

BIRDING ON CORSICA – 3rd-10th June 2018

Written by Jack Bucknall

Photographs by Jack Bucknall (unless stated otherwise)



Dramatic scenery from the car park at the top of the Restonica Valley.

The Trip:

From the 3rd-10th June 2018, Dan McGibbon and I visited the beautiful island of Corsica, with the hope of seeing some of the endemic birdlife that the island holds, as well as some other specialities. The trip was thoroughly enjoyable, birding at a relaxed pace (a week was more than enough time to see everything we wanted), whilst also appreciating some of the fantastically dramatic scenery the island has to offer.

As there are no direct flights from Newcastle to Corsica, the trip began for me on 2nd June with a drive down to Dan's house in Norwich, where we stayed for the night (after dipping a Moltoni's Warbler on Blakeney Point!), before flying out of London Stansted the next morning. There are four airports on Corsica; we chose to fly into Bastia-Poretta airport in the north-east of the island, by far the easiest and cheapest I found. We based ourselves around the picturesque town of Corte in the centre of the island, staying in a lovely apartment called Villa Margherite where we spent 6 nights. Despite being a nightmare to find with the location on Booking.com being incorrect, it was a perfect base for us when we did find it! We then spent the final night in Bastia for ease of dropping off the hire car before our early morning flight home on the 10th. The hotel was called Les Jardins De La Madrague, and was considerably easier to find, only a 15 minute walk to the airport.

We hired our car from Sixt – it was a Peugeot 208, a superb automatic car that seemed to be almost brand new. We had no problems with the car, and it dealt very well with the mountain roads which can be a struggle! We only hired the car for six days, as our flight home on the 10th was at 7:35am, meaning the office for the car return wasn't open in time. Therefore, we dropped the car off on the evening of the 9th.

The weather was changeable throughout the week, being a nice mid-20°C for the first few days, turning into heavy thunderstorms towards the end of the week. The final day was 34°C+ which made birding rather difficult at times.

Low cloud often covered the peaks, which is worth bearing in mind if planning to birdwatch up the valleys in the centre of the island.

Trip Itinerary:

- 3rd June – Arrived at Bastia Airport around lunchtime, birded Etang de Biguglia before heading to Corte.
4th June – Visited Col de Sorba in the morning, before birding the lakes around Aleria in the afternoon.
5th June – The morning was spent around Vivario, then visited the Restonica Valley in the afternoon.
6th June – Early start birding around Aghione, then the Asco Valley in the afternoon.
7th June – Revisited Col de Sorba, then headed north to Bastia for seawatching and visited Etang de Biguglia again.
8th June – Another early start birding the Aghione area, before revisiting Vivario, Restonica Valley and Corte.
9th June – Slow drive back to Bastia, birding Etang de Biguglia in the afternoon, before returning the hire car.
10th June – Early morning flight back to Stansted (7:15).

DAY-BY-DAY ACCOUNT

Day 1 – 3rd June:

We arrived at Bastia-Poretta airport at 12:45, and upon arriving at our hire car after a hassle-free car pick-up from Sixt, we immediately saw our first **Red Kite** of the trip, a particularly common sight in almost any habitat on the island. My first lifer of the trip came very shortly after with a group of **Italian Sparrows** in the car park, another common sight throughout, as were **Hooded Crows**, **Spotless Starlings** and **Collared Doves**.

Whilst sitting in the departure lounge at Stansted, we had been discussing the influx of Rose-coloured Starlings into Western Europe over the previous few weeks, with huge numbers particularly in Southern France, and fancied our chances of finding some on Corsica. Upon leaving Bastia airport, we headed towards Etang de Biguglia, a large body of water just minutes from the airport. Unbelievably, literally seconds after leaving the car park, I shouted “There’s a **Rose-coloured Starling!**” as a superb adult flew across the road in front of us accompanying four **Spotless Starlings**. Wow! Certainly a promising start to the trip, and we began to think that maybe Rose-coloured Starling would be quite a common sight during our stay. However, this was to be our only sighting of this species throughout the week, which considering the influx, we thought was surprising.

