

It can be chaos in the world of the breeding bird



A little Grebe with a demanding youngster. PHOTO: NEVILLE JAMES-DAVIES

Wild Mallorca

Demanding youngsters



By Neville James-Davies

Wherever you go on Mallorca from around now until at least August, you will be seeing the first of the young birds, hatched and raring to go. The noise and fights over territories by the adults will have settled down, squabbles put aside, the best nesting spots taken, some by force, and now a time of parents being kept busy by feeding their young until they are independent and able to feed and fend for themselves. From the humble **House Sparrow** to the majestic **Greater Flamingo**, the fields, marshes, mountains and rivers will have young birds everywhere. Adult males will already have been calling at dawn, re-establishing their territory and hoping to attract a mate, disputes over good nesting sites

and habitat will have taken place with some disputes resulting in death, chases would have ensued and even nest boxes taken over even though a bird is already building a nest inside, it can be chaos in the world of the breeding bird. But when all this settles down, the serious stuff begins, finding food for the young, which can range from feeding two chicks (for example the **Booted Eagle**) or up to ten (in the case of the **Shelduck**). Even the small birds have a busy time ahead. Take the resident **Blue** or **Great Tit** for example, they need to find anything up to a few thousand caterpillars a day to feed their hungry brood.

The hard work is worth it, not just for the parents who have managed to raise a successful brood (and sometimes a second or even third brood if food has been plentiful), but also for the bird watcher and nature lover who will get to see a variety of young birds everywhere. And this is a good time to test your ID skills too and learn the different plumages in the juveniles, especially in the waders and ducks, then see how their colours change as they get older. And if you want a feel-good moment, pop into a bird hide some-

where and watch the ducklings. Nothing looks more cuter than ducklings following mum as she slowly moves across the water. In particular, the black and white balls of fluff of the **Shelduck**, or yellow ducklings of the Mallard are a gorgeous sight, as are the young of the **Black-winged Stilts** and **Avocets**, already showing the long legs and distinctive shapes of the parents. Sometimes a real comical sight will await the lucky observer – a **Great Crested Grebe** with the young having a piggy-back across the water.

But its not all cuteness, the parents work incredibly hard and put up with constant squawking and nagging from the young for food. And of course there are predators to watch out for too, and it is always a disheartening time when a duckling falls prey to a **Grey Heron**, or a juvenile **House Martin** gets plucked out of the sky by a **Hobby**. As sad as it is this is a part of the life of a bird, but not something we see a lot of. What we do see a lot of fortunately are the happy moments with the ducklings feeding, the youngsters calling and squabbling, the parents enjoying a bathe to freshen up their feathers and new life everywhere.



by Aniol Esteban

THE protection and improvement of the Balearic Sea is a shared responsibility. In an economy like ours, to achieve this, besides the support of fishers and sailors, we need the commitment of the tourist industry. Without that, it will be very difficult to achieve the shared objective of making the Balearic Islands a benchmark in marine conservation.

This involvement of the tourism sector must be done on at least three levels. First, by working to reduce the impact on a business scale. Secondly, by investing in the improvement of the natural environment on which the tourist activity depends (and not just on its property, garden, or piece of beach). Thirdly, and very importantly, by using its strength and influence it must take giant steps in marine conservation instead of just dragging its feet.

The fact is that we are still a long way away from a tourism sector that is fully involved in the care and custody of the Balearic Sea. Although tourism benefits enormously from a sea and coastline in good condition, it has so far, on its own initiative, invested very little in their care and conservation; it has not put its full strength and influence into this cause.

Even so, we have seen signs of improvement on all three fronts. Most of the tourism sector is already working to reduce its impact, implementing measures to reduce water consumption, carbon emissions or waste generation, or to buy local. The ecological footprint is entering the balance sheet and will do so even more after the entry into force of the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

In recent years we have also started to see some remarkable actions by companies in the sector getting involved in marine conservation. Fundatur, the RIU Hotel Group, and the TUI Care Foundation have made significant financial contributions to the conservation of the Balearic Sea, the later with €500,000. Marilles Foundation redistributes these donations in their entirety to local

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Quality (and quantity) tourism

projects and entities, with a greater probability of impact. Among many other activities, they have allowed us to advance plans to restore shallow bays, improve and extend marine protected areas, and co-produce with IB3 the unique series *Arxipèlag Blau*.

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It is also worth highlighting the broad support that hotel companies and the tourism sector have given to the Balearic Blue Deal. It is to be celebrated that a little more than a year ago a large part of the tourism industry in the Balearic Islands came out publicly in favour of this initiative, calling for more political action and more funding for the protection of the Balearic Sea. We hope that this is the first of many steps that will give visibility to the tourism industry's commitment to the marine

conservation of these islands and their natural heritage. But, as the Balearic Blue Deal itself recognises, we cannot talk about marine conservation and quality tourism without mentioning a key variable: quantity. We must talk about the volume of tourists visiting our islands and the growing demographic pressure.

If we do not work on quantity, we will not be able to have quality tourism or a well-conserved sea. This truism has been a source of controversy over the last few decades. Now, after the welcome, albeit surprising announcement by President Prohens acknowledging that the Balearics need to reduce the number of tourists, we seem to be entering a new context.

After years of hearing that we need to grow in value and not in volume, we hope that we can finally move from words to action. While we look for the best ways to reduce the population pressure on the Islands, now more than ever the tourism sector and the Balearic government need to reinforce and demonstrate their commitment to the protection and regeneration of the Balearic Sea.