

CORSICA AUGUST 2012

Introduction

Our family went to Corsica this summer for several reasons. First of all we wanted to have a relaxing holiday with a nice beach and good weather and Corsica has all this on offer. Secondly our children wanted to visit France (my daughter to practice her French) and last but not least Corsica has some interesting endemic birds. Although I have been to Corsica before and saw most endemics like Corsican Nuthatch and Corsican Finch, I still missed the endemic race of Treecreeper (*corsa*) that can be evaluated to a full species in the future (like has happened with Corsican Finch). There was also a possibility to see California Quail, an established introduced species, that can be interesting for some rankings.

We decided to stay near Ghisonaccia because of the nice beaches and the central location (in the middle of the island), close to the mountains, the Bastia airport and the main attractions like Bonfaccio and Corte. The weather didn't disappoint and it was sometimes even too hot (35+) to do anything else but swimming. The food in general and the often mentioned tranquillity of the island was however quite disappointing and we ended up in traffic jams along the coastal road N198 more than ones. Corsica is also an expensive island, let alone the costs of getting there by ferry or plane. We hired a car for the full two weeks of our stay and used it every day, but it took us some time to get used to this French car full of electronic gadgets like an electronic key, -doors, -fuel tank cover, -handbrake, etc.

In order to see *corsa* Treecreeper I visited several sites in the mountains. For California Quail I visited several sites north of Ghisonaccia. I usually got up at 6 a.m. and went out birding for a few hours, picking up fresh bread before returning to our accommodation around 10 a.m. when the rest of the family was just awake. The rest of the day was mostly spent on the beach.

While birding I saw all the **endemic (sub)species**. The endemic bird taxa for Corsica are:

Corsican Nuthatch	<i>Sitta whiteheadi</i>
Crossbill	<i>Loxia (curvirostra) corsicana</i>
Treecreeper	<i>Certhia (familiaris) corsa</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major parroti</i>
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs tyrrhenica</i>
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius corsicanus</i>

There are also a number of **near-endemic (sub)species** on Corsica who share their distribution with nearby islands in the Mediterranean. These near-endemic bird taxa are:

Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis arrigonii</i>	(Sardinia)
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus wolterstorffi</i>	(Sardinia)
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo arrigonii</i>	(Sardinia)
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba ernesti</i>	(Sardinia)
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes koenigi</i>	(Sardinia)
Marmora's Warbler	<i>Sylvia sarda</i>	(Sardinia and some small Italian Islands)
Moltoni's Warbler	<i>Sylvia subalpina</i>	(Sardinia and Balearics)
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscipapa (striata) tyrrhenica</i>	(Sardinia)
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius (senator) badius</i>	(Sardinia, Balearics and some small Italian Islands)
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater sardus</i>	(Sardinia)
Corsican Finch	<i>Serinus corsicana</i>	(Sardinia, Elba)
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris madaraszii</i>	(Sardinia)
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis tschusii</i>	(Sardinia, Elba and Sicily)

Of all these I never saw *arrigonii* Goshawk and *ernesti* Barn Owl, but all the others were seen on this or earlier trips to Corsica. Marmora's Warbler was easy in spring 1991 near Corte.

Sites visited

Below is some information about the sites I visited during my stay on Corsica.

Ghisonaccia

We hired a mobile home at a holiday park called 'Perla di Mare', just east of Ghisonaccia and next to the beach. This park is divided in two parts and we were based at the quiet western park of the park. We heard Nightjars and Scops Owls almost every evening and had some of the commoner birds like Spotted Flycatchers, Blue Tits and Great Spotted Woodpecker in our garden.

Étang del Sale

This lake is one of the three sites for California Quail and I tried to find it here on a morning and an afternoon without any success. This lake can be reached by a small track opposite the archaeological site near Aleria. I only saw some of the commoner birds.

Lac d'Urbino

This lake is situated north-east of Ghisonaccia and can be reached by turning on an access road from the N198. I only visited this lake once, walking from our accommodation along sandy tracks parallel to the shore, eventually reaching this lake. During this walk I noticed a few Moltoni's Warblers. At the lake there were a few Great Crested Grebes but not much else, although during our stay also a Pygmy Cormorant was present (a rarity in France).

Aghione

In this general area there are two more sites for California Quail (contact me if you want more details), which I both tried. Just as I was to give up I heard a California Quail call spontaneously several times just north of Aghione in an area with a lot of vineyards. Although I could locate the place where the bird was calling quite exactly, I never saw it. The area around Aghione was also good for other birds like Great Spotted Woodpecker, Wren, Robin, Long-tailed Tit, Sardinian- and Moltoni's Warblers, Red-backed Shrike, *badius* Woodchat Shrike, Gold- and Greenfinch and Jay. I also heard and saw a group of Corsican Finches here perched on a wire, proving that Corsican Finch also occurs at sea level.

Col de Sorba

This Col is a good place to see Corsican Nuthatch. Near the highest point (where there is a sign saying 'Col de Sorba 1311 m') is space to park a car and a pair of Corsican Nuthatch was found here almost immediately. Other common birds were Coal Tit, Chaffinch, Treecreeper (only heard) and Goldcrest. The road D69 has improved a lot but the road D344 from Ghisonaccia to Ghisoni is horrible to drive and I wouldn't advise you to use this road. When coming from the east it is better to use the D343 to Vezzani and Vivario and then approach the Col de Sorba from the west, using the D69. The driving here is much more relaxed with light traffic and goes through nice habitat, like the Col d'Erbajo (see below).