We soon arrived at our first stop, a car park on the east side of the lake at 42.579755, 9.514202. Some good habitat surrounded the car park, so we walked towards the beach through the vegetation. A group of at least 15 **Bee-eaters** were flying around the area, calling and showing well on the overhead wires, while the coastal bushes held five **Sardinian Warblers**, two **Nightingales** and a surprising sighting of two **Tree Sparrows**, not a common bird in our experience on the island. After a brief wander, we moved further north along the lake and found a path leading to the water’s edge at 42.601735, 9.491499. A scan of the lake didn’t produce as much as we’d hoped for, but we still picked up six **Marsh Harriers**, **Great Crested Grebe** and two **Cattle Egrets**, as well the usual **Mallards**, **Cormorants**, two **Coots** and a **Yellow-legged Gull**. On the way back to the car, we saw a **Jay** fly over the road, as well as hearing numerous **Zitting Cisticolas** and another **Nightingale**.

We decided to go and check-in, about an hour’s drive from the airport, arriving at the scenic town of Corte, situated at the foot of the Restonica Valley. After a bit of a nightmare finding our accommodation, we eventually met the owner who showed us to a fantastic studio apartment just off the main road. With superb mountain views, we sat on our balcony having dinner in the company of a **Cuckoo** calling from the valley, a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, and a **Mediterranean Flycatcher** – considered a full species by some authorities. The first day ended listening to two **Scops Owls** calling from the darkness.



The view from our Corte apartment.

Day 2 – 4th June:

Day 2 started with breakfast on the balcony of our apartment in the company of our resident **Mediterranean Flycatcher**, also adding **Common Buzzard** to the trip list, along with a **Firecrest** singing from the hillside behind. After breakfast, we made our way up into the hills in search of the island's endemics, first stopping at Col de Sorba – the 'go to' site for the star bird of the island – **Corsican Nuthatch**. Parking our car at 42.144108, 9.190368, we got out and listened from the lay-by. Within two minutes, we heard the Nuthatch calling near the road, and it wasn't long before it showed itself by flying across the road and landing in the pine right above our heads. Whilst watching the Nuthatch, a flock of 15+ **Corsican Finches** also flew in and began feeding on the ground about 30 feet away! This is without doubt the site for seeing both these endemic species with ease, in our experience. After enjoying our two lifers in quick succession, we had an explore of the forest around the parking area, which produced 2 **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**, a **Firecrest**, a male **Cirl Bunting** and 6 **Common Crossbills** (an endemic subspecies to Corsica). Overlooking the scenic hillside below the parking area, we added **Crag Martin** and 3 **Ravens** to the trip list.



Corsican Nuthatch from Col de Sorba, one of the stand-out highlights of the trip.

After a while, we came back down the road, and decided to try for the next species on our target list – Marmora's Warbler. From previous trip reports, we gathered that a site called Vivario was a good shout for this species. We arrived at the parking area at 42.174797, 9.164815 (the second parking area you pass when coming from Col de Sorba), and looked over the maquis-covered hillside, which looked superb for Sylvia warblers. We walked down the obvious path at the west end of layby, and soon heard a scratchy song that we suspected was a **Dartford Warbler**, which was soon confirmed as a male sat high up on the maquis just off the main path. Looking further onto the hillside, we briefly glimpsed a dark Sylvia warbler as it flew between two bushes, which was suspected was a Marmora's, but despite a further hour of searching the area, it never reappeared. We also recorded **Stonechat** and **Woodlark** here.

We decided to spend the afternoon searching some coastal lakes on the east coast of Corsica, starting with the most northerly wetland of the coastline, Etang de Diane. Driving along the T50 past Aleria, we tried a coastal road that took us to a stone lighthouse-type building called Tour de Diane, where we parked the car (42.142038, 9.555714). Exploring the area here revealed the estuary mouth of the lake, but it was disappointingly quiet, with not a single waterbird seen on the lake at all! We turned to seawatching instead from the stone building, finding 10 **Scopoli's Shearwaters** as a result, quite close inshore – we had hoped we might see Yelkouan Shearwater, but in an hour of

trying, we only recorded the Scopoli's and the occasional **Yellow-legged Gull**. The coastal bushes surrounding the parking area were fairly productive, with **Mediterranean Flycatcher**, **Nightingale**, 3 **Sardinian Warblers** and our only **Red-backed Shrike** of the trip – a cracking male on the overhead wires.

