

Trip Report

North-eastern Catalonia – Spain

10-11 December 2004

Participants: Göran Ekström, Niklas Holmström & Dan Mangsbo, Sweden

Itinerary

Flight with Alitalia in the afternoon on 9th December from Arlanda (via Milano) to Barcelona. On the way back we left Barcelona early in the morning on 12th December, along the same route. This meant we only had two full days birding, but our main goal was to study Yelkouan and Balearic Shearwaters off Roses and Cap de Creus. The price of the flight ticket was 205 Euro per person, both ways. We hired a car at the airport for the whole period, cost 144 Euro. Our Catalonian friend and birder, Aleix Comas, meet us late in the evening at Barcelona Airport on 9th December. We then drove straight to Roses (north-east of Barcelona) for about two hours. We stayed two nights in one of Aleix's relative's summer house in the centre of the nice town of Roses and the last night at Aleix and Helena's apartment in the centre of Barcelona. Furthermore, it's very difficult to hire a boat at Roses during the winter for a pelagic trip, but Aleix managed to arrange that by his very useful contacts. Thanks Aleix! The cost for renting the high speed boat was 200 Euro for three hours and the boat tour was certainly worth the money for us seabird addicts, wishing to get close views on the two shearwater species!

10th December: We spent the morning and noon in the great Natural Park Aiguamolls de L'empordà and the beach along Roses Bay (Badia de Roses). Aiguamolls resembles much of Albufera on north-eastern Mallorca (except the absence of the Eleonora's Falcon) with even better and far more hides (in all 13 hides). At noon we visited the harbour of Roses in search for Med Gulls. We spent the afternoon on the peninsula Cap de Creus, visiting nice valleys and seawatched from the eastern-most tip the last hours before dusk. In the evening we had a great dinner in a local restaurant in the lovely small city Roses: Biro, Vino and Paella!

11th December: We left Roses early in the morning about two hours before dawn as our main reason was to reach the peak Núria in the Pyrenees at dawn. The peak lies 2900 metres above sea level. It was cold, indeed, but with a sunrise on a clear blue windless sky, it was a pleasure to birding in the Pyrenees, as the air got warmed up very fast. Seeing several Lammergeirs and up to 30 Griffon Vultures along with Golden Eagles, Alpine Accentors and two species of Choughs was a memorable moment! At noon we drove straight to Empuriabrava (a few kilometres south of Roses) to catch up with the skipper Danny and boat we had hired for an afternoon trip offshore Roses Bay. We bought two kilos of small fishes and lots of sliced bread to use as "chum" and lure seabirds to the boat. Aleix functioned as a "chum" master and has smelt of fish ever since. After about 45 minutes there was many gulls (including two adult Kittiwakes and two Med Gulls) and lots of Gannets close to the boat feeding bread and pieces of fish. Then, at last, the shearwaters arrive (both Balearics and Yelkouans) landing and diving only one metre from the boat! Incredible nice views! What a contrast, Pyrenees in the morning (clear blue sky) and at sea in the afternoon with perfect light conditions, seeing loads of seabirds in great company!

To experience all this within two full days only would be impossible without kind and great help from our friend and birder Aleix Comas!

Photos

A few excellent photos from our short trip to Catalonia could be viewed on the web site (under "Trips & photos"): <http://www.seawatching.net>

Contact

If you ever intend to visit Catalonia don't hesitate to contact Aleix Comas, Barcelona, to get useful information of when and where to go birding in Catalonia as well as up to date reports. You will never regret all the useful help you possible could get from him. You can reach Aleix by email: aleixcomas@hotmail.com

Species List

A total of 100 species were recorded over the two full days.

Black-throated Diver – *Gavia artica*

Two winter plumaged birds flew north off the Roses Bay beach on 10th and one towards north off Cap de Creus in the afternoon on 10th December.

Great Crested Grebe – *Podiceps cristatus*

Two seen offshore Roses Bay beach and in the harbour of Roses on 10th December.

Black-necked Grebe – *Podiceps nigricollis*

Two close and nice winter plumaged birds in one of the lagoons of Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Little Grebe – *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

One seen from the Gantes hide in Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Balearic Shearwater – *Puffinus mauretanicus*

In all 14 birds passing towards both north-west and south off the tip Cap de Creus during our seawatching session between 14:45-16:45 hours on the 10th December. On our tour at sea in the afternoon on 11th December (between 14:35- 17:50 hours) we saw at least 8 close birds, of which one was very dark, which all offered excellent views! According to Aleix and Ricard Gutiérrez the Balearics should have been the most numerous of the two shearwaters species, but it wasn't. Strange! Could they have been delayed, staying in waters along the coast south of Barcelona? Though, great numbers had already passed Gibraltar in to the Mediterranean in late October.

