GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF S'ALBUFERA NATURAL PARK, MALLORCA

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Introduction

S’Albufera Natural Park, created in 1988, attracts increasing numbers of bird watchers from the Balearic Islands, mainland Europe and throughout the world. The Park comprises 1500 hectares of reed beds, canals and pools, connected by tracks, bridges and paths and 250 hectares of sand-dune and dune woodland. This guide is aimed at the interested amateur ornithologist, and anyone who takes pleasure in looking at birds. The Park has a team of professional biologists who keep detailed records of visiting and breeding birds, and this guide is based largely on their observations, with some added information from visiting scientists and local ornithologists.

Management of the Park has increased the range of habitats to include areas of bare mud, varied water depth, clear canals, trees and scrub, reed beds and reed edge. Cattle, buffalo and horses are allowed into some areas in order to maintain clearings and different vegetation heights.

This management has resulted in an increase in both wintering and breeding water birds. The overall density of water birds wintering in the Park has increased by a factor of seven. For example, the number of wintering herons and egrets increased from 74 in 1988 to 500 in 1998, and ducks from 450 to 4,500. Breeding herons and egrets were represented by fewer than 20 nests of just one species (purple heron) in 1988, but had increased to 210 nests of 5 species by 1998 and to 250 nests of six species (purple heron, grey heron, cattle egret, little egret, night heron and squacco heron) by 2001. The bittern, which had become extinct as a breeding bird in Mallorca, has recolonised S’Albufera, while other birds such as the purple gallinule and red-crested pochard have been given a helping hand, through artificial reintroduction.

There are several hides open to visitors, which give excellent views of some of the more open areas and pools, with identification charts of birds displayed within. The hides should be entered and left quietly. Please close the shutters if you are last to depart.

Despite the good viewing facilities and open areas, birds can be difficult to see amongst the tall dense vegetation, particularly in summer. Many of the birds rely on calls to maintain contact, and this provides an additional means of identification. Visiting bird watchers may find that calls and songs are slightly different from those they are used to at home: birds can have local dialects. Also, a puzzling call could well turn out to be made by a frog or cricket!

Some birds, such as night herons and water rails are active at twilight or during the night. Others, such as wagtails, corn buntings and starlings use the Park to roost and fly daily between the reed beds and the surrounding farmland. The roosts, in turn, attract birds of prey to the area.

Mallorca’s position in the Mediterranean means that it is a stopping off point for very large numbers of passage migrants in spring and autumn, moving between Europe and Africa. Birds of prey, such as eleonora’s falcons, specialise in feeding on these migrants. In yellow wagtails and some other species, races bound for different breeding areas are found together as they pass through Mallorca.
Between 1988 and 1998, a total of 263 species was recorded in the Park, of which 57 species bred. This guide describes a selection of the more easily seen and commonest birds. A complete species list is also included. The species accounts are arranged as follows:

Scientific name (with length in centimetres)

English name

Status at S'Albufera: whether a migrant or resident, abundance, and whether increasing or decreasing in numbers.

Maximum number: where known, a figure is given of the Maximum number of birds seen on any one day from August 1993 - August 2001.

Breeding: the size of the breeding population in the Park, if known.

Habitat: the preferred habitat in the Park.

Description: a brief description of the main identification points, including plumage, behaviour and calls. Where appropriate, notes are given on arrival and departure times and good places to see the bird in the Park.

Please fill in a record form of the birds you see when you visit the Park, and leave it at the information desk. This can then be used by the Park staff to compile their daily records.
**Tachybaptus ruficollis** (25-29 cm)
Little Grebe
Common resident
Maximum: 250 (estimate)
Breeding: 125 pairs (estimate)
Open water and reed swamp

Little grebes look like a ball of feathers with virtually no tail, a short upright neck and short pointed bill. The overall colour is dark brown, but the cheeks and neck are a rich chestnut, with a pale spot at the base of the bill in summer. In winter the plumage is duller, with less chestnut and paler under parts. They occur on all the deeper freshwater pools and canals, constantly diving for small fish and invertebrates. Their call is a high-pitched trilling, often drawing a response from birds in nearby territories.

**Podiceps cristatus** (46-51 cm)
Great-crested grebe
Scarce winter visitor
Maximum: 4 (February 1994)
Open water

This is a much larger grebe than the last species, and has a conspicuous long white-fronted neck and long pointed bill. It swims low in the water, and slides beneath the surface in search of fish with scarcely a ripple. Individuals often remain for some weeks on the Gran Canal.

**Podiceps nigricollis** (28-34 cm)
Black-necked grebe
Scarce autumn and winter visitor
Maximum: 6 (September-October 1993)
Open water

This grebe is slightly larger than a little grebe. It has a grey-black face and neck, red eye and upturned bill. Like the other two grebes, it habitually dives for fish, and prefers deeper water.

**Phalacrocorax carbo** (80-100 cm)
Cormorant
Common winter visitor
Maximum: 189 (January 1994)
Deep water and canal-side trees

Cormorants are large, dark, fish eating birds with short legs and webbed feet. Two races occur in S'Albufera: one from Holland and north Atlantic coasts, and a central and southern European race. In breeding plumage, the adults of both races develop a round white patch on the flank, but the southern race also develops white feathers on the neck and breast. Young birds are brown with paler bellies. They have a heavy flight with long neck outstretched. They swim low in the water and dive for fish, which are captured in their long, slightly hooked bills. When fully fed they like to perch upright on a post or tree above the water, often in groups. They often spread
their wings out when perched. This helps to dry the wings, though it has been suggested that it may also help the birds to warm up after immersion in cold water, perhaps aiding digestion. Highest numbers occur from November to February.

**Botaurus stellaris** (70-80 cm)
Bittern
Scarce resident
Breeding: up to 10 pairs
Reedswamp and reed edge

The bittern is seldom seen, as it likes to skulk in dense reeds searching for fish and frogs. Its plumage is a mottled golden brown, matching the reeds. When alarmed it stands motionless with long bill erect. In flight silhouette it resembles a heron, with neck retracted and greenish legs outstretched. From mid-February the males begin their booming territorial call, which sounds rather like someone blowing across the mouth of an empty bottle. When close, it is possible to hear an intake of breath before the boom. Bitterns returned to breed in the Park in the 1990s reaching about ten booming males by the end of the decade. A major reed bed fire in 2001 may have reduced their numbers.

**Ixobrychus minutus** (33-38 cm)
Little bittern
Breeding summer visitor
Reed beds and canals

The adult male has a black crown and back, streaked brown front and cream wing panel. The female is similar but more streaky. They are sometimes flushed along canal banks, and usually fly a short distance before landing clumsily in the reeds. Little bitterns are most active at dusk and dawn. At this time the male makes a repeated 'kwok', every 2-3 seconds, a bit like a distant dog bark. A few little bitterns remain through the winter, but most fly to tropical Africa in autumn and return to S'Albufera in March to breed.
**Nycticorax nycticorax** (58-65 cm)
Night heron
Summer visitor; a few winter
Maximum: 110 (July 1997)
Pools; roost in trees during the day

Night herons are pale grey with a black back and crown and broad pointed black bill. The legs are red in breeding birds, and there is a long drooping white crest on the head. Immatures are dark brown with pale spots and streaks. During the day they often gather in a communal tree roost, usually in the pines near the Park gates. They emerge shortly before nightfall along the Gran Canal, uttering loud 'kwark' calls. The wings are rather rounded in silhouette, and the flight is steady, but with frequent changes of direction. When feeding, they stand very still in the water, legs set wide, watching for any movement, then stalk their prey cautiously. Many of S'Albufera's night herons migrate south in September/October, and return in March/April. Winter numbers are increasing, with 31 present in January 1998.

**Bubulcus ibis** (48-53 cm)
Cattle egret
Winter visitor: some present throughout the year
Maximum: 242 (January 1998)
Fields near livestock or bank sides, often in trees

Cattle egrets can be confused with little egrets. Both are white heron-like birds with long legs. However, cattle egrets have a shorter neck and more hunched appearance and the bill is yellow-orange (not black). In breeding condition the bill becomes deep orange and ginger-yellow tints appear on the feathers of the crown, breast and back. The dark greeny-brown legs also change to a rusty colour. An egret standing on or alongside a cow or horse is almost certain to be a cattle egret. When the beasts disturb an insect, the egret alights and chases after the prey. Often they simply walk about
inspecting the ground where the cattle have recently trodden. When they see prey they sometimes make side-to-side neck movements, gauging the distance before the neck unfolds and the bill darts out. Cattle egrets rarely wade in water to feed. However, they do gather in bank side trees or stand in shallow water to roost, often in the company of little egrets. In the morning they stay in the roost longer than little egrets, and the majority leave the Park to feed in nearby fields.

**Egretta garzetta** (55-65 cm)
Little egret
Breeding resident and passage migrant
Maximum: 301 (August 1998)
Open water, water margins, roost in bushes and trees

Little egrets are one of the most conspicuous birds in the Park. Their white plumage immediately attracts attention as they fly over the reeds, their black legs with yellow feet trailing behind. They feed on fish and other small animals which they catch by wading into shallow water. The usual feeding method is to stir the sediment by shaking one foot, then darting forward to catch anything that moves, sometimes running through the water after their prey. They also snap at passing dragonflies.