Gorge de la Restonica

The entrance to this gorge is well indicated in Corte. Although a popular tourist attraction, the road gets a lot narrower if you drive deeper into this valley and there is no space anywhere to park a car. Very hairy to drive and if you make it to the end, you have to pay to park your car. I went there at first light and left before the first traffic arrived, but yet the left mirror of the car was hit by an oncoming car.

Col d'Erbajo

Situated along the D343 between Vivario (Muracciole) and Vezzani. There is an area of mature pines here with a sign saying 'Col d'Erbajo Altitude 920m' and a picnic area a little before where you can park the car and have a walk. The area is good for Corsican Nuthatch (only heard) and other forest birds like Goldcrest, Coal Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Raven, Buzzard, etc.

Bonifacio

A 'must see' for anyone visiting Corsica but it is best to be here early before most tourists arrive. We took a boat trip along the coast in order to fully appreciate the spectacular cliffs. Bird wise I only saw Pallid Swift, Italian Sparrow and Shag but on an earlier trip in May 1991 Blue Rock Thrush was seen on the castle walls in the village and Scopoli's- and Yelkouan Shearwater from the shore. The whole coast, just east of the village, is good for *Sylvia* warblers, Tawny Pipit and *badius* Woodchat Shrike but was not visited this time.

Col de Bavella

This Col lies on the D-268, between Solenzara and Zonza. The road from Solenzara to Col de Bavella is good and at the Col itself is plenty of opportunity to park a car. There are several marked walking tracks that start in the small village. This village also had a few small wells that attracted a lot of birds. This is the only place on the island where I saw numerous *corsicana* Crossbills (100+) and also Corsican Finch was very common. I took one of the tracks into the forest and after 20 minutes of searching I finally not only heard but also saw a *corsa* Treecreeper. A nice birthday present! Other birds recorded here were Robin, Blackcap, Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Coal Tit, Jay and Chaffinch. To me this seems one of the best and easiest places on the island to see the endemics including Corsican Nuthatch which has been seen here by other birders. The scenery is also stunning, so you can take your family here for a nice day in the mountains and see some good birds as well.

Birds seen

Great Crested Grebe	cristatus	only seen Lac d'Urbino
Shag	desmarestii	only seen coast Bonifatio
Red Kite	monotypic	quite common
Buzzard	arrigonii	only one bird Col de Sorba
Kestrel	tinnunculus	
Hobby	subbuteo	two hunting in the evening near Ghisonaccia
Quail	coturnix	heard near campsite Ghisonaccia
California Quail		one heard vineyards near Algheri on 11-08
Yellow-legged Gull	michahellis	
Rock Dove	livia	only domesticated birds?
Woodpigeon	palumbus	
Collared Dove	decaocto	
Turtle Dove	turtur	
Scops Owl	scops	at least two were calling every evening near our accommodation near Ghisonaccia
Nightjar	meridionalis	we heard the frog like call and purring of several Nightjars every evening near our accommodation
Common Swift	apus	
Pallid Swift	brehmorum	several on seacliffs near Bonifatio
Kingfisher	atthis	one River Tavignano
Bee-eater	monotypic	several heard Tavignano
Hoopoe	epops	several seen
Great Spotted Woodpecker	parroti	quite common forests

Crag Martin	monotypic	river Tavignano
Swallow	rustica	
House Martin	meridionalis	quite common in villages
Grey Wagtail	cinerea	river Tavignano, Gorge de la Restonica
Wren	koenigi	1 seen near Algheri
Robin	witherbyi // rubecula	quite common
Blackbird	merula	
Fan-tailed Warbler	juncidis	several near Ghisonaccia
Moltoni's Warbler	monotypic	several seen and heard near Algheri, also at Lac d'Urbino
Sardinian Warbler	melanocephala	several seen and heard
Blackcap	paulucci	quite common
Goldcrest	regulus	common in forests
Firecrest	ignicapillus	several near Algheri
Spotted Flycatcher	tyrrhenica	very common
Long-tailed Tit	irbii	quite common and seen at different sports
Coal Tit	sardus	very common forests
Blue Tit	ogliastrae	quite common
Great Tit	corsus	quite common
Corsican Nuthatch	monotypic	two at Col de Sorba
Treecreeper	corsa	after hearing birds at Col de Sorba, Col d'Erbajo and Gorge de la Restonica 1 bird was finally seen at Col de Bavella on 17-08
Red-backed Shrike	monotypic	only seen Aghione
Woodchat Shrike	badius	1 juvenile near Aghione
Jay	corsicanus	common
Hooded Crow	cornix	quite common
Raven	hispanus // corax	several seen in mountain areas
Spotless Starling	monotypic	quite common
Italian Sparrow	monotypic	quite common, the only sparrow seen
Chaffinch	tyrrhenica	quite common
Corsican Finch	monotypic	5 birds Aghione, several near River Tavignano and very common Col de Bavella
Greenfinch	madaraszi	quite common
Goldfinch	tschusii	quite common
Linnet	mediterranea	quite common
Crossbill	corsicana	only seen Col de Bavella where very common
Cirl Bunting	monotypic	quite common

If you would like more information please contact:

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