

Alpine Accentor Report 2024 – 2025

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1. Introduction

The Alpine Accentor (*Prunella collaris*) is a small passerine bird belonging to the family Prunellidae (Svensson et al., 2023; Figure 1). It inhabits mountainous regions across Europe, North Africa, and parts of Asia (Langmore et al., 1996; Lukač et al., 2016; Svensson et al., 2023). In Europe, its range includes major mountain ranges such as the Pyrenees, Alps, Tatra, Dinarides, and Carpathians (Lukač et al., 2016).

Alpine Accentors are social birds, often observed in small groups throughout the year, including during the breeding season. Globally, the species is listed as “Least Concern” on the IUCN Red List, with an estimated population of 2,030,000–3,709,000 individuals (BirdLife International, 2025). In Europe, population estimates range from 203,000 to 379,000 individuals. At a regional scale, Alpine Accentors are also considered of Least Concern in Catalonia, with an estimated 280 to 750 breeding pairs (SIOC, 2025). In Montseny Natural Park in northeastern Catalonia, Alpine Accentors are regularly observed during the winter, particularly at high elevations such as Turó de l’Home and Les Agudes, where rocky terrain and sparse vegetation provide suitable habitat (Ornitho.cat, 2025).



Figure 1: Alpine Accentor observed on the peak of Les Agudes.

Alpine accentors are either resident or altitudinal migrants, moving from higher to lower altitudes depending on the season (BirdLife International 2025). They typically migrate short distances to avoid unfavourable conditions and snow cover (Lukač et al. 2016). During autumn migration, from late September to November, they usually descend to lower altitudes and may even move closer to human settlements in search of food (Lukač et al. 2016; BirdLife International 2025). Their primary food sources are insects, but they also consume spiders, earthworms, small snails, and occasionally vegetable matter (BirdLife International 2025). Their diet varies seasonally: in spring and summer, they primarily feed on insects, while in autumn and winter, they consume grass and seeds (Janiga & Novotná 2006). Alpine accentors forage in groups and exhibit competitive feeding behaviour due to their dominance hierarchies (Janiga and Novotná 2006).

The primary aims of this project were to monitor the number of Alpine Accentors found in Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes, track how many are ringed, and observe how many return in subsequent years. Monitoring their numbers helps us understand how many individuals overwinter in the area while ringing them allows us to determine if the same individuals return annually. Additionally, their feeding behaviour was studied by counting the number of times they pecked at various food sources. This helps identify their primary feeding locations and potential food sources during winter. Together, these data provide vital insights into the habitat quality and suitability of these birds.

2. Method

2.1 Timeframe

The project was conducted during the winter season, from mid-November 2024 to mid-February 2025. This timeframe was chosen because Alpine Accentors are present in Montseny Natural Park during this period, as they descend from higher altitudes in the Pyrenees to lower altitudes in Montseny.

2.2 Site

The Alpine Accentors were observed at two mountain peaks in Montseny Natural Park: Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes. These peaks were selected because Alpine Accentors are frequently observed in these areas, and the sites are relatively accessible. Matagalls, another peak in the park, was excluded from this study due to accessibility issues noted in a previous project conducted during 2023-2024.

Both Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes feature open spaces with low-lying plants, shrubs, and wide stretches of rocky terrain. The winter temperatures in Montseny Natural Park are variable, ranging from 13°C to 4°C in November and 11°C to 1°C in February (meteoblue). Additionally, strong winds are common at these peaks during the winter months. These mountain peaks are also popular hiking destinations, with numerous trails attracting many hikers.

2.3 Data collection

Fieldwork was ideally conducted twice a week. However, adverse weather conditions occasionally limited observations to once a week. Data collection focused on:

2.3.1 Population monitoring

The total number of Alpine Accentors observed at Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes was recorded to determine the distribution of individuals between the two peaks. Whenever possible, ringed individuals were identified, recorded, and photographed.

2.3.2 Feeding behaviour

Feeding behaviour was observed by counting the number of times an individual pecked at specific substrates or food sources, such as plants (including grass and shrubs), rock (including gravel), soil, insects (including worms), faeces (goat and sheep), seed and human food (e.g. leftovers or litter from hikers) (Figure 2).



Figure 2: alpine accentor pecking at grass

2.3.3 Additional vagrant bird observations

While searching for Alpine Accentors, sightings of vagrant bird species such as snowfinches, snow buntings, ring ouzels, fieldfares, and redwings are also recorded on Ornitho.cat.