Little egrets leave their roost at first light, spreading out widely in suitable pools around the Park. They feed intensively for an hour or two then tend to fly off in search of better feeding areas. One bird often chases off another, making a grunting 'raak' call, setting off a chain reaction of birds flying from pool to pool. As evening approaches they gather in trees to roost, often making a final movement to a new site just before nightfall.

**Egretta alba** (85-102 cm)
Great white egret (= Great white heron)
Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant
Maximum: 5 (January 1998 and November 2000)
Pools amongst tall vegetation

The great white egret looks like a much larger version of a little egret. However, the bill and legs are yellowish in winter, and the bird is usually solitary and rather shy. It often keeps the company of the similar sized grey heron during the day, but roosts in trees with other egrets. At S'Albufera it feeds mostly on fish by wading into water, sometimes performing a dancing flight low over the surface to shoal them.

**Ardea cinerea** (90-98 cm)
Grey heron
Common winter visitor, with some present in every month
Maximum: 65 (January, 1998)
Breeding: 2-3 pairs bred in 1989 and also in 1991
Canal banks, pool edges

Grey herons look huge in flight, with grey and black wings beating slowly and heavily, neck hunched up and legs extended. When they stand motionless on a canal side, they can be easily overlooked. They often gather in loose groups of up to 10 on Es Colombar and at the water treatment works. In summer they generally migrate north to breed, and are replaced by purple herons from the south. Since 1989 a few pairs have bred sporadically. In autumn and spring both species can be seen in the Park.

*Ardea purpurea* (78-90 cm)
Purple heron
Common summer resident
Breeding: approximately 100 pairs in 2000
Pools among reeds

This large heron is almost as big as the last species, but is a darker bird with a more slender head and neck. It is shyer than the grey heron and difficult to observe on the ground without disturbance. As it rises up, the chestnut underwing coverts are visible. The back looks brownish purple with two yellowish spots at the carpal joint and the orange coloured legs trail behind. Purple herons winter in tropical Africa, returning to S'Albufera in March. The occasional bird turns up in winter.
**Anser anser** (75-90 cm)
Greylag goose
Scarce winter visitor
Maximum: 54 (November 1998)
Open marshes

These large grey geese with orange bill and legs can sometimes be seen on the marshes in winter, usually in the Es Ras area. They keep in flocks, and in flight make the squeaky, honking, farmyard goose call. They are indeed the ancestors of the domestic goose, and some feral greylags are present in the Park in small numbers throughout the year.

**Anas penelope** (45-51 cm)
Wigeon
Common winter visitor
Marshes and grassy banks
Maximum: 590 (January 1995)
Grassy banks of pools

Wigeon are ducks with small bills adapted for grazing. The drakes make a far-carrying whistling note, and in flight show a large white patch on the fore wing. The head is rufous with a yellow forehead. The females are duller and lack the white wing patch. They form dense flocks on Ses Eres, Es Ras and Es Cibollar from October to March.

**Anas strepera** (46-56 cm)
Gadwall
Resident and winter visitor
Maximum: 175 (January 1998)
Breeding: 35-38 pairs in 2001
Shallow pools

At first sight a drake gadwall seems much duller than the drakes of other species. However, close inspection shows fine grey and black vermiculations on the breast, and a black hind end. Both sexes have a white wing patch on the secondaries, larger in the male, conspicuous in flight and sometimes visible on the water. Gadwall are dabbling ducks and feed in shallow water by head ducking and up-ending.
**Anas crecca** (34 -38cm)
Teal
Common winter visitor
Maximum: 1118 (December 1999)
Shallow water

The teal is a small surface feeding duck which springs quickly from the water when disturbed, swerving and turning in fast flight. The drake has a dark chestnut head with a broad green stripe leading back from the eye. There is a yellow triangle at the base of the tail. The female is brown and streaky but shares the male's green speculum (wing bar) framed in white, and has a white mark near the tail base. The drake makes a clear 'cheep' sound. In spring teal migrate north to breed.

**Anas querquedula** (37-41cm)
Garganey
Spring migrant; can occur in any month
Maximum: 200 (March 1998)
Shallow water and boggy areas

The drake is a striking bird with a bold white stripe above the eye, reddish head and long blue-grey scapulars. There is also a blue-grey patch on the fore wing, visible in flight. Females are similar to female teal, but have a pale patch at the base of the bill, and no white mark at the tail base. When courting, the drakes make a dry rattling call, which has been described as sounding like a finger-nail drawn across the teeth of a comb. Garganey and teal usually feed with just the head held beneath the surface, dabbling with the bill, using touch to detect food.

The garganey which pass through S'Albufera during March and April are moving to breeding grounds farther north, after wintering in tropical Africa.

**Anas platyrhynchos** (51-62 cm)
Mallard
Resident and winter visitor
Maximum: 2,800 (January 1997)
Breeding: about 1000 pairs
Pools, canals, banks, tracks and paths

The mallard is one of the largest ducks and is the most widespread and easily seen. Mallards like to come out of the water and rest on the banks, and are often seen waddling across the tracks. Some of the resident mallards around Sa Roca are tame, but others spring up from the water when surprised. The drake has an iridescent green-blue head, whose colour changes with the angle of the light. The back and sides are grey and brown, with black hind quarters, white tail and black curly central tail.
feathers. The bill is yellow. Females are streaky brown, and only she gives the characteristic loud quacking sound. They often feed by up-ending.

Anas acuta (51-57cm)
Pintail  
Winter visitor  
Maximum: 43 (January 1995)  
Shallow pools  

The pintail is an elegant bird, with long neck, rounded head and long narrow pointed tail. The drake has a greyish body, with elongated black and grey back feathers. The breast is white extending as a curved line into the chocolate coloured head. The pointed tail is particularly noticeable as the birds up-end to feed, and is set off in the drake by black and yellow under-tail panels. The female is streaky brown, with a short pointed tail.

Anas clypeata (49-52 cm)
Shoveler  
Winter visitor: one pair bred in 2001  
Maximum: 1100 (January 1996)  
Shallow pools  

Shovelers are easily identified by their outsized broad-ended bills. These are held just below the water surface as the birds swim forward to filter small prey items from the water and mud. Drakes have prominent chestnut belly and flanks, white breast and green head. There is a blue wing patch, which shows up in flight. The female also has a blue wing patch, but is otherwise streaky brown. Shovelers move north to breed, departing in February-March.

Netta rufina (53-57 cm)
Red-crested pochard  
Resident: increasing  
Maximum: 191 (January 1997)  
Breeding: 60-65 pairs in 2001  
Deeper pools and canals  

Drake red-crested pochards have an orange head, red bill, black breast and neck and black hind end. The flanks are whitish, blending into a coffee coloured back. The female is brown, ringed with paler streaks and has contrasting whitish cheeks. They feed by diving as well as up-ending and dipping. The courting male has a sneeze like call. Numbers at S'Albufera are increasing after the species was reintroduced in 1992.
**Aythya ferina** (42-49 cm)
Pochard
Winter visitor; a few stay to breed
Maximum: 545 (January 1995)
Breeding: 5 pairs in 2001; first bred 1992
Deeper water

Pochard drakes have a reddish brown head, black breast and tail end, with contrasting pale grey breast and back. Females have the same plumage pattern as the male, but comprised of brown and grey. They are diving ducks and prefer the main canals and water treatment works. Highest numbers occur between October and January, when they depart for more northerly breeding grounds.

**Aythya fuligula** (40-47 cm)
Tufted duck
Winter visitor
Maximum: 180 (January 1994)
Deeper water

The black and white drake with his long crest, yellow eye and grey bill is easy to identify. On the water, the white flanks contrast with the black body. The female is brown, but paler where the male has the white band. She has a slight crest only. Tufted are diving ducks and prefer deeper water. The highest numbers occur in January, and they move north to breed.

**Oxyura leucocephala** (43-48 cm)
White-headed duck
Resident
Breeding: one or two pairs
Deep water

The male has a white head with some black on the crown, and a blue bill with swollen base. There is a black neck band, but the rest of the body is a ginger-brown with black striations. The tail is held stiffly upwards. Females are similar, but the head has only a little white and the bill is dark. They are diving ducks and are usually seen on the Gran Canal.

As a conservation measure for this internationally endangered species, 36 birds were released in the Park on 31st March 1993. Some remained on the Gran Canal, but others dispersed as far as Palma! Despite isolated breeding success, numbers declined to 18 birds in 1995 and to 2 or 3 by 1998 with one pair breeding in 2001. The only evidence of previous presence comes from a wood cutting depicted in an old book on
the area. At that time, S'Albufera was largely a series of lagoons. The current limited availability of this habitat may prove a barrier to the reestablishment of a viable population.

**Circus aeruginosus** (48-55 cm)
Marsh harrier
Resident and winter visitor
Maximum: 51 (October 1996)
Breeding: about 10 males (some have more than one mate)
Reed beds

This large bird of prey is regularly seen quartering slowly over the reeds and marshes, with broad wings held in a shallow V. Other birds below usually fly up in alarm when they spot the harrier nearby, allowing the raptor to seek out weak or injured individuals. The female has dark brown plumage with a creamy yellow fore wing and head, and a brown stripe through the eye. Adult males have a large area of grey on the wing, grey tail and black wing tips. Immatures are chocolate brown with variable head markings. Communal roosts of up to 50 birds occur in winter in the reed beds. Marsh harriers are visible most of the time in the park, with two or three often hunting together. They also gather at starling roosts in the late afternoon in winter.