We moved further south and headed for the next waterbody along the coast, Etang d'Urbino. We picked out our route on the map, and aimed for the restaurant right on the lakeside (42.053870, 9.467910). Upon turning off the main road, we started seeing a few birds including a flock of 10 **Bee-eaters** on the overhead wires. A male **Serin** also showed well on a nearby power line, and as we approached the restaurant area, we heard a male **Corn Bunting** singing from the fields. The lake itself was much more productive than the previous one with 2 **Common Terns** being the first birds we saw as we scanned. **Yellow-legged Gulls** were common here, our first **Little Egret** of the trip was seen, as were 8 **Shags** of the race *desmarestii*, a rather distinctive endemic subspecies to the Mediterranean.

As the evening began to draw to a close, we moved on to the final wetland of the stretch of coastline, Marais de Canna, also known as Canna Marsh. From some reports, this sounded like a brilliant place to see waders, herons etc., so parking our car at 41.987943, 9.437975, we walked along the beach southwards towards the wetland. It was difficult to view the wetland because of the high reedbeds, but we took advantage of the miniature jetties where we could. The best view we had was from 41.982634, 9.433752, and although the water level was high, we still got some trip ticks – a flock of 9 **Cattle Egrets** flew low overhead, and a **Little Ringed Plover** was on the beach here. On the water, we recorded 2 **Little Grebes**, 2 **Teal**, 5 **Moorhens** and 3 **Coots**; the reedbeds were alive with the constant songs of **Cetti's Warblers** and **Reed Warblers**. With a disappointing lack of waders, and the evening drawing in, and we headed home. On our way back, just outside Corte, we got a very welcome surprise that caused me to slam on the brakes – a family of **Wild Boars** were feeding right on the road side, an adult and two youngsters showing wonderfully well in the evening sunlight. Sadly, it was such a busy road that we couldn't hang around for any photos, but ending the day with a lifer is never a bad thing! Arriving home in the near darkness, we were again greeted by a **Scops Owl** calling in the distance.

Day 3 – 5th June:

On our third day, we decided to make another go at Marmora's Warbler, and also drive up the Restonica Valley in the hope of seeing some large raptors and Alpine Choughs, which would've been a new bird for me. Following breakfast in the company of several **Red Kites** and a vocal **Firecrest**, we headed back to Vivario, parking up in the layby looking over the hillside. Leaving the car and heading down the path, we heard a **Cuckoo** calling, and a pair of **Stonechats** showed pretty well. Before long, we heard the scratchy song of a Sylvia warbler just off the path, and having listened to the Marmora's song before leaving, we recognised it straight away. Following the sound, within seconds we were watching our first **Marmora's Warbler** at very close range, superb! It continued to sing, most of the time from deep cover, occasionally coming into full view, providing some photo opportunities. We watched the bird for half an hour, before leaving it in peace, and exploring the area further. Strangely, we didn't hear or see any more warblers in the next hour or so, and eventually decided to give the raptors a go, and made our way up the Restonica Valley.



Male Marmora's Warbler singing and showing well at Vivario – a near-endemic to Corsica.

The drive to the top took about 45 minutes, including a few stops to scan the ridges. 2 **Buzzards** and a **Peregrine** were the best of our efforts on the way up, as well as a couple of **Crag Martins** very high up. The car parking area (42.229918, 9.033273) at the top of valley was extremely busy by the time we arrived at 11am, and we had to pay €6

for the privilege, but the views at the top were absolutely stunning. The main attraction here is the mountain walk to Lac de Melo, a picturesque glacial lake at 5,610ft – also a great place to see Alpine Choughs as per previous reports. We began the walk to the lake, which in total took around an hour to the top, often rather difficult in places with metal ladders and ropes to help you at the top! The walk up produced some good birds, including 4 **Water Pipits**, two of which were carrying food, so presumably had young nearby. We also had views of **Blackcap**, 2 **Ravens**, 2 **Grey Wagtails** and a nice surprise were two **Corsican Finches** near the restaurant just past the car park.

As we approached the top, the climb got steeper, and use of the ropes/ladders became essential. Standing in the 'queue' for the ladder, we scanned the ridges from here, and I picked up my second lifer of the day as 15+ **Alpine Choughs** circled high above the valley. Hoping for some better views, we carried on to the top, and we were not disappointed. As if the view of the lake with the mountain backdrop wasn't enough, it was topped off by at least 40 **Alpine Choughs** scavenging food from tourists. We spent the next two hours photographing, watching and literally hand-feeding the Choughs, what an experience – one of my more memorable lifers! I would highly recommend the walk to any birders visiting the island, it took up our full afternoon, but it was certainly worth it.



Incredible views of Alpine Choughs around Lac de Melo, arguably the stand-out highlight of the trip for me.