2.4 Observation procedure

An individual Alpine Accentor within a group was selected for observation, and its behaviour was recorded over a 5-minute period. During this time, the number of pecks and the specific substrate being pecked (e.g., plants, rocks, soil) were noted using binoculars. The observation was ended early if the individual flew away or moved out of sight before the 5-minute period ended. Once the 5-minute observation period was completed or the individual left the area, a new individual was selected for observation. This process was repeated continuously within the group until either the group moved out of sight or a total of 30 minutes of observations had been completed. The procedure was then repeated with another group of Alpine Accentors when found.

3. Results

3.1. Population

During the study period, a total of 19 visits were conducted at Turó de l'Home and 15 visits at Les Agudes (Table 1). February had the lowest number of visits to Les Agudes due to its inaccessibility caused by heavy snowfall. The highest total number of Alpine Accentors was

recorded in February, with 81 individuals observed at Turó de l'Home, while for Les Agudes the highest total number of accentors was recorded in December with 16 individuals (Table 1). The mean number of accentors per visit was higher at Turó de l'Home, with 12 individuals per visit, compared to a mean of 2 individuals per visit at Les Agudes (Table 1).

Table 1: the total number of visits, total number of alpine accentors and mean number of alpine accentors in Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes from November 2024 till February 2025.

Month	Total number of visits		Total number of alpine accentors		Mean number of alpine accentors	
	Turó de l'Home	Les Agudes	Turó de l'Home	Les Agudes	Turó de l'Home	Les Agudes
November	5	5	40	13	8	3
December	3	3	54	16	18	5
January	4	4	43	2	11	1
February	7	3	81	4	12	1
Total	19	15	218	35	12	2

The highest mean number of Alpine Accentors was observed in Turó de l'Home compared to Les Agudes for both periods, 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 (Figure 2). The 2024-2025 period showed a higher mean number of accentors in both locations compared to 2023-2024. However, in February, Les Agudes recorded a higher mean in the 2023-2024 period. The month with the highest mean number of accentors for both locations was December in both periods. The lowest mean was recorded in January for both Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes in 2023-2024. In 2024-2025, the lowest mean occurred in November for Turó de l'Home and in January and February for Les Agudes.