**Circus cyaneus** (43-50 cm)
Hen harrier
Winter visitor
Maximum: 5 (January 1996)
Marsh fringes, banks, tracks
This harrier occurs regularly during the winter months. Its hunting behaviour is similar to the marsh harrier's, but it more commonly flies along linear features such as tracks and canals. It is a more slender bird than the last species. Females are streaky brown with a white crescent-shaped rump patch and barred tail. The adult male is pale grey with black wing tips. Both sexes have long yellow legs.

**Pandion haliaetus** (55-69 cm)
Osprey
Present throughout the year
Maximum: 3 (various times)
Often perched on post or tree

The osprey is a large fish-eating bird of prey with a world wide distribution. The back is dark and the breast white, with a darker band. There is also a dark stripe through the eye. The wings are angled in flight, and when a fish is spotted the osprey hovers over the spot before dropping to seize it from the water in its talons. This spectacular hunting behaviour can often be seen over the Gran Canal.

**Falco tinnunculus** (33-39 cm)
Kestrel
Resident
Maximum: 19 (August 1997)
Breeding 1-2 pairs
Periphery of Park, old buildings, grassy areas

This falcon is regularly seen hovering along the tracks and paths, facing into the wind with tail fanned and wings fluttering, as it scans the ground for small prey. When there is too little wind to hover, kestrels scan for prey from a perch such as a post or power cable. The male's back is a rusty colour with black flecks. The head is blue-grey, as is the tail which has a black terminal band and white tip. The breast is cream with black streaks. The female is similar but lacks the grey head and tail. Kestrels can be very vocal around the nest site, making high-pitched 'kee-kee-kee' calls.

**Falco eleonorae** (36-42 cm)
Eleonora's falcon
Summer resident
Maximum: 112 (May 1995)
In flight almost anywhere

Eleonora's falcons have very long, pointed wings and a rapid graceful flight. They do not hover like a kestrel, but pursue their prey (small birds and dragonflies) on the
wing. They occur in dark, intermediate and light phases. All are slate grey on the back, and the dark phase is also very dark beneath. The light phase is white around the face with a prominent dark moustachial stripe, rusty tinted and streaked below.

These falcons breed in colonies on the north coast of Mallorca and on some of the offshore islands. They winter mostly in the region of Madagascar, returning to S’Albufera in April-May, when they can be seen hunting over the reed beds, sometimes in quite large numbers. Breeding occurs in late summer, allowing the young to be fed on migrant passerines.

**Falco peregrinus** (39-50 cm)
Peregrine falcon
Resident and passage migrant
Maximum: 2 (various times)
Hunting over the park, often high up

Peregrines are powerful looking falcons with a stocky body, pointed steel grey wings and a short grey tail. The female is larger than the male. The broad moustachial stripe and barred under parts are visible at close range, but peregrines often remain no more than a distant, if unmistakable, silhouette. They occur in ones and twos in any month of the year. They prey on other birds, either by out-flying them or in a stooping dive, and are often in the vicinity of the starling roost on the western side of the Park in October and November.

**Rallus aquaticus** (22-28 cm)
Water rail
Common resident
Maximum: estimate of 300 (January 1998)
Breeding: 150 pairs (estimate)
Swampy vegetation

Water rails have a laterally compressed body, which allows them to move easily through thick swampy vegetation. They are shy birds, most easily discovered by their calls, which consist of a sudden pig-squealing sound, which gradually fades away. At night they make a repeated 'kip-kip-kip' call. They are most easily seen in the early morning, when they often emerge onto the mud in front of Bishop 1 hide. They have a long, slightly down-curved red bill, grey breast, brown back and striped flanks, with a bobbing white tail.

**Gallinula chloropus** (32-35 cm)
Moorhen
Common resident
Maximum: 500 winter 96-7
Breeding: 250 pairs (estimate)
Bank sides, canals, pools, paths and tracks

The moorhen is likely to be the first species encountered as you enter the Park. Moorhens resemble a small, dark chicken with a jerky black and white tail. They like to come out onto the road and paths, sometimes in small groups. When disturbed they run for cover in the reeds with necks outstretched. The back is a rich brown, the
underparts slate grey with white horizontal flank markings. The bill is yellow with a red base and shield and the legs are yellowish with red 'garters'. The usual call is a rich 'kruuk'. Juveniles are brown in colour with a pale chin.

**Porphyrio porphyrio** (45-50 cm)
Purple gallinule
Resident, reintroduced: population increasing
Maximum: 150 (January 1998)
Breeding: about 200 pairs by 1999
Reed beds and dense swampy vegetation adjacent to a canal or pool

Purple gallinules look like giant moorhens, with dark iridescent blue plumage, white under-tail patch, red legs and stout red bill. They have been described as looking like a moorhen on steroids. They are exclusively vegetarian, using the toes of one foot to grasp a plant stem while skilfully removing the nutritious parts with their strong bill. They run clumsily when disturbed, but fly infrequently. They spend much of their time hidden in the reeds and keep in contact by raucous cackling and grunting calls. When reeds are cut for clearance, or trampled by animals, the gallinules emerge to feed on the broken stems. Hunting and agricultural expansion led to their extinction in Mallorca early in the 20th century. Twenty eight birds were reintroduced into the Park on 10th July 1991. Three pairs bred in 1992, increasing to 23 pairs in 1995, 40 in 1996 and 200 in 1999. They are now too numerous to count accurately, and have spread throughout the Park and beyond to the Albufereta. They are most easily seen from the CIM and Bishop hides.

**Fulica atra** (36-38 cm)
Coot
Common breeding resident and winter visitor
Breeding: 350-450 pairs estimated 1991
Canals, pools and bank sides

Coots are plump black waterbirds with a striking white bill and frontal shield. They dive under water to seize plant matter in their bills, which is carried back to the surface to eat. The downy black young have orange-red heads and follow their parents to be fed. Non-breeding birds form dense packs, especially at Tancat de Sa Roca (CIM hide). Breeding birds are aggressively territorial, constantly splashing and squabbling, making very high-pitched 'pitt' sounds. They often chase across the
water, flapping their wings and paddling the surface. Any loud splashing heard in the
reeds is most likely to be a coot.

**Grus grus** (114-130 cm)
Crane
Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor
Maximum: 30 (October 1995 and October 1997)
Pools and marshes

Migrating cranes can occasionally be seen crossing the Park in a diagonal line or V
formation, necks outstretched (unlike a heron) and legs trailing. The plumage is
generally pale grey, with black on the wings, tail and neck. A white stripe extends
behind the eye and the crown is red. Their trumpeting calls can be heard from some
distance. Sometimes they land and feed, but seldom stay long. They can occur in any
month between October and April. Cranes breed in northern and eastern Europe,
wintering in Spain and North Africa.

**Himantopus himantopus** (35-40 cm)
Black-winged stilt
Summer visitor, increasing; a few overwinter
Maximum: 310 (June 1999)
Breeding: 110 pairs in 2001
Pools and exposed mud

This wader is unmistakable owing to its extremely long pink legs, which look
completely out of proportion to its body. The back is black, the under parts white and
there is a variable amount of black on the head, which can be completely white. The
black bill is long and slender and the eye is red-tinted. Females are similar to males
but the back is less glossy and lacks the green sheen. They feed by wading, sometimes
up to their bellies, but also in shallow water. They often form noisy groups in spring,
calling and chasing in territorial disputes. They nest in a scrape on the open mud.
**Charadrius dubius** (14-15 cm)
Little ringed plover
Summer visitor: a few present in most winters
Maximum: 38 (March 1996)
Breeding: 40 pairs in 1997
Bare mud and shallow water

There are three similar types of small plover commonly seen in the Park, little ringed, ringed and kentish, but the adults in summer plumage are easily distinguished at close range. All can be viewed from the CIM hide in spring. All have a roundish head, large eye, short bill and black-banded head region. The back is mid-brown and the under parts white. They feed by making short runs, then stopping to peck for small animals at the mud surface. Sometimes the foot is vibrated in wet mud to disturb prey. Little ringed plovers have a complete neck band, yellow eye ring and yellow-brown legs. When displaying they inflate the breast feathers, exaggerating the black band as they run forward. Adults in all plumages and juveniles can be distinguished in flight from the other two species by the absence of any white wing bar.

**Charadrius hiaticula** (18-20 cm)
Ringed plover
Spring migrant, with smaller numbers in autumn
Maximum: 357 (May 2000)
Bare mud and shallow water

This species is very similar to the last, but is slightly larger and rounder. The main distinguishing feature is a white wing bar, which shows well in flight. Note, however, that kentish plovers also have a white wing bar. Adults in summer plumage can be distinguished (at close quarters) by the eye ring, which is orange and less prominent than the yellow eye ring of the little ringed plover. The bill base and legs of the adult are also orange. Juveniles and wintering adults have dark brown rather than black head markings.