Arriving back at the car early evening, we had a slow drive home back down the valley. 3 **Crag Martins** were the only highlight birds on our way down, so we headed back to Corte, where we enjoyed our dinner, again in the company of a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, a **Firecrest**, 2 **Scops Owls** calling, and a surprise **Sparrowhawk** circling above the valley.

Day 4 – 6th June:

We made an early start on our fourth day on the trail of one of the WP's best Category C birds – the California Quail. After doing some research into this species before we set off, I had a couple of sites in mind for them, both around the SE town of Aghione. We left our apartment at 4:30, and arrived at our first site about an hour later, quickly hearing a **Turtle Dove** calling around the car. **Bee-eaters** were very common here, with flocks of 10+ on several wires around the vineyard fields, as well as the ever present **Red Kites** circling overhead. However, in the hour we gave it at this site, we never heard any California Quails.

We moved on to the other 'less reliable' site about 1km away, and began slowly driving round the vineyards in the hope of glimpsing or hearing a Quail. We again heard another **Turtle Dove** singing from the trees, as well as two **Nightingales** singing from deep cover, and a male **Sardinian Warbler**. Unfortunately for us, again we had no sight nor sound of any Quails in the hour we searched here, but we did have a close flyover of our only **Hobby** of the week.

Admitting defeat on this occasion, we moved on and tried again for Yelkouan Shearwater from Tour de Diane. The drive to the point produced another **Turtle Dove**, 2 **Linnets** and a nice close **Tawny Pipit** on a fencepost right by the roadside. The seawatch was again quiet, although still produced 15 **Scopoli's Shearwaters**, 7 **Shags** and a constant stream of **Yellow-legged Gulls**. We followed a similar route to earlier in the week, and continued on to Etang d'Urbino in the hope of some waterbirds. **Bee-eaters** were again common on the drive along to the restaurant overlooking the lake, where we also heard 2 **Nightingales** and a **Cetti's Warbler**. The lake itself held 2 **Shags**, a **Little Egret** and a **Sandwich Tern** of note.



Tawny Pipit showing well at Etang de Diane.



Yellow-legged Gull on the restaurant at Etang de Diane.

Following a rather quiet morning dipping the Quails and again failing on the Yelks, we headed back towards Corte, and had a drive up the Asco Valley with Lammergeier in mind, a very difficult bird to see on Corsica. The final destination was Hotel Le Chalet at the top of the valley (42.403316, 8.922818), with numerous stops on the way up scanning the ridges. About a mile up the valley, Dan got his eye on a large raptor above one of the mountains, and upon pulling over and getting our scopes on the bird, it turned out to be a cracking **Golden Eagle**. In total, the drive up to the ski centre produced 5 **Golden Eagles**, 12 **Alpine Swifts**, 10 **Crag Martins**, 2 **Ravens** and 5 **Firecrests** were heard/seen. We then spent about an hour scanning from the top for the elusive Lammergeier – to carry on the theme of the day, we dipped! Deciding it wasn't our day, we had a slow drive back to our apartment for the night. On the way down we saw 2 **Grey Wagtails** on the river, and heard a **Moltoni's Warbler** near the base of valley.

Arriving back, we had our dinner whilst watching the resident **Mediterranean Flycatcher**, 5 **Long-tailed Tits** and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. As the night came in, we listened to 2 **Scops Owls** calling in the distance.



Bee-eater showing well on fence near Aghione.

Day 5 – 7th June:

Following an early start the previous morning, and the weather forecast looking grim, we decided to have a bit of a lie-in, before heading up into the hills again after breakfast. We started again at Col de Sorba, with the intention of getting some more views and photos of both the Corsican Nuthatch and Corsican Finch. However, upon reaching the

vantage point, it was clear that we had been beaten by the weather with incredibly thick fog surrounding the car as we pulled up – not a chance of seeing either of them on this occasion.

Hoping that the fog was just sitting over the high ground, we headed back down the hillside and stopped again at Vivario. Although the clouds looked heavy, the fog had not followed us down, so we headed into the maquis, and immediately heard a familiar sound, the distinctive rattling call of a **Moltoni's Warbler**. Although we had heard one on the previous day, we were keen to get a view of this near-endemic, and we were not disappointed when it came to the top of a nearby bush, giving us some great views – a lifer for me. It quickly disappeared again into thick cover, but continued to call frequently, drawing the attention of a **Woodlark** that came in for a look, also offering some excellent views. Small numbers of commoner birds were recorded here too, along with a pair of **Cirl Buntings**, a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and a low **Alpine Swift** soared over our heads. Unfortunately, the forecast was spot on, and just as we were about to search the Marmora's area again, the heavens opened and we made a dash for the car.



