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	Н	
European Bee-eater	Merops apiaster			55	Н				
Eurasian Wryneck	Jynx torquilla		Н		1				
Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus		Н						
Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	\checkmark							
Eleonora's Falcon	Falco eleonorae							\checkmark	
Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus	_			2	1	\checkmark		
Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator	_		3		2			
Northern Raven	Corvus corax	_	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark
Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus	_	•	•	1	•	\checkmark	•	•
Great Tit	Parus major	\checkmark	\checkmark						
Thekla's Lark	Galerida theklae	• •	v	v	v	× 3	v √	v	
Sand Martin	Riparia riparia	_	\checkmark				v		
Eurasian Crag Martin	Ptyonoprogne rupestris	_	\checkmark		\checkmark				
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	\checkmark	v	\checkmark	v		\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark
Western House Martin	Delichon urbicum	\checkmark		v √			v √	v √	V
Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti	H	/	\checkmark	1	\checkmark	\checkmark	v √	\checkmark
Wood Warbler	Phylloscopus sibilatrix		V	V	V	V	\checkmark	V	
Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus	_			\checkmark		\checkmark	\checkmark	
Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita	_			V		\checkmark	V	
Moustached Warbler	Acrocephalus melanopogon	1		Н			V		<u> </u>
Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis							1	
Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla	\checkmark	\checkmark						
Sardinian Warbler	Curruca melanocephala					\checkmark	\checkmark		
Common Whitethroat	· · ·	\checkmark	√ 1	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark
	Curruca communis								4
Balearic Warbler - E	Curruca balearica		1			11			1
Common Firecrest	Regulus ignicapilla				\checkmark	H	\checkmark		<u> </u>
Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes		H	H		1	\checkmark	 ✓ 	H
Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	\checkmark	\checkmark						
Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata		1	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark		\checkmark	
Mediterranean Flycatcher	Muscicapa tyrrhenica		1		\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark	
Common Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos		Н	\checkmark	H	\checkmark	\checkmark	H	
European Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula hypoleuca				4		\checkmark		
Common Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus		1				1		
Blue Rock Thrush	Monticola solitarius		1		4		2		\checkmark

E = Endemic		April 2025								
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola	\checkmark								
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	\checkmark								
Western Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava	\checkmark		\checkmark		\checkmark		\checkmark		
Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis	\checkmark								
Eurasian Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs				\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark			
European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris	\checkmark								
Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina		\checkmark		\checkmark	\checkmark	\checkmark			
Red Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra					\checkmark				
European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	\checkmark								
European Serin	Serinus serinus	\checkmark								
Corn Bunting	Emberiza calandra		\checkmark		\checkmark	\checkmark				

Others

Common name	Scientific name
Mammals	
Common Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus pipistrellus
Reptiles and Amphibians	
Iberian Water Frog	Pelophylax perezi
European Pond Terrapin	Emys orbicularis
Butterflies	
Common Swallowtail	Papilio machaon
Large White	Pieris brassicae
Small White	Artogeia rapae
Cleopatra	Gonepteryx cleopatra
Clouded Yellow	Colias crocea
Holly Blue	Celastrina argiolus
Common Blue	Polyommatus icarus
Painted Lady	Vanessa cardui
Red Admiral	Vanessa atalanta
Monarch	Danaus piexippus
Speckled Wood	Pararge aegeria
Dragonflies	
Common Bluetail	Ischnura elegans
Green-eyed Hawker	Aeshna isoceles
Lesser Emperor	Anax parthenope
Red-veined Darter	Sympetrum fonscolombii
Common Darter	Sympetrum striolatum
Keeled Skimmer	Orthetrum coerulescens
Misc Invertebrates	
Necklace Ground Beetle	Carabus monilis
Orchids	
Pyramidal Orchid	Anacamptis pyramidalis

Common name	Scientific name	
Loose-flowered Orchid	Anacamptis laxiflora	
Mirror Orchid	Ophrys speculum	
Other Notable Plants		
Common Broomrape	Orobanche minor	
Dwarf Fan Palm	Chamaerops humilis	
Balearic Milk-vetch	Astragalus balearicus	
Balearic Sowbread	Cyclamen balearicum	
Branched Asphodel	Asphodelus ramosus	
Balearic St. John's-wort	Hypericum balearicum	
Field Gladiolus	Gladiolus italicus	
Illyrian Gladiolus	Gladiolus illyricus	



Blue Rock Thrush by Simon Satchell