**Charadrius alexandrinus** (15-17 cm)
Kentish plover
Resident
Maximum: 100 (September and October 1997)
Breeding: approximately 50 pairs; population increasing
Bare mud and shallow water

Kentish plovers are similar in size to little ringed plovers, but have an incomplete breast band, forming a black collar on each side. (Note, however, that the breast band can be inconspicuous in some juvenile little ringed and ringed plovers too). They look large-headed and short-tailed compared with the other two species. The adult male has a reddish brown (rather than mid-brown) crown in the breeding season. There is a white band above the eye and the legs are black. Juveniles and non-breeding birds can be distinguished by their shape and their very dark legs and bill. Kentish plovers sometimes gather in groups to roost on the mud in front of CIM hide.
**Vanellus vanellus** (28-31 cm)
Lapwing
Winter visitor
Maximum: 870 (January 1997)
Shallow water and bare ground

This handsome plover has a white belly, black upper breast, green back and rufous under-tail. The head is buff and white with a dark stripe below the eye, and a long black crest. The call is a plaintive 'pee-wit'. Lapwings arrive from their northern breeding grounds in October, reaching highest numbers in mid-winter and departing in January-February.

**Calidris minuta** (12-14 cm)
Little stint
Spring and autumn passage migrant; small numbers in winter
Maximum: 110 (May 2000)
Bare mud and shallow water

This is a tiny wader with white belly, brown back and upper breast, being somewhat greyer in winter. There are small dark markings on the feathers of the back and breast and juveniles have a yellowish 'V' on the back. Little stints walk rapidly on the mud, pecking at the surface with a short, almost straight, bill. Numbers peak in August to October and March to May.

**Calidris ferruginea** (18-23 cm)
Curlew sandpiper
Autumn and spring passage migrant
Maximum: 36 (August 1996)
Mud and shallow water

Curlew sandpipers in summer plumage have a reddish-orange head and breast, with grey, black and orange flecked back. The bill is longer than a dunlin's and distinctly down-curved. There is a white wing bar and a white rump. In early autumn the red colour is replaced by pale grey. First-winter birds also lack the red colour, being silvery white below and grey on the back. The bird is rather rounded in shape and bigger than a dunlin. Curlew sandpipers breed in the far north and winter in tropical Africa.

*Calidris alpina* (16-22cm)
Dunlin
Passage migrant and winter visitor
Maximum: 190 (May 1994)
Mud and shallow water

Dunlins fall between the last two species in overall size and bill length. The bill is very slightly down-curved. Their plumage is similar in pattern to a little stint, but in summer the dunlin has a large black patch on the belly. There is a thin white wing bar and a black central stripe down the rump and tail. In winter, the adults are grey on the back and upper breast, but juveniles are browner with spotting on the sides of the belly. They feed by touch, walking along on the mud and pecking at the surface in little groups, like mechanical toys. When disturbed they take off and wheel around together. Dunlins breed in northern Europe and winter in the Mediterranean and Africa.

*Philomachus pugnax* (male 26-32 cm, female 20-25cm)
Ruff
Spring and autumn passage migrant and scarce winter visitor
Maximum: 190 (May 1994)
Mud and pool margins

On migration, these waders lack the ruff of feathers around the head which gives the species its name. The bird looks rather plump with a small head and relatively short bill. The legs are orange-red or greenish, not as red as a redshank's. The plumage is very variable in colour and pattern, ranging from grey to quite reddish brown. The back feathers often look 'scaly', with pale edges, and the male is much larger than the female. In flight there is a thin white wing bar, and a white oval patch at each side of the rump. Ruff breed in northern Europe and winter in the Mediterranean region and tropical Africa.

*Gallinago gallinago* (25-27 cm)
Snipe
Winter visitor and passage migrant
Maximum: 500 (estimate, January 1998)
Boggy ground, pool margins

Snipe are stocky, plump waders with short legs and a disproportionately long bill, which is used to probe deeply into the mud for worms and other food. The plumage is a dappled brown, cream and black, with a pale belly. They rise steeply when
disturbed, making one or two harsh 'ketch' calls, and zig-zag erratically in flight. They often form small groups at S'Albufera, and are most frequently seen probing soft mud in front of the Bishop 1 hide. Snipe breed in central and northern Europe. They are present from August - May.

**Limosa limosa** (36-44 cm)
Black-tailed godwit
Spring passage migrant: a few in autumn
Maximum: 17 (March 1997)
Pools of moderate depth

This elegant, long-legged wader has a long straight bill, and is easily distinguished in flight by its prominent white wing bar, and white tail with black terminal band. In summer plumage the male's head and breast are ochre red with black flecks. Females, juveniles and winter males are greyer. This species breeds in central and eastern Europe and in Iceland.

**Tringa erythropus** (29-32 cm)
Spotted redshank
Spring and autumn passage migrant; some present in winter
Maximum: 50 (September 1999)
Pools of moderate depth

This medium sized wader is pale grey in winter, with pale under parts. The bill is slender and long - about twice the length of the head. There is no wing bar, but the white rump extends as a wedge up the back. In full summer plumage spotted redshanks become entirely sooty-black, with some white flecks on the back and black legs. Birds in intermediate plumages show varying degrees of darker barring and usually have orange legs. Between bill and eye there is often a black mark with a white band above. The flight call is 'chewit'. Spotted redshank breed in the far north.

**Tringa totanus** (27-29 cm)
Redshank
Spring and autumn passage: common in spring: occasional in winter
Maximum: 170 (May 1996)
Pools and pool margins

The redshank is similar to the spotted redshank, but has brown mottled and streaked plumage in summer, not black. The bill is just longer than the head, much shorter than the spotted redshank's and the legs and bill base are a bright orange-red. There is a bold white trailing edge to the wing, seen in flight, and a white rump. The call is a clear 'teeeoo-too'. Most redshank move north to breed, but some stay to breed in Mallorca on Salobrar de Campos.

**Tringa nebularia** (30-35 cm)
Greenshank
Spring and autumn passage migrant: can occur in any month
Maximum: 23 (April 1997)
Pools of moderate depth

Greenshank are rather larger than the last two species. The longish legs are greenish, as the name implies, and the general plumage colour is grey with varying amounts of black flecking and a pale belly. The bill is similar to a redshank's in length, yet slightly but distinctly upturned and grey in colour. In flight, the loud 'teu-teu-teu-teu' call often draws attention to the bird. There is no wing bar, and the white rump extends up the back, rather like the spotted redshank's. Greenshank breed in the far north.

*Tringa ochropus* (21-24 cm)
Green sandpiper
Passage migrant and scarce winter visitor: recorded in all months of the year
Maximum: 39 (July 1996)
Small pools and marshy ground

This small wader is hard to see on the ground as it is easily disturbed. On rising it makes a 'tuee wit-wit' call and flies rapidly and high. The back and underwing are dark in colour, contrasting boldly with a white rump and under parts. The bill is straight and about the same length as the head, and there is a pale stripe above the eye. Green sandpipers move north and east to breed.

*Tringa glareola* (19-21 cm)
Wood sandpiper
Spring and autumn passage migrant
Maximum: 100 (April 1996)
Small pools and marshy ground

Wood sandpipers are quite similar to green sandpipers, but have longer legs and a browner back. The back often shows roundish yellow spotting. The white rump is less clearly contrasting with the tail markings and wings, and the under wing is pale in
comparison with the very dark under wing of the green sandpiper. The call is a 'jiff-
iff-iff'. Breeding occurs to the far north and east.

**Actitis hypoleucos** (19-21 cm)
Common sandpiper
Passage migrant and scarce winter visitor; recorded in all months of the year
Maximum: 120 (May 1996)
Pool and canal margins

This sandpiper has a brown back and upper breast with some black streaking, and
clear white under parts extending into a white patch at the 'shoulder'. It has relatively
short legs and bill and repeatedly bobs its tail as it walks about. The call is a high-
pitched rapid 'pee-pee-pee-pee'. It shows a long thin white wing bar in flight.
Common sandpipers breed throughout mainland Europe.

**Larus audouinii** (48-52 cm)
Audouin's gull
Resident and partial migrant
Maximum: up to 6 in various months
Shoreline

This gull is a Mediterranean speciality which many come to Mallorca to see. It is
smaller and paler than a herring gull, and has dark legs and a deep red bill with black
tip. The species breeds on offshore islands and some move to the west African coast
in winter. One or two can often be found at the tip of S'Oberta, where the Gran Canal
enters the sea.

**Larus ridibundus** (38-44 cm)
Black-headed gull
Passage migrant and winter visitor
Maximum: 473 (January 1997)
Marshes and pools, water treatment works

This is a small gull with a black/brown face mask, red bill and red legs. The grey
wings have a white leading edge and black tips. The Mediterranean gull, which is an
infrequent visitor to the Park, is similar but has more extensive black on the head. The
Mediterranean gull also has a heavier bill and broader wings which lack any black
markings except, in the case of second year birds, reduced black spots on the wing
tips. In winter the black-headed gull's face mask shrinks to a dark spot behind the
eye. Juveniles have some brown feathers on the back and wings mixed with the grey.
The call is a loud 'keearr'. This species moves north and east to breed.

**Larus cachinans** (55-67 cm)
Yellow-legged herring gull
Resident
Maximum: 4500 (autumn)
At sea, flying over the Park and at the water treatment works (Depuradora)

This gull, once considered a race of the herring gull, is now generally accepted to be a
separate species. It differs in the colour of its legs, which are yellow instead of pink.
Like the herring gull, it is white below and grey above, with black wing tips spotted with white. The back is a slightly darker grey than that of the herring gull. The bill is orange-yellow rather than yellow, with a larger red spot. The young are mottled brown. These gulls are constantly present in the Park, flying lazily over the reeds or resting beside the pools. They breed around the coast, and gather in vast numbers to rest, preen and roost on the sides of the water treatment works, especially in autumn.