Very timid male Cirl Bunting at Vivario.



Woodlark showing well at Vivario, seemingly feeding chicks nearby.

Another check of the forecast revealed that things were looking grim for the rest of the day, however it was forecasted to be brighter in the north around Bastia, so we decided to spend a couple of hours making a real go at Yelkouan Shearwater. Previous trip reports suggested that Cap Corse on the very northern tip of the island was a reliable spot for passing Shearwaters, so we began the drive north. It took us over an hour to get to Bastia, and the weather hadn't really improved much. We continued to follow the coast north, and reached a town called Grigione, where we found a few benches overlooking the sea. Having driven for almost 90 minutes, we decided to give it a go from here (42.740866, 9.461005). We felt less than hopeful as the rain persisted, and we didn't see a single bird for the first 20 minutes of watching. Dan then picked up a fairly close **Scopoli's Shearwater** which gave us a bit of hope, this was closely followed by a **Shag** fishing just offshore, although a further 20 minutes passed with no more birds, with the weather closing in further. As we approached the hour-mark of our seawatch, and just on the verge of giving up, Dan got onto a distant flock of birds heading towards us, but lost them almost straight away. He thought they were Shearwaters, but couldn't quite get an ID on the short glimpse he'd had of the flock. However, around 30 seconds later, I got my eyes on the flock again, much closer in still flying towards us – “**YELKS!!**” I shouted in delight as 7 **Yelkouan Shearwaters** effortlessly glided past us, showing off their distinguishing features. We watched the birds for at least 5 minutes as they made their way round the headland and continued south, success at last, and a lifer for us both!

Soaked through, but buzzing that perseverance had paid off, we made back for the car. Before heading home, we decided to check the north end of Etang de Biguglia as we suspected we had only viewed a fraction of the lake on the first day. We picked a route on the map, and aimed for what looked like a car park near a jetty, situated at 42.643753, 9.444050. Walking east from the car towards the jetty, we saw several passerines in the trees along a nearby stream, the best of which was a singing male **Serin**. Of the waterbodies that we'd checked previously on Corsica, we found wildfowl to be quite hard to come by, so weren't expecting a great deal here – how wrong we were, it seemed that every duck on the island was at the north end of this lake! We were greeted by a large flock of **Red-crested Pochards**, around 65 birds in total, also holding 3 **Common Pochards**. Also present on the water were hundreds of **Coots**, many on nests, 12 **Great Crested Grebes**, 4 **Shelduck**, 25 **Mallards** and a **Cormorant**. Scanning the water's edge immediately revealed 3 **Little Egrets**, a **Marsh Harrier**, 2 **Black-winged Stilts**, several **Yellow-legged Gulls** and 3 **Black-headed Gulls**, not an easy bird to see on Corsica. Two quality and unexpected birds came in quick succession here as further scanning of the lake revealed a cracking **Osprey** perched on a log, offering great scope views. Soon after this, we both got eyes on a **Squacco Heron** flying across the lake, which was a lifer for Dan, what a

site! The reedbeds around the jetty held 5 **Reed Warblers** and several **Cetti's Warblers**, a **Kestrel** was hovering over the marshland, 2 **Buzzards** circled above the trees and the ever-present **Red Kites** quartered the area. A super site that I would highly recommend to any visiting birders!

Before heading back to Corte, we checked the beach just east of the lake after reading previous reports suggesting this was prime location for seeing Audouin's Gulls. As we pulled into the roadside car park, a **Hoopoe** flew across in front of us, and 2 **Sardinian Warblers** were singing from the scrub. As we walked onto the beach and scanned, it appeared very quiet, until Dan soon spotted an adult **Audouin's Gull** standing on its own on the sand – the only bird on the beach! We threw some bread in the air in an attempt to get it to come in, and the bird took off and flew towards us, but seemed very timid as it flew straight past us and landed c.100m away. On review of the photos, we found that the bird was carrying a colour ring, and a GPS transmitter! We made the journey home, ending the day with our two favourite locals, the **Mediterranean Flycatcher**, and a **Scops Owl** calling.



Audouin's Gull near Etang de Biguglia (photo by Dan McGibbon).



