

Birds of the Mar Menor

I have chosen this week, to write about two of the most flamboyant and less common birds that can be seen around the Mar Menor: the Hoopoe and the Bee-eater. Both birds have very striking features and neither is normally seen in the UK.

These are not water birds; however both are seen in the area of the Mar Menor and further inland. I recently spotted a Hoopoe in Mar de Cristal and Bee-eaters have often been seen in Playa Paraiso.

Hoopoes are resident in both N. Africa and S. Spain. They are very hard to spot when they are on the ground, as they blend with the colour of the earth, however when they fly, they can easily be seen, as they have a vivid black & white markings on their wings.



The preferred habitat for Hoopoe is open cultivated ground, with short grass or bare earth. They forage around on the ground for insects, grubs and worms. They are rather slow in flight and somewhat erratic in their movement, which is why they are quite easy to spot.

The Hoopoe's crest is normally down and is only raised (as in the photo) when a bird is trying to draw attention to itself. They normally nest in a hole in a tree or wall. Their nests smell strongly of faeces to keep away predators!

Bee-eaters have the most fantastic colouring, though until the sunlight hits them you could mistake one for a starling. They are often seen in large flocks sitting on telephone wires and prefer open countryside. They feed on insects, which they catch while flying and as you would expect from their name, they eat bees. They remove the sting from the bee by repeatedly hitting it against a rock or stone and can get through 250 bees a day.

Bee-eaters nest in sandy banks specifically by rivers and make a tunnel in which they lay their eggs.

I hope you manage to get out and see these birds. Keep your eyes open, especially when you are out in the countryside and you may be lucky. Some good places to try would be the Calblanque National Park and the open countryside surrounding El Carmoli.



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