**Sterna sandvicensis** (36-41 cm)
Sandwich tern
Winter visitor and passage migrant
Maximum: 9 (December 1996)
Coastline

This tern has a slim white body, pale grey back, black crown with a crest and black bill with a yellow tip. The legs are also black. It has an easy graceful flight, and can be seen flying back and forth over inshore waters, often hovering then plunging headlong into the water for fish. It breeds colonially around European coasts and winters mainly off the west African coast. It occurs regularly in small numbers along the coastline adjacent to the dunes.

**Chlidonias niger** (22-24 cm)
Black tern
Spring and autumn passage migrant
Open water and pools

This small dark tern has a buoyant flight, and feeds by dipping onto the water, picking up insects from the surface. In summer plumage the body is sooty black, with a pale grey rump, vent and tail. In autumn the black area is much reduced, with black patches often remaining on the head and underparts. Black terns breed in Europe and winter on the African coast.

**Chlidonias leucopterus** (20-23 cm)
White-winged black tern
Spring and autumn passage migrant
Maximum: 27 (September 96)
Open water and pools

This tern is very similar to the last species, but in summer plumage the leading part of the upper wing is an attractive silvery white and there is a broad black band under the wing which contrasts with the pale grey flight feathers. The paler upper parts remain in autumn, but at this time the two species are harder to distinguish. White-winged black terns breed in eastern Europe and winter in Africa.

**Chlidonias hybridus** (23-25 cm)
Whiskered tern
Spring and autumn passage migrant
Maximum: 152 (April 2000)
Open water and pools
Whiskered terns feed in a similar manner to the above two species, but also plunge dive, like sandwich terns. They are a silvery grey colour on the upper parts, darker underneath and have a black crown, and red legs and bill. The most distinctive characteristic in spring is the large oval white face patch, not shared by any other S'Albufera tern.

Separating black, white-winged black and whiskered terns – ‘marsh terns’:
The juveniles of these three marsh terns are difficult to identify, but with experience can be separated. Black tern has the mantle (middle section of the upper parts) not much darker than its wings. Look too for a diagnostic black 'shoulder' mark where the wings meet the body. White-winged black lacks the mark and has a mantle noticeably darker than the wings, giving it a 'saddled' appearance. This is further emphasised by a contrasting white rump. Whiskered lacks the shoulder mark, but can look 'saddled' (though normally more mottled in appearance). However, its rump and tail are pale grey, not white. Whiskered tern, particularly, can be mistaken for common tern, but all three marsh terns are smaller, shorter-billed with far less deeply forked tails. Marsh terns never dive, preferring to pick invertebrates daintily from the surface of marshes and canals. Non breeding adults are much more difficult. The adult black tern retains the diagnostic black shoulder mark. Colour of rump separates white-winged black from whiskered, but this can be hard to see. Whiskered lacks the silvery upper parts of white-winged black and has very little white collar. White-winged black has a broad white nape area and is more thick set with a more stumpy bill. Whiskered’s bill is longer and more dagger shaped.

**Columba livia domestica** (31-34 cm)
Domestic pigeon
Resident
Breeding: 6-8 pairs
Buildings with ledges and cavities

Domestic pigeons are descendants of rock doves, which breed on rocky cliffs. The birds which nest in the buildings at Sa Roca are mostly quite similar to the ancestral form, with a green neck band, pinkish breast, grey head and body and a dark double wing bar. The rump is white and the tail grey with a black terminal band. Some birds have quite dark plumage however, and domestic pigeons are very variable. In display they glide on raised wings. The song is the familiar dove's throaty cooing.

**Columba palumbus** (40-42 cm)
Wood pigeon
Resident, dispersing into flocks post-breeding
Maximum: 100 (October 1997)
Breeding: 30-50 pairs; increasing
Pines

Wood pigeons are larger than the last species. They have a grey head and green neck band, with a large white spot at each side of the neck and on the wing. The wing patch
is most noticeable in flight. The breast is pink, the wings grey and the tail grey with a black terminal band. The rump is grey, not white. The display flight is a series of noisy flaps in which the wings are clapped above the head as the bird gains altitude, then there is a downward glide followed by more flapping. They also make a noisy flapping exit when flushed from a tree. Wood pigeons are most often seen around the pine trees at Ses Puntes and on the dunes.

**Cuculus canorus** (32-34 cm)
Cuckoo
Summer visitor and passage migrant
Breeding: formerly bred but has not done so since 1996
Reed beds and scrub

The cuckoo looks rather like a small falcon, but the short bill is not hooked and the legs and feet are small. The upper parts, head and breast are mid-grey and the underparts are barred grey and white. The wings are pointed and the wing beat rather shallow. On arrival in April it makes its celebrated 'cuck-oo' call. This species has decreased as a breeding bird.

**Otus scops** (19-20 cm)
Scops owl
Common Resident
Maximum: 16 (October 1993)
Breeds in poplars and other trees

This owl is much more often heard than seen. The usual call is a bell-like 'tew', sounding like a radio time signal, or water dripping into a bucket, repeated every 2-3 seconds during the night. It is a small owl with plumage resembling tree bark, varying in colour from brown to grey. It has prominent ‘ear’ tufts which can be raised or lowered.

**Asio otus** (35-37 cm)
Long-eared owl
Resident
Breeding: 5-10 pairs
Pines

Long-eared owls beat their long wings rather stiffly, and are most likely to be seen silhouetted at dusk near pine trees. The plumage is streaky golden brown with long 'ear tufts' and the eyes are orange. The call of the adult is a deep, repeated 'hooo', and the young's high-pitched begging notes sound like a creaking gate, audible at some distance.

**Apus apus** (16-17 cm)
Swift
Passage migrant and summer visitor
Maximum: 1000+ (April 1995)
In flight over all parts of the Park
Swifts are entirely black except for a small whitish patch on the chin. The wings are sickle shaped and beat rapidly, keeping the bird continuously airborne as it both feeds and roosts on the wing. On dull days when insects are low, swifts skim the reed tops, but in fine weather they can be very high and hard to see. Swifts are present from April to October. Large numbers of passage migrants can occur in April and early May. Swifts breed under roof tiles in buildings throughout Europe.

**Apus melba** (20-22 cm)
Alpine swift
Spring and autumn passage migrant; occasional in summer
Maximum: 87 (September 1995)
In flight over all parts of the Park

Alpine swifts are noticeably larger than common swifts and have a slower wing beat. They have white under parts broken by a dark breast band. They sometimes feed very high, when they can be detected by their high pitched trilling calls. Small numbers of alpine swifts breed in Mallorca, and occasionally fly over the Park in summer, probably coming from the Arta Peninsula or the Orient Valley.

**Alcedo atthis** (16-17 cm)
Kingfisher
Winter visitor
Maximum: 50 (estimate, January 1998)
Banks of canals and deeper pools

The kingfisher is an unmistakable bird, with turquoise blue upper parts and bright orange belly and head markings. The bill is long and pointed but fairly stout. They have the habit of perching motionless on a branch overhanging the water, then dropping head first with a splash to take a fish under the surface. They can be hard to spot until they fly, when they flash fast and low over the water. The call is a high pitched 'pee-pee'.

**Meriops apiaster** (27-29 cm)
Bee eater
Summer visitor and passage migrant
Maximum: 150 (May 1997)
Sandy cliffs: overhead on migration
This spectacularly colourful bird hunts bees and other insects in an aerobatic flight which includes circling glides. The adult is blue-green beneath, with yellow chin, and the back and wings are a combination of yellow, rusty-orange and blue. There is a dark stripe through the eye and the blue tail has elongated central tail feathers. Flocks passing overhead can be located by their far-carrying liquid ’pruup’ calls. In the 1990’s they bred just outside the Park, but this site was lost to sand quarrying. Attempts to attract them into the Park by creating sand banks at Ses Puntes were initially successful, but the sand banks were too liable to collapse. However, a small colony still survives nearby in sandy cliffs below a housing development, the adults frequently foraging within the Park. The species is present between April and October.

**Upupa epops** (26-28 cm)
Hoopoe
Resident
Breeding: 20-30 pairs
Tracks, walls, bare ground

Hoopoes are exotic looking birds, pinky-brown in general colour, with black and white banded wings and tail. The crest, which can be raised fan-like, is similarly banded. The bill is longish and down-curved, adapted for probing into soft ground and extracting insects and insect larvae. The flight is bouncing and erratic. The call is an unmistakable ’oop-oop-oop’, which gives the species its name. They breed in holes within old stone walls and trees. They can be seen along most of the tracks particularly those lined by the stonework of old aqueducts, such as towards Ses Puntes and the power station (Cami de ses Senyals) tracks.

**Calandrella brachydactyla** (14 cm)
Short-toed lark
Summer visitor
Maximum: 19 (July 1994)
Breeding: 6 pairs
Grassy open spaces, dunes and farmland
This small lark is streaky pale brown on the back, pale and largely unstreaked beneath with a relatively stout bill. Like other larks it walks rather than hops. There is a pale stripe above the eye and a dark line behind it. The crown is brownish and in spring there is a diagnostic dark neck patch at the side of the neck (less obvious in females). With its subtle blends of browns, it merges unobtrusively with its surroundings on the ground. When it flies it climbs in an undulating flight to a great height, giving a loud call 'tsisisivui-tsivui-tiu'. The species is present from April to September. The best places to see it are s'Amaradot and the agricultural areas of Son Serra and Son Bosc.