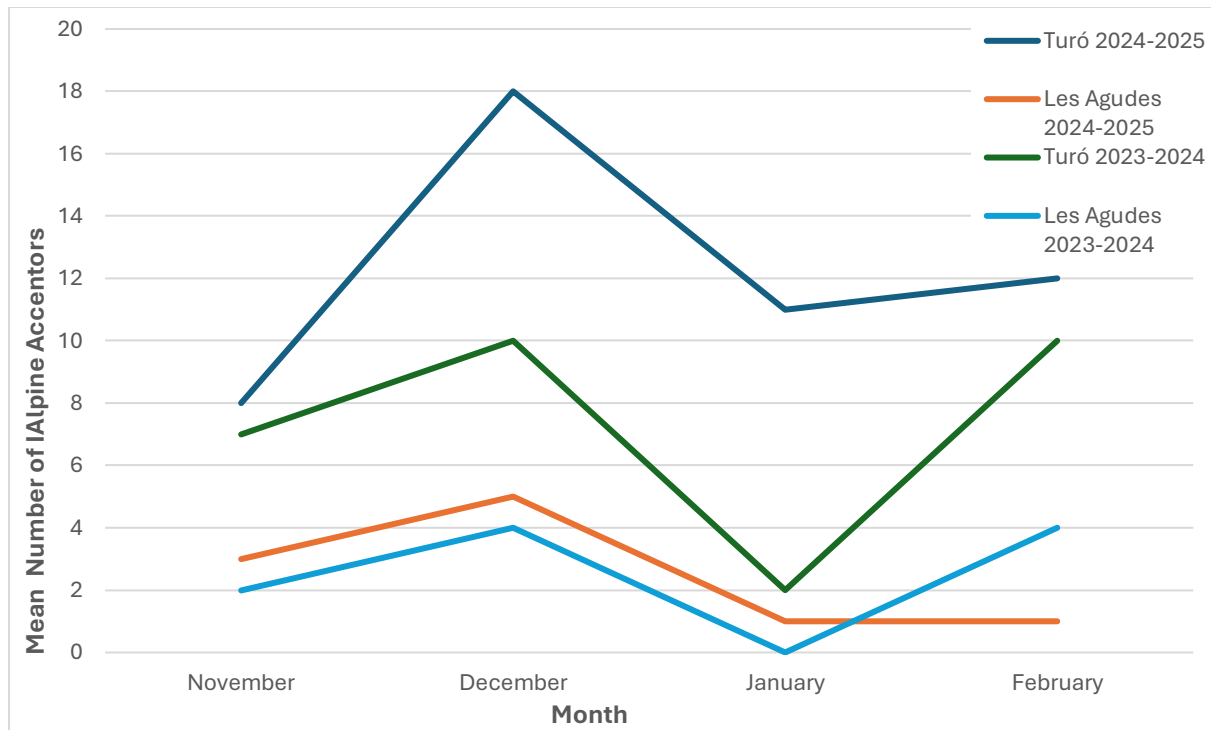


Figure 3: Mean number of alpine accentors observed each month (November, December, January and February) in Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes during the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 periods.

The month with the highest number of Alpine Accentors observed was December for both Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes (Figure 3). February showed the highest variability in the number of Alpine Accentors observed in Turó de l'Home. In Les Agudes, accentors were only observed once in February, which is why there is only a single point on the graph. January showed the lowest variability in Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes, with a similar number of Alpine Accentors observed during each visit.

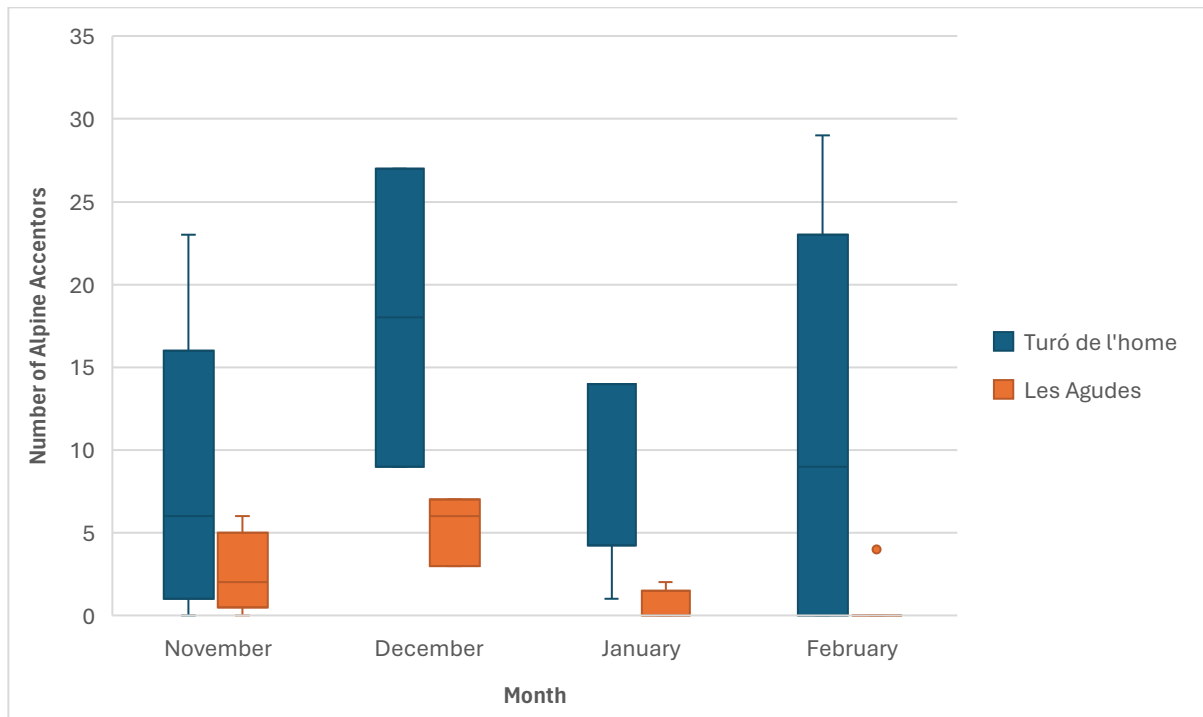


Figure 4: Total number of alpine accentors observed each month (November, December, January and February) in Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes during the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 periods.

