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Field report - Majorca April 2009

by **Carl Corbidge**

Majorca is the largest of the Balearic Islands and has long been a place I have wanted to visit. So I booked a 10 day trip over the Easter holidays, I went with my 10 year old daughter Sasha. To save on travel time I stayed in 3 areas, Arenal near Palma, Cala dor in the South and Alcudia in the North West.

There are a total of 13 species of reptiles and amphibians on Majorca, many of which are the result of introductions long ago and some more recent as in the case of the Red eared Terrapin *Trachemys scripta*. Of these, my main target species were the 2 *Podarcis* lizards on the island, the North African race of False Smooth Snake *Macrotodon cucullatus*, Majorcan Midwife Toad *Alytes muletensis* and the 2 species of tortoise.

The weather for the first 2 days was terrible with rain, hail, thunderstorms. After that it was generally sunny with temperatures of 18-20 Celsius, so pretty much ideal.

Day one (rain)

My flight landed at midday and it was raining! I picked up the car and drove towards Palma Cathedral in the hope the sun might break through bringing out with it the population of Ibiza Wall Lizard *Podarcis pityusensis* that resides there, but it didn't so I went to the hotel. Later that evening it stopped raining for a while, so we went down to the beach, a few turned stones later and the first herp of the trip was found in the form of Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica*.

Day two (more rain/hail etc)

We awoke to more rain so went to the Palma Aquarium (very good but expensive). Emerging after midday it had stopped raining and I spotted some blue sky. I drove to Palma Cathedral, but again it started to rain, so I continued towards the Calvia area. This is the area for Spur-thighed Tortoise *Testudo graeca*, but low numbers means you need lots of luck and/or specific information to stand any chance of coming across the beasts. Driving around this area I saw some Iberian water frogs *Rana perezi* in a stream. A break in the weather allowed a quick look for tortoise without success. Driving back to the hotel the heavens opened to a torrential downpour of hail (was I really in the med?). On approaching the hotel the sun came out it was now about 4pm. I stopped at the area I had found geckos the previous day. Turning some discarded building materials I quickly found some Moorish Geckos (less infested with mites than the previous days animals) so a little more photogenic. I then turned several pieces of roofing felt and when I lifted the last one, Sasha shouted "snake" and there was one of my target species Balearic False Smooth Snake *Macrotodon cucullatus*. It was approximately 45cm in length. It didn't really attempt to bite when handled (with glove). It was quite difficult to photograph, when it tried to escape it repeatedly put its head/neck into a (S) shape and then when it thought it was home and dry straightened out. Compared to those on the mainland they are less well marked around the head/neck. Its underside was pale yellow with a few pale black spots. They are thought to have been introduced long ago and implicated in the demise of Lilford's Wall Lizards *Podarcis lilfordi* from the main island.

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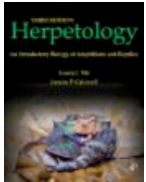
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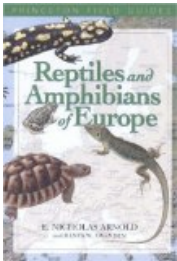
- Carl Corbidge has been to Majorca, Spain (10th May 2009)
- Jean-Pierre Vacher has been to Belgium (2nd May 2009)
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- Matt Wilson has made a report from the cold north of England (3rd April)
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- Tibor Sos has made a report from Romania (1st April)
- Frank Deschandol has made a home report from northern France (21st March)
- Jeroen Speybroeck has been to Sardinia (19th March 2009)

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Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica*



Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica*



False Smooth Snake *Macroprotodon cucullatus*



False Smooth Snake *Macroprotodon cucullatus*



False Smooth Snake *Macroprotodon cucullatus*



False Smooth Snake *Macroprotodon cucullatus*

Day 3 (out comes the sun)

With the sun shining I made off for Palma Cathedral at 9am. Straight away I saw several Ibiza Wall Lizard *Podarcis pityusensis*. An hour later and there were perhaps a total of 15 in one area including some beautiful

males. These have got to be some of the nicest looking of all the wall lizards. Having seen one *Podarcis* we got the boat from Sant Elm to the Island of Dragonera to see another. Immediately on landing there were Lilford's Wall Lizards *Podarcis lilfordi giglioli* everywhere. Most were a dull brown colour, but searching through the masses there were some with more interesting markings. With so many lizards it's easy to observe their behaviour. Sasha took delight in letting them nibble and lick her fingers. Some were climbing plants trying to snatch butterflies from flowers. I saw one trying to subdue a large bumblebee while being pursued by other lizards making it impossible to photograph.



Palma Cathedral



Ibiza Wall Lizard *Podarcis pityusensis*



Ibiza Wall Lizard *Podarcis pityusensis*



Ibiza Wall Lizard *Podarcis pityusensis*



Photo11 Approach to Dragonera



Lilford's Wall Lizards *Podarcis lilfordi giglioli*



Lilford's Wall Lizards *Podarcis lilfordi giglioli*



Lilford's Wall Lizards *Podarcis lilfordi giglioli*



Lilford's Wall Lizards *Podarcis lilfordi giglioli*



Lilford's Wall Lizards *Podarcis lilfordi giglioli*



Habitat on Dragonera

Day 4

We set off around the coast towards Cala dor. It was another sunny day with a little cloud. Having looked on Google Earth I had identified an area en-route where there might be some Hermann's Tortoise *Testudo hermanni*. We started by turning a few stones and found lots of Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica* of various shades and patterns. I then found the first of two tortoises close to the bottom of scrub. Driving to the hotel via the Mondrago national park, lots of birds were seen and were in song, including Sardinian Warblers, Serins and lots of Larks (Thekla?).



Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica*



Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica*



Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica*



Hermann's Tortoise *Testudo hermanni*



Hermann's Tortoise *Testudo hermanni*



Habitat



Hermann's Tortoise *Testudo hermanni* 2nd individual



Hermann's Tortoise *Testudo hermanni* 2nd individual

Day 5 & 6

We took it steady for the next couple of days going down to the beach. No new herps were added. I did see Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* which is apparently one of the world's rarest gulls and a Majorcan specialty.



Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*

Day 7

It was raining in the morning but on reaching the Alcudia area the sun was starting to break through. The next place on the itinerary was the famous Albufera reserve, a large wetland area. Most people go there for the birds, with lots of herons etc. The first herp I found was a very small European Pond Terrapin *Emys orbicularis* which are apparently being squeezed out by the Red eared Terrapin *Trachemys scripta*. A few Iberian water frogs *Rana perezi* were seen and heard. I then found a small Viperine Snake *Natrix maura* which had recently eaten and I was soon surrounded by a crowd of people. A few more *Tarentola mauritanica* were seen. Another Majorcan avian specialty was seen in the form of the Red Knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*.



European Pond Terrapin *Emys orbicularis*



European Pond Terrapin *Emys orbicularis*



Viperine Snake *Natrix maura*



Viperine Snake *Natrix maura*



Iberian water frogs *Rana perezi*



Iberian water frogs *Rana perezi*



Iberian water frogs *Rana perezi*



Red Knobbed Coot Red Knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*

Day 8

Another sunny day so I went to the Albufereta area (different to Albufera) apart from gaining access to a fast flowing river I couldn't find a way in to the main area of lagoons so I didn't waste any time and went to an area of dunes. Here I soon found a small Hermann's Tortoise *Testudo hermanni* perhaps 6-7cm in length.



Hermann's Tortoise *Testudo hermanni*



Hermann's Tortoise *Testudo hermanni*

Day 9 (Into the Mountains)

This was the day I set aside to look for the Majorca Midwife Toad *Alytes muletensis*. They have been pushed back into the Tramuntana Mountains by the introduction of predators. I only had one (difficult) site earmarked and therefore knew I was going to have to be lucky, I wasn't. However the scenery was spectacular. I may have heard one calling just 3 notes in succession, despite listening for a while it didn't call again and turning stones in the vicinity didn't lead to anything.



Me and Sasha in the Tramuntana mountains

Day 10

I went to the Albufera again and saw the same species again although the *Rana perezi* were in full voice on this occasion.

With 8 species seen I was satisfied with the trip, but was surprised not to find any Turkish Gecko.

Species Seen

Iberian water frog *Rana perezi*

Hermann's Tortoise *Testudo hermanni*

European Pond Terrapin *Emys orbicularis*

Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica*

Ibiza Wall Lizard *Podarcis pityusensis*

Lilford's Wall Lizard *Podarcis lilfordi giglioli*

Balearic False Smooth Snake *Macrotodon cucullatus*

Viperine Snake *Matrix maura*

Comments (8)

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Bobby Bok



Thanks Carl, if you ever visit Menorca I have some great locations for you as well!

17/5/2009 19h45 - (CET)

Carl Corbidge



Thanks Bobby i also intend to visit Menorca in the near future, hopefully you may be lucky with the false smooth snake on Mallorca if you go, e-mail me if you need any info.

15/5/2009 14h08 - (CET)

Bobby Bok



Nice report and excellent photo's! I love the false smooth snake, unfortunately I still haven't found them, they should live on Menorca but it's the only snake I haven't found so far on the Balearics. Love to visit Mallorca as well some day.

14/5/2009 20h05 - (CET)

Daniel Escoriza



Hi Carl no, no.. April is nice season for the tortoises and muletensis, but the graecas are really very scarce in Majorca. Nice falseie.

12/5/2009 19h26 - (CET)

Carl Corbidge



Thanks for the comments Ilian, Matt, Jeroen. I think i was quite lucky with the Macrotodon, i didn't spend too much time looking for spur thighed because of the weather, but i think i could have searched all week and not seen one. Glad you had a good day with the adders Matt. Thanks for the info Jeroen ,i think i may have been too early in the season, typically i thought i heard an Alytes calling and when

i went over to the area it went quiet and wasn't heard again, really frustrating.

12/5/2009 13h21 - (CET)

Jeroen Speybroeck



Dear Carl, I can't remember whether I did or did not give you Alytes details on time. If not, I'm sorry!!! Nice Macroprotodon! We only found a single DOR (July...) that also had this yellow upperlip.

10/5/2009 17h40 - (CET)

Matt Wilson



What a nice report! Well done Carl! Two very good finds in particular: Macroprotodon and Emys, it does not surprise me that you couldn't find any Testudo graeca, they now highly endangered in W-Mallorca.

10/5/2009 12h04 - (CET)

Ilian Velikov



Great photography and amazing wall lizards! Good job!:)

10/5/2009 11h55 - (CET)