Black-winged Stilt at Etang de Biguglia (photo by Dan McGibbon).

Day 6 – 8th June:

Day six was our last full day around the Corte area, so we decided to make it an early start and try one more time to see the elusive California Quail. Setting off at 4:30, we headed again for Aghione. Driving through the dark, we had hopes of maybe glimpsing an Owl on our way, however our first bird of the day was a very welcome one – 2 **Nightjars** sat in the middle of the D50, showing well in the car highlights, albeit briefly! A bird that wasn't really on our radars, so after stumbling upon them, we felt our luck may be in.

We arrived at our first Quail site around 5:30, and began slowly walking around the perimeter of the vineyards. Around 10 minutes in, I heard the very distinctive call of a male **California Quail**, it sounded fairly close, but in deep cover. We approached the area slowly and quietly, and stood about 30ft from where the bird was calling – it seemed very settled in the trees adjacent to the vineyard, but still very deep in cover, and not visible. We decided to step back a bit, and tried a brief period of playback to see if the Quail would move in to view, however the bird didn't really react to the tape, and continued to call from the same spot. After a frustrating and rather panicked 20 minutes, the bird stopped calling, and we did not hear it again despite waiting a further hour searching the area. Suitably hacked off, we made our way back to the car – even a mammoth flock of 12 **Turtle Doves** flying around the area did not cheer me up! We moved on to our other site for a last ditch attempt to see a California Quail, where we again drew a blank. A **Cetti's Warbler** and a **Nightingale** singing here again provided very little consolation to our double dip, and we gave up.

We headed back towards Corte, and revisited Col de Sorba for the final time for more views of the Nuthatch and Finch. This time round was no different, and we heard **Corsican Nuthatch** almost immediately after leaving the car, which soon showed well again. The **Corsican Finches** however were the highlight this time round, with 20+ feeding on the grass, often at very close range, joined by a more timid male **Cirl Bunting**. We enjoyed the birds for a good hour, feeding on the grass verge right by the car park – this site really is a must-do for any visiting birders.



Corsican Finch showing well at Col de Sorba.

Another site that we thoroughly enjoyed was Vivario, which we visited for the final time upon leaving Col de Sorba. The clouds again looked rather heavy when we pulled up, which caused a bit of worry, and 4 very low **Alpine Swifts** above the car parking area also suggested poor weather at higher altitudes. However, we walked down the path again into the maquis, and again immediately heard 2 **Moltoni's Warblers** calling to one another, which soon turned into 4 individuals all calling in the same area of maquis (presumably a family party) – typically hard to get any views of however. We walked around for a further 20 minutes, seeing a male **Stonechat**, 2 **Cirl Buntings** and 2 **Woodlarks**, as well as hearing the distinctive song of a male **Corn Bunting**. However, with no further Sylvia warblers on offer, we headed back to the apartment for some lunch.

For our final afternoon on the island, we gave it one last go for the elusive Lammergeier, by having a slow drive to the top of the Restonica Valley again. We stopped the car for the first time quite near the foot of the valley, and began scanning the ridges. A **Buzzard** was circling over the valley, and as the bird drifted closer towards us, it drew Dan's attention to a cracking **Blue Rock Thrush** perched up on the rock face just behind the car, which was soon joined by a second bird! We enjoyed prolonged views of the pair feeding on the rock face, before moving a bit further up. A second 'stop and scan' produced another trip tick for us, **Dipper**! We had checked for these great birds every time we had gone up the valley, but this was the first time we had actually found one, so we spent a bit of time watching it, before again moving on. We made a few more stops on our way up the twisty roads, and recorded some good birds such as 4 **Golden Eagles**, 10 **Crag Martins**, 2 **Alpine Choughs** and 4 **Ravens**. A **Corsican Finch** was waiting for us at the car park at the top, but despite scanning the ridges for the best part of an hour, we again saw no Lammergeiers – I get the impression you have to hit on very lucky indeed to get any views of the very few of these birds that are left on Corsica.

We finished the day with a new site, the citadel in the centre of Corte, a site recommended to us for Rock Sparrow. We parked up in the pay and display car park, and walked into the grounds of the citadel. A **Mediterranean Flycatcher** showed particularly well here, but was unfortunately in the dark shadows of the citadel walls, so the photos weren't as good as I had hoped! We heard a few **Italian Sparrows** calling here, but no Rock Sparrows for us. We walked to the top of the steps, and overlooked the town, a fantastic view. This was made even better by a super-close flyover from a **Red Kite**, posing nicely for the camera! This was to be the last act of the day, before we headed back to our apartment for the evening. A **Serin** greeted us as we arrived, as did a calling **Firecrest**, and as the darkness fell again, we heard our last **Scops Owl** of the trip!