Overall, more Alpine Accentors were observed at Turó de l'Home compared to Les Agudes in 2024-2025 (Figure 4). Additionally, Turó de l'Home exhibited greater variation in the number of Alpine Accentors observed, while Les Agudes showed less variation.

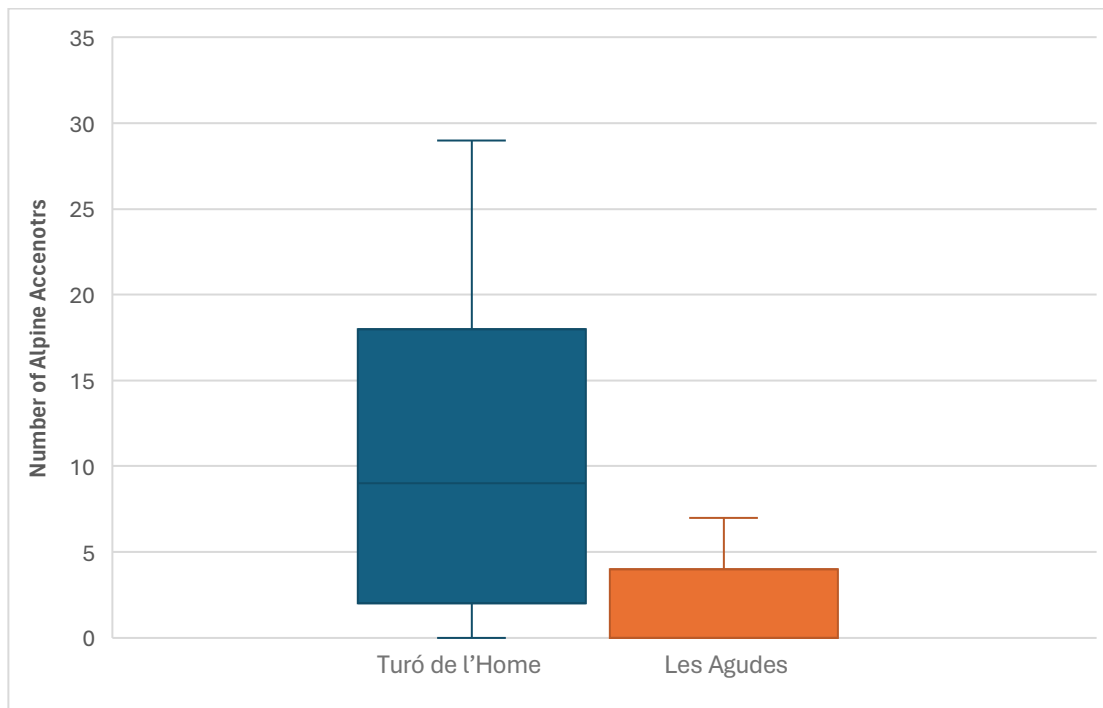


Figure 5: Total number of alpine accentors observed in Turó d l'Home and Les Agudes during 2024-2025 period.

Between November 14th, 2024, and February 27th, 2025, volunteers observed a previously ringed individual, 06J, twice, on November 20th, 2024, and February 14th, 2025. This individual was ringed in 2019 and has been returning for five years. No Alpine Accentors were ringed during this period.



Figure 6: Alpine Accentor with ring number 06J observed on November 20th 2024 and February 14th 2025.

3.2. Feeding behaviour

The highest mean number of pecks per minute observed at both Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes occurred in December, while the lowest was recorded in February (Figure 7). Turó de l'Home showed a higher mean number of pecks per minute in January and February, whereas Les Agudes had higher means in November and December. Turó de l'Home also exhibited greater variation in the types of food sources pecked by Alpine Accentors compared to Les Agudes. In Les Agudes, the birds were mostly observed pecking at plants, soil, and rock, while at Turó de l'Home, at least one observation included every food source. At both sites, the highest number of pecks was recorded on plants.