Additional info by Ricard Gutiérrez in email as follows: "You mention a rather surprise on the fact of having more Yelkouans than Balearics. Yes, because in late 2004 the Balearics remained further South and no double figures were obtained so far North, with the largest group (c.1000 birds) moving between Tarragona (most of the time) and a few days off Llobregat Delta."

Yelkouan Shearwater – *Puffinus yelkouan*

At least 41 passing mainly towards north-west off the Cap de Creus tip between 14:45-16:45 hours on the 10th December. On our tour at sea in the afternoon on 11th December we saw at least 39 close birds, of which many were seen (and settled on the sea too) only a metre from the boat! The numbers of this species were probably normal, but may seem high in comparison to the lower numbers of Balearics seen from land and at sea during our visit.

Balearic/Yelkouan Shearwater – *Puffinus mauretanicus/yelkouan*

A total of 22 distant birds were seen off the tip Cap de Creus between 14:45-16:45 hours on 10th the December. At least 26 distant and briefly seen birds were record at sea between 14:35- 17:50 hours on 11th December. Most birds

probably consider Yelkouan Shearwaters, as the Balearics was much more easier to distinguish from the more numerous Yelkouan Shearwaters, which may sound odd, but that's the truth.

Northern Gannet – *Morus bassanus*

A total of 5 birds (one juvenile and four adults) were seen off the Cap de Creus tip between 14:45-16:45 hours on the 10th December. During our pelagic tour on 11th December probably up to 30 adults (except for one immature) were seen. Many birds were attracted, but less happy, about the fishes and bread we through over board. However, their arrival along with the gulls, seemed to attract the shearwaters!

Great Cormorant – *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Fairly common and seen both days with no effort. Good number at Cap de Creus and on the narrow stony jetties in the harbour of Roses. Unfortunately, we didn't record any Mediterranean Shags among the Great Cormorants.

Cattle Egret – *Bubulcus ibis*

Seen daily in small groups, feeding along the roads and any other suitable habitats!

Little Egret – *Egretta garzetta*

One seen in the south area of Aiguamolls Natural Park on 10th December.

Grey Heron – *Ardea cinerea*

Several singles and small groups were seen on both days.

White Stork – *Ciconia ciconia*

At least 80-100 were present in the Natural Park Aiguamolls. These introduced birds are sedentary.

Greater Flamingo – *Phoenicopterus ruber*

Only two singles were seen at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Mute Swan – *Cygnus olor*

At least four adults were seen at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Greylag Goose – *Anser anser*

About 50 were seen at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Common Shelduck – *Tadorna tadorna*

At least four adults were seen at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Mallard – *Anas platyrhynchos*

The commonest dabbling in the lagoons of Aiguamolls Natural Park. Probably 1000's were present in the area on 10th December.

Northern Pintail – *Anas acuta*

At least three females and one male were seen at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Common Teal – *Anas crecca*

The second most commonest dabbling in the lagoons of Aiguamolls Natural Park. Several thousand were present in the area on 10th December.

Northern Shoveler – *Anas clypeata*

50-100 were seen at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Common Pochard – *Aythya ferina*

Only seen in the southern area of Aiguamolls (from the Gantes hide) with up to 50 birds on 10th December.

Tufted Duck – *Aythya fuligula*

Only seen in the southern area of Aiguamolls (from the Gantes hide) with up to 20 birds on 10th December.

Lammergeier (Bearded Vulture) – *Gypaetus barbatus*

At least three birds seen at the peak Núria in the Pyrenees (within two hours drive from Roses) late morning on 11th December: Two nice adults and one juvenile just passing a few metres over our heads. The adults and the juvenile were seen on several occasions, soaring together with Griffon Vultures and Golden Eagles against a clear blue sky. These sightings were lovely and unforgettable and, yes, it was an ever-lasting memory!

Griffon Vulture – *Gyps fulvus*

30-40 birds were seen at the peak Núria in the Pyrenees (within two hours drive from Roses) late morning on 11th December. It was a delight to see in total 17 Griffon Vultures, one juvenile Lammergeier and two adult Golden Eagles soaring together! Several Griffon's were recorded at the peak and in the valleys further below the peaks

Golden Eagle – *Aquila chrysaetos*

At least two adult pairs (and one immature) were seen at the peak Núria in the Pyrenees late morning on 11th December. Great views!

Marsh Harrier – *Circus aeruginosus*

Several were seen at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Buzzard – *Buteo buteo*

Several were seen at Aiguamolls on 10th December and along the road to and from the Pyrenees on the 11th.