**Alauda arvensis** (18-19 cm)
Skylark
Passage migrant and winter visitor
Maximum: approximately 5-10
Short grassy areas and cultivated land

The skylark is larger than the last species and is a warm streaky brown on the back and upper breast, buff below. The legs are brown-pink and the hind claw very long. There is a slight crest which can be raised and the bill is stout. The flight call is a rich 'chirrup' on take-off and during flight. The wings have a white trailing edge. Most individuals are recorded flying over on migration, but small numbers winter when they can be found on open areas of short vegetation.

**Riparia riparia** (12 cm)
Sand martin
Spring and autumn passage migrant
Maximum: 5000 (April 1997)
In flight over the reed beds

Sand martins are sandy-brown members of the swallow family. The underparts are white with a brown band across the breast. They have a dry rasping call note. Very large numbers can accumulate over the Park during migration, as they move between Africa and breeding grounds throughout mainland Europe.

**Ptyonoprogne rupestris** (12.5 cm)
Crag martin
Common resident and passage migrant in small numbers
Maximum: 1000 (February 1996)
In flight over the reed beds

Crag martins are larger and have a more thick set appearance than sand martins and are a rather colder brown colour. They lack the dark breast band and the underparts are pale brown below rather than pure white. A diagnostic feature is the presence of white spots, visible on the tail when it is fanned. Crag martins breed on the coast and in the mountains and often come down to feed in the Park between October and March, particularly in poor weather.

**Hirundo rustica** (19-22 cm)
Swallow
Summer visitor and common passage migrant
Maximum: 20 000 (April 1997)
Airborne over the reed beds

The swallow has a dark blue back, blackish tail and flight feathers, red face and dark upper breast. The tail has long streamers, especially in adult males, and the wings are long and pointed. The under parts are creamy white in many birds, but some eastern populations have a rusty tint. They have a languid graceful flight, usually hunting low over the reeds. Like sand martins, they can accumulate in vast numbers on migration, finding plentiful insect prey over the S'Albufera reed beds. They winter in South Africa.

**Delichon urbica** (12-13 cm)
House martin
Summer visitor and common passage migrant
Maximum: 500 (September 1993 and May 1997)
In flight over the reed beds

House martins resemble swallows, but their tails are shorter and they have a prominent white rump. The underparts are white and they lack any red colour. They nest on houses in many of the towns, but only small numbers are usually recorded within S'Albufera. They winter in tropical Africa.

**Anthus pratensis** (14.5 cm)
Meadow pipit
Winter visitor
Maximum: 300 (January 1997)
Damp pastures

Meadow pipits are small streaky olive-brown birds with pale orange-brown legs. They often form small flocks, moving among tussocky grass with a jerky walk. When disturbed, they fly up uttering ‘seet-seet-seet’ calls and showing white outer tail feathers. The bill is much thinner than a lark's. They are present from September to April, when they return to their breeding grounds in mainland Europe.

**Anthus spinoletta** (17 cm)
Water pipit
Winter visitor
Maximum: 17 (November 1994)
Wet pastures with standing water and pool edges

In winter plumage, water pipits are similar to meadow pipits, having a streaky brown breast, head and back, but water pipits are larger and have diagnostic black legs. From late January the breast begins to lose its streaks, and by about mid-March develops a pinkish hue. The head also becomes greyer with a fairly distinct white stripe above the eye. Water pipits are rather shy and often solitary. When disturbed they make a single ‘tweet’ and tend to fly quite a long way. They like to walk in shallow puddles when feeding, and can be seen from the CIM hide. They are present from September to April and migrate north to their high altitude breeding grounds.
**Motacilla flava** (17 cm)

Yellow wagtail
Summer visitor and passage migrant
Breeding: 200-300 pairs
Pastures and grassy areas, often near livestock

Yellow wagtails feed on the ground, walking rapidly with nodding head and tail, chasing after insects. They have several distinct races with different head patterns, but all have a greenish back and yellow breast. Flocks of mixed races often occur. The following races have been recorded in the Park:

(i) The Spanish race iberiae breeds in the Park and its range extends to Iberia and southern France. It has a grey head, a white stripe of variable size above the eye (sometimes only behind the eye), darker grey ear coverts and a white throat.

(ii) The ashy-headed cinereocapilla is similar to the Spanish race, but lacks the white stripe, and breeds in Italy and Albania. A male of this race was paired with an iberiae in May 1994.

(iii) The grey-headed thunbergi is similar to ashy-headed but has less white on the throat. It breeds in northern Fennoscandia. Six males of this race were seen in May 1996.

(iv) The blue-headed flava has an all-grey head with white stripe above the eye and only a little white on the chin. It breeds in Scandinavia and central Europe.

(v) The black-headed feldegg has an all black head with no white markings. One was recorded in May 1996. It breeds in the Balkans and Black Sea area.

(vi) The British race flavissima has yellow, but no grey or white on the head. The crown is a similar colour to the back. One was recorded in March 1996 with further sightings in spring 1998.

Yellow wagtails arrive in March-April and depart in October. The wintering grounds are in Africa. Females have less distinct head patterns, and arrive slightly later than the males in the spring.

**Motacilla cinerea** (18-19 cm)

Grey wagtail
Winter visitor
Maximum: 7 (November 1997)
Canals sides, often by flowing water

Grey wagtails differ from the last species in having a longer tail and a white wing bar visible in flight. The adult male has a black throat separated from the grey head by a white line. There is also a white stripe above the eye. The underparts are yellow. The yellow is confined to the tail region in non-breeding birds and females, with perhaps a band on the upper breast. Grey wagtails have a constantly bobbing body, which accentuates the very long tail as they run about among stones beside water, snatching at insects. They fly north to breed.
**Motacilla alba** (18 cm)
White and pied wagtails
Winter visitor
Maximum: 10,000 (winter roost 96/7)
Flying to and from roost: bare ground, often near water

This wagtail has a combination of black and white plumage, with no yellow at all (apart from round the face of juveniles). The adults of the nominate race alba (the white wagtail which is the usual race in the Park), has a black crown and upper breast, white face and forehead, white under parts and pale grey back. Young birds lack the black on the crown. The tail is black with white outer tail feathers. They have a jerky undulating flight and commute from surrounding farmland to roost communally in the reeds in winter. They are present from September to April, and move north to breed. An example of the race yarrellii (the pied wagtail, which breeds in Britain and Ireland) was seen in January 1998. It differs in having an almost black back

**Troglodytes troglodytes** (9.5 cm)
Wren
Resident
Breeding: probable, not confirmed
Dunes and scrub

This small bird with an upturned tail, mouse-like in habit, is often detected by its loud reeling song or its 'check' alarm call. The plumage is dark rusty brown with fine black barring on the wings and back. The under parts are somewhat paler brown and there is a pale stripe above the eye. Wrens feed in dense vegetation, usually within one metre of the ground. They are most likely to be seen on the coastal dunes, and rarely come into the reed beds.

**Erithacus rubecula** (14 cm)
Robin
Common winter visitor
Paths, bushes

A small bird feeding on a track in winter, which flies up into a nearby bush when disturbed, is most likely to be a robin. A glimpse of an orange-red breast and face, olive brown back, pale belly and long legs will confirm the identification. The 'tick-tick-tick' call is also diagnostic. Robins are abundant in the Park from October to April, and head north to breed. Densities can be high in autumn with birds singing to proclaim winter territories.

**Luscinia megarhynchos** (16.5 cm)
Nightingale
Summer visitor and passage migrant
Breeding: 50-75 pairs; decreasing population
Scrub and dense vegetation
Nightingales are best known for their song, which is a rich, varied fluting of repeated phrases, given both at night and during the day. Nightingales sometimes sing from an open perch when their warm brown upper parts and rusty brown rump and tail may be seen. The under parts are pale, the eye is large and the bill slim. Nightingales arrive in April and depart in October. They winter in tropical Africa.

**Luscinia svecica** (14 cm)
Bluethroat
Winter visitor
Maximum: 9 (October 1995)
Along tracks and in reed beds

Bluethroats are unobtrusive birds which like to search for food along the track sides, often hidden by overhanging vegetation. The tail base is a rusty colour, the underparts pale and the back brown. A front view reveals a patterned throat, which is quite variable. The adult male of the race svecica (the usual race seen in the Park) has a
broad red ‘spot’ placed centrally on a blue throat, bordered below by black and rust coloured bands. Young birds may have the red and blue markings largely replaced by white, while older birds have variable amounts of red and blue, sometimes obscured by pale feather fringes in autumn. All birds have a bold white stripe above the eye. The best time to see bluethroats is September to December and March. Look for them along the main tracks, or foraging under Tamarisk, for example by Bishop 1 hide.

**Phoenicurus ochruros** (14 cm)
Black redstart
Winter visitor
Maximum: 7 (October 1995)
Track sides, buildings, walls

Adult male black redstarts have a grey body contrasting with a sooty black face and breast. The wing feathers have pale edges, and the rump, under-tail and outer tail feathers are orange-red. The female and young male share the red markings, but are a dingy grey-brown elsewhere, and lack the orange-brown breast of female and young of their close relative, the redstart. Black redstarts like to perch on buildings and walls. The red on the tail is noticeable as the bird hops forward, pauses, flicks its tail then hops forward again. The species is present from October to March. It breeds on the European mainland.