Dipper showing well in the Restonica Valley.



Jay at the base of the Restonica Valley – common sight throughout.



Red Kite at Corte – often the commonest bird on the island.



Mediterranean Flycatcher showing well at Corte citadel.

Day 7 – 9th June:

A later start than usual was had on our final full day on the island, trying to recover from our early starts the previous few days. We again had breakfast on our balcony, with the usual birds for company including several **Red Kites**, and small numbers of **Greenfinches**. Unfortunately, with our early flight on the 10th, we could not return the hire car on the same day, so we booked a hotel within walking distance of the airport for the night. Around 10am, we checked out of our Corte apartment, and started a slow drive towards Bastia.

Some relaxed birding was had in the afternoon, largely around Etang de Biguglia and the surrounding area. Arriving around lunchtime, we again visited the north end of the lake and began scanning the wildfowl. Numbers were down on our previous visit, but there was still plenty of quality on offer – 8 **Red-crested Pochards**, 10+ **Great Crested Grebes**, stacks of **Coots** and a single **Moorhen** were on the lake. A scan of the surrounding trees produced 2 **Osprey** perched up, both giving some great scope views. At least 5 **Buzzards** were circling in the air here too, and 3 **Kestrels** were also noted. Scanning the wooden posts across the centre of lake produced our target species here – **Audouin's Gull**, with a single adult amongst 3 **Black-headed Gulls** and numerous **Yellow-legged Gulls**. A few **Serins** were noted around the car park too, as well as a **Sardinian Warbler** and several **Bee-eaters** amongst the regular birds.

After a full afternoon around the lake, we headed to our new hotel to check in, before returning the car to the airport, and enjoying a lovely meal in the restaurant for our final night (no Scops Owls calling here sadly!).

Day 8 – 10th June:

An early start was had, and we arrived at the airport at 7:15 to check in for our flight back to Stansted – a **Zitting Cisticola** was calling in the darkness as we walked to the terminal building.

Classified List

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

4 at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common at most wetland sites.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

2 at Canna Marsh on the 4th.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

3 at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

60+ at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th, 8 there on the 9th.

California Quail *Callipepla californica*

A male heard at a site near Aghione on the 8th.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

2 at Canna Marsh on the 4th.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

10+ at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th and the 9th.

Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

10 off Etang de Diane on the 4th and 6th, also a single bird off Grigione on the 7th.

Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*

Flock of 7 past Grigione on the 7th.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

10 at Etang de Biguglia on the 3rd, and a single bird there on the 7th.

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Small numbers of this distinctive subspecies were noted regularly offshore at various sites.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

2 at Etang de Biguglia on the 3rd, and a flock of 9 flew over Canna Marsh on the 4th.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

A single bird was noted at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

A single bird at Etang d'Urbino on the 4th and the 6th.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

A single bird flying past our apartment in Corte on the 3rd was our only sighting of the trip.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

One at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th, and 2 there on the 9th.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

5 in Asco Valley on the 6th, and 4 in Restonica Valley on the 8th.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Arguably the commonest bird on the island, present in almost all habitat throughout the week.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

6 at Etang de Biguglia on the 3rd, and one there on the 7th.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Small numbers noted daily at high altitudes, and 5+ at Etang de Biguglia on the 9th.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

One seen from our apartment in Corte on the 5th.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted in small numbers daily across most habitats.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

One flew through Aghione on the morning of the 6th.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

One bird in Restonica Valley on the 5th.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

5 at Canna Marsh on the 4th, 2 at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th, and one there on the 9th.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Large numbers noted at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th and 9th, also 5 birds at Canna Marsh on the 4th.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

2 birds at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th, and one there on the 9th.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

One bird at Canna Marsh on the 4th.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

3 birds at Etang de Biguglia on the 7th, and 4 there on the 9th.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Common in all coastal areas.

Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*

One on the beach near Etang de Biguglia on the 7th, and one on the lake itself on the 9th.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

One at Etang d'Urbino on the 6th.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

2 at Etang d'Urbino on the 4th.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Common and widespread.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Present in small numbers at most sites.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Very common and widespread.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Best area was around Aghione/Etang de Diane, with 2 on the 6th, and a flock of 10+ on the 8th.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Single bird heard on the 3rd from our apartment in Corte, and another heard at Vivario on the 5th.

Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops*

Heard daily from our apartment balcony in the darkness, one or two birds every night.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

2 in the middle of the road in the early hours of the 8th on our way to Aghione.

Swift *Apus apus*

Fairly common and widespread in most habitats.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*

10+ seen in Asco Valley on the 6th, 1 at Vivario on the 7th, 4 there on the 8th, as well as 1 at Corte citadel.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

2 at Etang de Biguglia on the 3rd, 1 there on the 7th, 1 at Aghione on the 8th, and 2 at Etang de Biguglia on the 9th.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Reasonably common in most areas. 15+ at Biguglia on the 3rd, and 20+ at Aghione were the highest counts.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Small numbers seen and heard daily at various locations.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

1-2 birds on every visit to Vivario throughout the week, and a single bird at Aghione on the 6th.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Small numbers seen regularly at high altitudes, 10+ seen in both Asco and Restonica Valleys regularly.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Common and widespread.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Common and widespread.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

A male singing from song-post at Etang de Diane on the 6th was our only sighting.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

4 birds were seen in Restonica Valley on the 5th, including an adult with food for chicks.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

2 in Restonica Valley on the 5th and 2 in Asco Valley on the 6th.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Single bird in Restonica Valley on the 5th was our only record.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

Single bird seen carrying food in Restonica Valley on the 8th.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Common and widespread.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Fairly common and widespread, often heard and not seen!

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Only seen at Vivario, but seen on every visit. 2 birds on the 5th was our highest count.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Common and widespread.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

A pair showed well in Restonica Valley on the 8th.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Common at Etang de Biguglia on the 3rd, and another one heard near the airport on the 10th.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Male singing in Restonica Valley on the 5th and 4 in Asco Valley on the 6th.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

Present in small numbers at various sites, more often heard than seen.

Moltoni's Warbler *Sylvia subalpina*

Single bird heard in the Asco Valley on the 6th, male seen well at Vivario on the 7th, increasing to 4 birds on the 8th.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

Single male singing at Vivario on the 4th was our only sighting of this species.

Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda*

Great views of this sought after species on the 5th at Vivario, our only confirmed record.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Commonly heard at wetland sites.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Commonly seen and heard at wetland sites.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

Heard throughout the week in small numbers at various sites, good numbers in Restonica and Asco Valleys.

Mediterranean Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata tyrrhenica*

Seen fairly regularly at various locations, including daily sightings from our balcony!

Great Tit *Parus major corsus*

Common and widespread.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater sardus*

Present in small numbers in all woodland areas.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus ogliastreae*

Common and widespread.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

5+ seen from our balcony in Corte on the 6th, our only sighting of the week.

Corsican Nuthatch *Sitta whiteheadi*

The star bird! 3 birds seen at Col de Sorba on the 4th, and a single bird there on the 8th. Calling frequently both times.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

An adult male was seen at Etang de Diane on the 4th on the overhead wires.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius corsicanus*

Common and widespread.

Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

2 at Etang de Biguglia on the 3rd.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

Common in the higher regions of the Restonica Valley, taking food out our hands around Lac de Melo on the 5th.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Common and widespread.

Raven *Corvus corax*

3 at Col de Sorba on the 4th, 2 in Restonica Valley on the 5th, 4 there on the 8th, and 2 in Asco Valley on the 6th.

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*

Common and widespread.

Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*

A superb adult flew across the road near Bastia airport on the 3rd.

Italian Sparrow *Passer italiae*

Common and widespread.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

2 birds at Etang de Biguglia on the 3rd, and a single bird there on the 9th.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common and widespread.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

2 at Etang de Diane on the 6th.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis tschusii*

Present in small numbers at various locations.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris madaraszii*

Present in small numbers at various locations.

Corsican Finch *Serinus corsicana*

Sought after endemic. 20+ showed well at Col de Sorba on the 4th and 8th, also a pair in Restonica Valley on the 5th.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Present in small numbers at a few locations throughout the week.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra corsicana*

Endemic subspecies to Corsica. 6 birds flew overhead calling at Col de Sorba on the 4th.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

1-2 birds seen on every visit to both Col de Sorba and Vivario throughout the week.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Males singing were not uncommon in rural areas, especially Etang d'Urbino, and around Aghione.