Goshawk – *Accipiter gentilis*

One nice adult female was seen for a while from the Quim Franch hide at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Common Kestrel – *Falco tinnunculus*

Several were seen at Aiguamolls and along the road to Cap de Creus on 10th December as well along the road to and from the Pyrenees on 11th December.

Peregrine Falcon – *Falco peregrinus*

One adult seen from the boat off Punta Falconera, close to Roses in the west on 11th December.

Red-legged Partridge – *Alectoris rufa*

9 (6, 3) were seen on the lower slopes (near the car park) at Núria on 11th December.

Water Rail – *Rallus aquaticus*

At least two different birds were heard at the Gantes hide in Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Common Moorhen – *Gallinula chloropus*

Several were seen from different hides at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Eurasian Coot – *Fulica atra*

Several were seen from different hides at Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Purple Swamp-hen – *Porphyrio porphyrio*

At least three were seen from the Gantes hide and one was walking among horses in the southern area of Aiguamolls on the 10th December.

Common Crane – *Grus grus*

6 passed over Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Little Bustard – *Tetrax tetrax*

One female seen at close range from the Quim Franch hide at Aiguamolls in the morning on 10th December.

Kentish Plover – *Charadrius alexandrinus*

One seen on the beach of Roses Bay on 10th December.

Grey Plover – *Pluvialis squatarola*

At least seven seen on the beach of Roses Bay on 10th December.

Golden Plover – *Pluvialis apricaria*

Fairly common with numerous flocks seen in the Aiguamolls area on 10th December.

Northern Lapwing – *Vanellus vanellus*

Fairly common with numerous flocks seen in the Aiguamolls area on 10th December.

Sanderling – *Calidris alba*

At least five birds were seen on the beach of Roses Bay on 10th December.

Spotted Redshank – *Tringa erythropus*

At least ten birds were seen in the Aiguamolls area on 10th December.

Common Snipe – *Gallinago gallinago*

Common in the Aiguamolls area on 10th December.

Black-headed Gull – *Larus ridibundus*

Besides Yellow-legged Gull the most common gull species seen in the area during our stay.

Mediterranean Gull – *Larus melanocephalus*

Surprisingly only two adults seen and not from shore, but close to the boat on our pelagic trip in the afternoon on 11th December.

Yellow-legged Gull – *Larus michahellis*

The most common gull species, seen everywhere along the coast, offshore and in big flocks inland too.

Lesser Black-backed Gull – *Larus graellsii/intermedius*

One adult and one juvenile was seen during our pelagic trip in the afternoon on 11th December. Very scarce along the Mediterranean coast of Spain in late autumn and winter.

Kittiwake – *Rissa tridactyla*

Two adult birds were seen almost the whole time during our pelagic trip in the afternoon on 11th December. The birds seen within a few metres catching bread and pieces of fish thrown over board by Aleix!

Sandwich Tern – *Sterna sandvicensis*

Singles were seen regularly along the coast and flocks up to 30 birds on the beach of Roses Bay and in the harbour of Roses.

Razorbill – *Alca torda*

4 flew north off Cap de Creus on 10th December. Also 7 (5+2) recorded passing north on our pelagic trip in the afternoon on 11th December.

Feral Dove – *Columba livia*

Seen here and there both days.

Common Wood Pigeon – *Columba palumbus*

Two seen along the road from Pyrenees on 11th December.

Eurasian Collared Dove – *Streptopelia decaocto*

Several seen around the Information Centre in Aiguamolls National Park in the morning on 10th.

Eurasian Hoopoe – *Upupa epops*

Two in the southern part of Aiguamolls in late morning on 10th December.

Common Kingfisher – *Alcedo atthis*

At least two heard and seen close to Quim Franch and Gantes hide in Aiguamolls in the morning on 10th December.

Monk Parakeet – *Myiopsitta monachus*

Two seen in the luxury and little village Empuriabrava south of Roses in the afternoon on 11th December, before embarking on our pelagic trip.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker – *Dendrocopos minor*

One seen along the river in Belusa (a small city between Roses and the Pyrenees) on 11th December.

Eurasian Skylark – *Alauda arvensis*

Several seen and heard on both days, mainly in the Aiguamolls area.

Crested Lark – *Galerida cristata*

Fairly common. Seen here and there in lowland areas close to the coast.

Thekla Lark – *Galerida theklae*

Several seen on higher and rocky altitudes and only recorded on the Cap de Creus Peninsula north of Roses on 10th December.

Eurasian Crag Martin – *Hirundo rupestris*

4-5 seen on the Cap de Creus Peninsula north of Roses on 10th December.