**Phoenicurus phoenicurus** (14 cm)
Redstart
Spring and autumn passage migrant
Maximum: 3 (September 1996)
Bushy places

Redstarts have similar tail markings to the last species, but differ in that the male also has a rusty-red breast, black face, white forehead and grey head and back. Females and young birds are orange-brown beneath (not grey-brown) with mid-brown back and head. As in black redstarts, the tail is repeatedly flicked, showing flashes of red. Redstarts breed throughout Europe and winter in tropical Africa.

**Saxicola rubetra** (12.5 cm)
Whinchat
Spring and autumn passage migrant
Maximum: 19 (September 1993)
Tracks with tall herbaceous vegetation

Adult male whinchats have a dark brown head and back, with a white stripe above the eye and each side of the chin. There are also small white markings on the wings. The underparts are pale orange. The tail is short showing two white patches in flight. Females, males in winter plumage and juveniles are much duller, but all have the stripe above the eye and the white tail patches. Whinchats often perch conspicuously on the top of a stem or bush, hopping down to the ground when food is detected.

89. **Saxicola torquata** (12.5 cm)
Stonechat
Common resident
Breeding: 75-150 pairs
Scrub and track sides

Stonechats resemble the last species, but have a rounder head and longer all-dark tail. The head lacks the white stripe above the eye. Adult males have an all-dark head and white shoulder mark. The back and tail are also dark brown, with a white fleck on the wing, and the under parts are orange. Females and juveniles look like faded versions of the male. Stonechats sit prominently on the tops of bushes and brambles, often darting into the air like a flycatcher to take insect prey. The song is a dry rattle, and the alarm call is a 'chat-chat' or 'weet-chat-chat'.

Oenanthe oenanthe (15-16 cm)
Wheatear
Spring and autumn passage migrant
Maximum: 12 (October 1994)
On bare ground

The wheatear is a plump bird, usually seen on the ground or a wall, showing a noticeable white rump and black tail when it flies. The adult males are grey above with black wings and a black band through the eye. The under parts are creamy-orange. Females and young birds are browner above, duller below and lack the bold black face markings. Wheatears occur in September-October and March - May. They breed throughout Europe and winter in tropical Africa.

Turdus merula (24-25 cm)
Blackbird
Common breeding resident
Wooded areas

The male blackbird is entirely black, with an orange-yellow bill and eye ring. Females are dark brown with some streaking and spotting on the breast, and also have a yellow bill in the breeding season. The blackbird has a loud fluting song, usually delivered from a high perch. It frequently feeds on the ground, and when disturbed flies off with a noisy chatter.

Turdus philomelos (23 cm)
Song thrush
Common winter visitor  
Maximum: not known  
Woodland and scrub

Song thrushes have pale under parts, liberally covered in dark spots, and sandy-brown upperparts. The flanks are yellowish and the under wings are a cinnamon. The sexes are similar. The call is a single ‘tsick’. In autumn, large numbers reach Mallorca from breeding grounds in northern Europe. Some go on to north Africa. They are present in the Park between October and April.

*Cettia cetti* (14 cm)  
Cetti’s warbler  
Common resident  
Breeding: estimated at over 4 males per hectare in favourable areas  
Scrub and reeds near water

Cetti’s warblers often announce their presence by their loud song, which is an explosive 'chet...chet...chetti-chetti-chet-chet-chet-chet'. The first two notes are distinct, and the rest run together. The song often starts after a disturbed bird has dived into cover. During delivery, the whole body and tail shake in time with the notes. It is a dark brown warbler, with a paler stripe above the eye, and pale underparts. The tail is fan shaped, and often frayed at the tip from constant rubbing against the dense herbage it normally frequents.

*Cisticola juncidis* (10 cm)  
Fan-tailed warbler  
Common resident  
Breeding: estimated at over 2 males per hectare in favourable areas  
Open areas, track sides, cultivated land

Like the last species this small warbler is most easily identified by its song, which is made in circling flight. The song flight is undulating, and at the top of each 'bounce' the fan-tailed warbler makes a 'zip' call, so the song is 'zip'..... 'zip'..... 'zip'.....’zip'.....’zip'.....’zip'.....'zip'.... etc., with about one second between 'zips'. The male makes a series of nests, and the vigour of its song is known to be greatest when one is near completion. The tail
has a black and white border and is repeatedly fanned during the song flight. There are brown and yellow stripes on the back and streaks on the crown, and the under parts are pale buff. It seeks food close to and on the ground, creeping mouse-like among stems.

**Acrocephalus melanopogon** (12.5 cm)
Moustached warbler
Common resident
Breeding: estimated at over 4 males per hectare in favourable areas
Reed beds

Moustached warblers are a rufous-brown above, with rusty-brown flanks and sides of breast. There is some streaking on the back. The crown and ear coverts are dark, separated by a bold white stripe above the eye. The song is a musical chirruping, more varied and melodious than a reed warbler, and much less harsh than a great reed warbler. Moustached warblers are easily overlooked as they feed low down among the reeds, close to the water surface. Some males mate with more than one female adding to the difficulty of censusing the large breeding population. The moustached warbler is rare and has a fairly restricted range in Europe, so S'Albufera is one of its main strongholds.

**Acrocephalus scirpaceus** (12.5 cm)
Reed warbler
Breeding summer visitor in small numbers
Reed beds

Reed warblers are warm buff-brown above, buff on the flanks and pale below. There is an indistinct pale stripe above the eye, extending to the base of the thin bill, and a pale eye ring. Young birds look more rufous. The song is a mixture of grating phrases, each repeated 2-4 times, more monotonous and harsh than the moustached
warbler's, but not so loud and grating as a great reed's. Reed warblers winter in Africa and return to S’Albufera in late April - May, departing in October.

**Acrocephalus arundinaceus** (19 cm)
Great reed warbler
Common breeding summer visitor
Reed beds

Great reed warblers resemble the last species but are much larger, with a heavier bill and more marked stripe above the eye. The song is very loud and harsh, with repeated 'creek-creek-creek---kerri-kerri-kerri' phrases and some higher notes mixed in. Great reed warblers winter in Africa, and return to S'Albufera from mid-April, the majority arriving in May and departing again in September-October.

**Sylvia melanocephala** (13 cm)
Sardinian warbler
Common breeding resident
Scrub and dense cover

This small, active warbler is easy to identify from the male's black head with prominent red eye and eye ring. The throat is a contrasting white, and the frequently cocked tail has black markings on its white underside. The back and flanks are grey. Females are brown above with a dark grey head. Sardinian warblers are usually seen among brambles at the track sides, often making a harsh 'tret-tret-tret-tret' call. The song is an unmusical chattering.

**Sylvia atricapilla** (14 cm)
Blackcap
Breeding resident, winter visitor and passage migrant
Breeding 10-15 pairs: decreasing in numbers
Dune and riverine woodlands

The male's black cap ends above the eye, rather than below it as in the last species. The greys of upper and under parts are also less contrasting and the tail is plain. The eye is dark rather than red, and tail is rarely cocked upwards. Females are similar, but the cap is a rich red-brown. Blackcaps feed among leafy vegetation, usually higher up than Sardinian warblers. The song is sometimes just a short simple warbling phrase,
but the full song is a lilting, sustained, flute-like warble and is among the most attractive of warbler songs.

**Phylloscopus collybita** (11 cm)
Chiffchaff
Common winter visitor
Low vegetation

Chiffchaffs are small, neat, grey-green warblers with buff under parts and dark legs. The wings are short and rounded, and often used for brief hovering as the bird hunts for mosquitoes and other small insects among the branches. The song is a monotonous 'chiff-chaff-chiff-chaff...' and the call is a clipped 'swit'. Chiffchaffs are present from September to April, and move north to breed. They are often abundant among the tamarisks and other track side bushes.

**Phylloscopus trochilus** (11.5 cm)
Willow warbler
Spring and autumn passage migrant
Maximum: 13 (April 1996)
Bushes and trees

Willow warblers are very similar to the last species, but are usually yellower in tone and have pale legs. Young birds in the autumn look very yellow. The wings are longer than a chiffchaff's. The song is a descending series of clear notes, performed irregularly as the bird hunts for food among the leaves. The call is a single 'hueet' rising in pitch, unlike a chiffchaff's. Willow warblers winter in tropical Africa and pass through Mallorca to and from European breeding grounds in September-October and March-April.

**Regulus ignicapillus** (9 cm)
Firecrest
Common breeding resident
Pine trees, dunes

This tiny bird is adapted for searching out spiders and insects between the needles of pine trees. It is constantly active in the pine canopy, sometimes hovering to take prey from under a leaf. The back is bright greenish and the face has a striking pattern, with orange crown edged in black, black stripe through the eye and white stripe above. The female is similar but her crown is orange-yellow. The firecrest is easily located by its high-pitched 'see-see-see' calls. The song is a 'sissi-sissi-sissit', louder at the end.