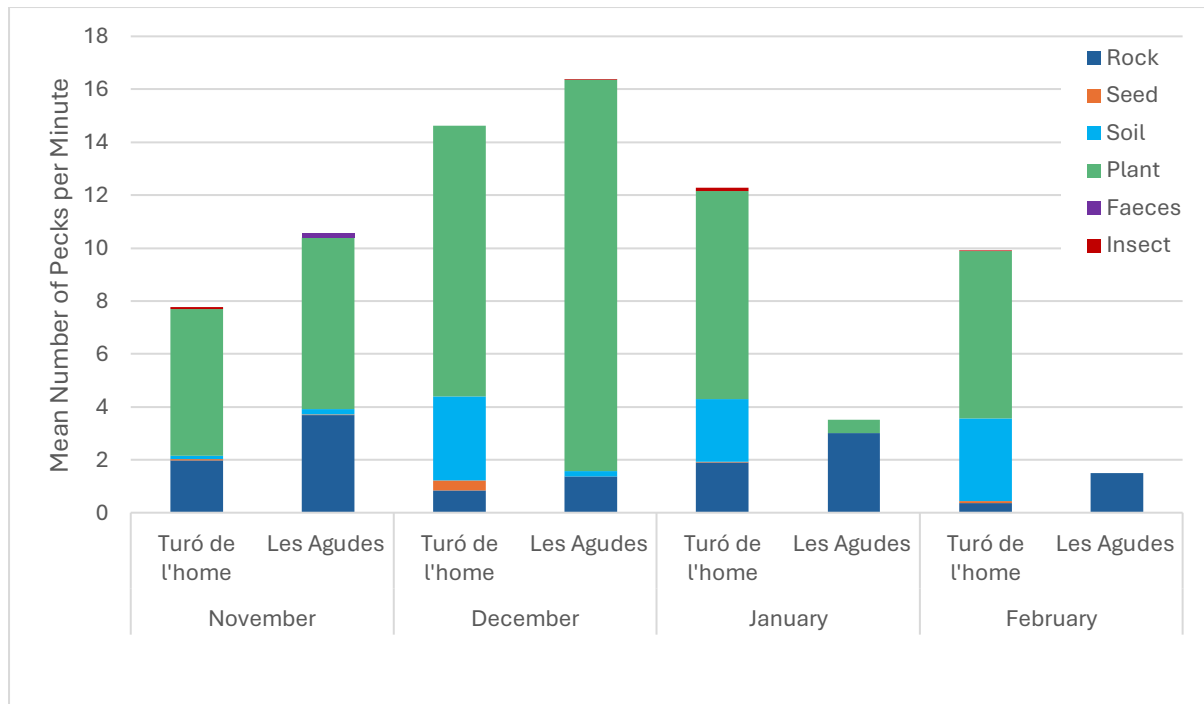


Figure 7: mean number of pecks per minute at different food sources (insect, faeces, plant, soil, seed and rock) at Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes in November, December, January and February.

3.3. Vagrant observation

Between November 2024 and February 2025, only two vagrant bird species were observed: Ring Ouzels (Figure 8) and Redwings. Three Ring Ouzels were recorded on February 25th, 2025. On December 20th, volunteers reported five Redwings, although no photographs were taken. Additional sightings of Ring Ouzels were reported on Ornitho.cat, including 5–10 individuals on November 22nd, one on November 23rd, one on January 15th, and one on February 4th. Although volunteers did not observe any Fieldfares during this period, other observers recorded two individuals on both November 22nd and 28th, 2024.



Figure 8: Ring ouzel observed on 25th of March 2025.

4. Discussion

The data suggest that Turó de l'Home had the highest number of Alpine Accentor observations, and overall, more individuals were recorded in 2024–2025 compared to the previous year. December 2024 had the highest number of pecks per minute, while February 2025 had the lowest, likely influenced by differences in weather and food foraging. Feeding observations revealed that plants were the most frequently pecked food source.

This year, one of the key improvements was that more visits were carried out, addressing last year's recommendation for increased visits. Additionally, conducting 5-minute observation intervals to record what the Alpine Accentors were pecking at made the process less tiring than observing them continuously for 30 minutes. These shorter sessions, allowed for short breaks to rest the eyes and also offered a broader picture of the group's feeding behaviour, rather than focusing on a single individual. Finding the birds was relatively easy, as they have distinct calls and, based on previous years, we already knew their preferred locations. Another positive aspect was prioritising safety, by avoiding fieldwork during periods of heavy snow or strong winds.

The biggest challenge this year was collecting large amounts of data. There were occasions when we couldn't find any birds, or the weather conditions were too poor to go out. In some cases, we started observing a group, but they flew away before we could finish, making data

collection difficult. This highlights the importance of maximizing field visits whenever possible.

6. References

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