Meadow Pipit – *Anthus pratensis*

Several seen in the Aiguamolls area on 10th December.

Water Pipit – *Anthus spinoletta*

A few seen in Aiguamolls on 10th and in the Pyrenees on 11th December.

Grey Wagtail – *Motacilla cinerea*

A few were seen and heard in Aiguamolls on 10th December.

White Wagtail – *Motacilla alba*

Fairly common and seen almost everywhere.

Dunnock – *Prunella modularis*

A few heard in Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Alpine Accentor – *Prunella collaris*

Only seen on higher altitudes in the Pyrenees in the morning on 11th December, numbers as follows: one flock that contained about 20 birds close to the small stony road up to the peak Núria and singles and less numerous flocks were seen at the peak Núria and surroundings. Many excellent and close views of this beautiful species, which recall much of a small lark in size, flight and call.

European Robin – *Erithacus rubecula*

Seen and heard here and there on both days.

Black Redstart – *Phoenicurus ochruros*

One male at Aiguamolls on 10th and one male along the road to the tip of Cap de Creus on 10th December.

Common Stonechat – *Saxicola torquata*

Several seen in the Aiguamolls Natural Park, Cap de Creus Peninsula and the Pyrenees on both days.

Blue Rock Thrush – *Monticola solitarius*

Three singles seen on the Cap de Creus Peninsula on 10th December.

Common Blackbird – *Turdus merula*

Seen here and there on both days. Fairly common.

Song Trush – *Turdus philomelos*

A few seen at Aiguamolls and in the Pyrenees on both days.

Mistle Trush – *Turdus viscivorus*

Only seen in the Pyrenees on 11th December.

Cetti's Warbler – *Cettia cetti*

Fairly common in Aiguamolls Natural Park, but hard to see.

Zitting Cisticola – *Cisticola juncidis*

Several seen and heard in Aiguamolls Natural Park on 10th December.

Dartford Warbler – *Sylvia undata*

Several heard and seen briefly in a valley on Cap de Creus Peninsula on 10th December.

Sardinian Warbler – *Sylvia melanocephala*

Common and singles were seen almost everywhere from the coastal areas up to higher altitudes at Cap de Creus and Pyrenees.

Chiffchaff – *Phylloscopus collybita*

A few seen and heard here and there, especially in the Aiguamolls area on both days.

Great Tit – *Parus major*

Seen here and there on both days.

Coal Tit – *Parus ater*

Heard calling widely in woodland areas, especially in the Pyrenees. The call was slightly different from that of Scandinavian birds.

Crested Tit – *Parus cristatus*

Several heard and a few seen in the Pyrenees on 11th December.

Eurasian Penduline Tit – *Remiz pendulinus*

At least six were seen well in the Natural Park Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Common Magpie – *Pica pica*

Fairly common and seen here and there both days.

Alpine Chough – *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

At least six seen at the peak Núria in the Pyrenees on 11th December.

Red-billed Chough – *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

Up to 20 birds were seen at the peak Núria in the Pyrenees on 11th December.

Carrion Crow – *Corvus corone corone*

Seen here and there on both days.

Raven – *Corvus corax*

At least 20 birds were seen at the peak Núria in the Pyrenees on 11th December.

Common Starling – *Sturnus vulgaris*

The most numerous bird species seen during our visit! Unfortunately, we didn't see any Spotless Starlings, which breed on the Cap de Creus Peninsula, but move south in winter.

House Sparrow – *Passer domesticus*

Seen here and there, especially numerous at the Information Centre in Aiguamolls.

Common Chaffinch – *Fringilla coelebs*

Fairly common in the Pyrenees.

Common Linnet – *Carduelis cannabina*

Several seen and heard in Aiguamolls on 10th December.

European Goldfinch – *Carduelis carduelis*

Several seen and heard in Aiguamolls on 10th December and the Pyrenees on 11th December.

European Greenfinch – *Carduelis chloris*

A few seen in Aiguamolls on 10th December.

Citril Finch – *Serinus citrinella*

Four + one seen in the Pyrenees on 11th December.

Common Crossbill – *Loxia curvirostra*

5+ (1,4+) were seen in the Pyrenees on 11th December.

Common Reed Bunting – *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Fairly common in the National Park Aiguamolls with many sightings.

Yellowhammer – *Emberiza citrinella*

One at Núria in the Pyrenees, 2300 metres above sea level.

Corn Bunting – *Emberiza calandra*

Only 1-2 seen of this fairly common species (in agricultural areas) at Cap de Creus on 10th December.

Acknowledgement

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