**Muscicapa striata** (14 cm)
Spotted flycatcher
Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant
Trees and walls
Spotted flycatchers do not have striking plumage, being grey brown in colour, with some streaking on the crown and breast. However, they are easily identified by their behaviour. They like to perch in a prominent place such as a dead branch, then sally out to snatch flying insects, before returning to the same or a nearby spot. The flight is twisting and aerobatic as the bird pursues its prey, before seizing it, often with an audible snap of the bill. The call is a ‘wheet-chup-chup’. The young birds have cream spots on the head and back. Spotted flycatchers winter in Africa, arriving in Mallorca in April-May and departing in September-October. Birds breeding in the Balearic Islands belong to a separate sub-species, Muscicapa striata balearica, being paler brown above, less streaked on the underparts and shorter winged than the nominate race.

**Ficedula hypoleuca** (13 cm)
**Pied flycatcher**
**Passage migrant**
**Maximum: 10 (April 1997)**
**Trees and walls**

This flycatcher feeds in a similar way to the last species. The males are very distinctive, with black upperparts and head, and a white spot on the forehead above the broad based short black bill. There is also a very prominent white wing bar, and the underparts are a clean white. Females and young birds have a similar pattern, but the upperparts are brown, and the wing patch is smaller. They have none of the streaking of the spotted flycatcher. Pied flycatchers pass through on migration between Europe and Africa in April-May and September-October.

**Parus major** (14 cm)
**Great tit**
**Common breeding resident**
**Trees, shrubs, reed beds**

Great tits are acrobatic birds with a scolding alarm call 'chink-chee-chee-chee', and a persistent song of two or three-note repeated phrases. The back is greenish and the wings and tail have blue-grey feather edges. The head is black, extending into a line
down the centre of the yellow underparts, more prominently in the male. There is a white patch on each side of the face and an indistinct one on the nape.

Great tits can be seen in track side shrubs, often quite low down, and sometimes venture out into the reed beds far from any trees.

**Remiz pendulinus** (11 cm)
Penduline tit
Winter visitor
Maximum: 15 (March 1997)
Reeds and shrubs

Penduline tits are pale with buff-brown back and a black face mask, extending to the forehead in the male. They are most readily located by their call, a thin 'tsee' as they search the reeds for food. Penduline tits are most often seen in October-November and from February to April. They move north to breed.

**Lanius senator** (19 cm)
Woodchat shrike
Summer visitor
Breeding: scattered pairs breed within the Park
Bushes, cultivated land

This is a robust, aggressive medium sized bird, boldly marked and with a powerful flight. The male has a bright brick-red crown and back of head, with a black stripe through the eye. The back, wings and tail are black with a white shoulder patch, white rump and white outer tail feathers. The underparts are also white. The bill is short and hooked and the tail is long. The female is similar but less boldly marked, and the young is brown and barred. The race of the west Mediterranean islands, *Lanius senator badius* has very little white at the base of the primaries, in contrast to other races. Like other shrikes, this species feeds by scanning the ground from a perch to pick up beetles, other invertebrates and even small mammals. It also sometimes takes insects on the wing.
**Sturnus vulgaris** (21 cm)
Starling
Common winter visitor; present in all months though rare in summer
Maximum: estimated at 1.5 million (November 1996)
Breeding: one pair bred 1994, probably bred 1996
On ground, often near livestock; large numbers roost in reeds

Starlings look black at a distance but at close quarters show a green and purple sheen to the feathers, especially in summer. The feather tips are spotted in buff-white, more so in winter and in females. The bill is dark in winter, changing to yellow in spring, with a blue base in males and pink base in females. Starlings have short tails and legs and a jerky walk. They feed by pushing the bill into the turf, opening it, then peering down the hole with forward-pointing eyes, seeking insect larvae and other invertebrates.

From August, starling numbers start to increase as migrating birds arrive from Central Europe. Many of these feed in fields outside the Park during the day, but return during late afternoon (from about 16.00 hrs) to spend the night communally in the reed beds. Numbers of roosting starlings peak during October-November and often number in the hundreds of thousands. With such quantities counting is a real challenge, but coordinated counts often show numbers in excess of 100,000, and occasional counts have topped a million. The birds usually gather outside the Park, then fly in as long flowing streams, or huge clouds of birds. They frequently descend, like falling leaves, almost vertically into the reeds, where they make a tremendous hissing chatter. Sometimes, on arrival, dense swarms feed on bare ground beside the tracks. Constant movements and resettling occur as they jostle for position in the reeds. Then, when it is almost dark, they all rise again and move low over the reeds, before settling in another area nearby. Tall reeds over 3 metres high are preferred, and the area usually chosen is to the west of the Park, where nutrients from cultivated land have resulted in stronger reed growth. In November and December, most of the starlings move on, perhaps because damage to the reeds has made these unacceptable for roosting.

The roost attracts birds of prey, including peregrines, marsh harriers, kestrels and the occasional merlin. When a raptor is encountered at high altitude, the starlings surround it in a 'ball' of birds and stay with the raptor for as long as half an hour, until it has been escorted out of the area. Successful predation usually occurs when a peregrine stoops from above at a straggler on the edge of a group of starlings. Harriers may also be able to snatch starlings from the reeds.

**Passer domesticus** (15 cm)
House sparrow
Common breeding resident
Near buildings

The male house sparrow is streaky brown above with a small white wing mark. The crown is grey with a dark brown line through the eye extending onto the nape. The face is white, and in summer the small black 'bib' enlarges down onto the breast. The under parts are dirty white. The female is similar to the male, but lacks the black and grey head markings. Sparrows make a repeated chirping sound, and like to feed on the
ground. House sparrows are frequent around the car park and buildings, taking advantage of any dropped picnic food, and building untidy straw nests under the tiles.

**Fringilla coelebs** (15.5 cm)
Chaffinch
Breeding resident and passage migrant
Pines, dunes and roadside verges

The male chaffinch is much more colourful than the last species. The undeparts and face are brick-red and the top of the head grey. The back is chestnut brown and the wings black with a prominent white shoulder patch and wing bar. The rump is green and the tail black with prominent white outer feathers. Females are duller in colour and lack the white shoulder patch. The alarm call is a loud 'spink-spink', and the song is a far-carrying descending phrase, ending in a flourish. Chaffinches feed on the ground, often under trees. In autumn, numbers are boosted by passage migrants.

**Serinus serinus** (11 cm)
Serin
Common breeding resident
Pines

Male serins have a bright yellow head, breast and rump and some darker markings on the back of the head and cheeks. The back is streaked grey-brown, and there are bold stripes on the flanks. The bill is short and stubby. Females are similar but the yellow areas are paler yellow-buff. Serins are mobile, gregarious and noisy birds, making a jingling rattle in flight, and often perching in tree tops. Males start singing in February, a sustained chirping jingle like a bunch of small keys being rattled together, often made during a display flight of slow bat-like wing beats.

**Carduelis chloris** (15 cm)
Greenfinch
Common resident
Breeding: numbers not known
Bushes and wooded areas occasionally at the edge of reed beds

Greenfinches are much larger than the last species and have a more robust bill. The male is yellow-green, with bright yellow primary and outer tail feather edges. The female is duller with less yellow on the feather edges. The song is a loud 'zueee..chewy-chewy-chewy', often made in song-flight of slow wing beats similar to that of the serin.

**Carduelis carduelis** (14 cm)
Goldfinch
Common breeding resident
Grassy areas, track sides, bushes

Goldfinches have mid-brown body plumage offset by black wings boldly barred by bright yellow, very noticeable in flight. The head has black and white markings and the bill is surrounded by a red patch, slightly smaller in the female. Juveniles lack the colourful head markings. The call is a tinkling musical twitter, which is also
incorporated into the male's song. Goldfinches come down to feed on seeding thistle heads on the paths.

**Carduelis cannabina** (14 cm)
Linnet
Common breeding resident
Tracks, grassy areas

Linnets have rusty-coloured backs and greyish heads with buff-brown spots and streaks on the paler under parts. There are white edges to the flight feathers, making a white patch on the closed wing. The male in breeding plumage has a red forehead and red patches on each side of the breast. The flight call is a harsh 'chet-chet...chet', and the song is a sustained musical twittering. Linnets usually feed on the ground, often in small groups.

**Emberiza schoeniclus** (15.5 cm)
Reed bunting
Breeding resident
Reed beds and marshy ground

Male reed buntings have a black head and chin separated by white moustachial wedges. The back is streaky rufous, buff and black with a white collar around the back of the head. The breast is pale with dark streaks, and the tail black with white outer feathers. Females have less distinct head markings and lack the white collar. The song, which starts in late February, is a series of slow chirruping melancholic notes. S'Albufera reed buntings belong to a south west European race which has developed a deeper bill than reed buntings elsewhere in Europe. This is thought to be an adaptation allowing them to tear into reed stems and remove caterpillars living inside.

**Miliaria calandra** (18 cm)
Corn bunting
Common breeding resident: 35-40 pairs (1991)
Rough cultivated land: roost in reeds

This large bunting has a robust bill and streaky brown head and back. The breast is pale and boldly streaked with black. Corn buntings perch on walls, fences and low bushes near weedy fields. On short flights the legs are often left dangling. The song is a jingling rattle, like a bunch of large keys being shaken together (similar to but stronger than the song of the serin). Birds gather to roost in the reed beds during the winter months. Normally 100-200 are present in mid-winter, but in some years the numbers approach 1000. The flight call is a soft 'tip-tip-tip.'

**Further Reading**

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Nick Owens
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