

Additional BIRD REPORT by THERESA LEVERTON

This outing was primarily organised by Leslie as an opportunity to see and appreciate in more detail the wonderful Springtime wildflower spectacle of this beautiful stretch of coastline and for just that alone this was a truly memorable trip. However, for those amongst us who can't resist looking at everything that moves too, in particular the birds, the day proved to be a very productive one. Jill and I travelled together to meet up with Leslie and the rest of our party at Bolonia and we set off in lovely warm early morning sunshine, however our spirits sank a little as approaching Tarifa we could see we were about to run into grey clouds. We turned off the main road towards Bolonia and perked up again when we were greeted by a gorgeous little group of Bee-eaters that were perching on and flying between the roadside fence and overhead cables very close to the road. We stopped to watch them of course and within a few minutes also had close views of Crested Larks, Corn Buntings, Sardinian Warbler and a small group of Cattle Egrets; from amongst the dense stems of the long grass the zitting of numerous Fan-tailed Warblers could be heard from spots every few metres along, but none of them appeared in view.



We drove on to our destination where we met up with Leslie and our fellow walkers in the designated car park, where Barn Swallows and House Martins were landing to collect mud. We had coffee then returned to our cars to drive the short distance to the end of the beach road and parked there, apparently there is a small charge in the 'season', but not today. Next to where we parked the car I spotted two huge Oil Beetles on a thistle plant, someone then found a Rhinoceros Beetle in a muddy puddle and a Cream-spot Tiger moth on the ground close by. We walked along the back of the beach for a while, where Jill found diving Gannets out at sea and flying Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls. We then cut inland a little to follow a path



alongside some rough pastureland where Swallows were skimming along just centimeters above the ground, paying almost no heed to us being in their way. A number of Cattle Egrets, the males in full breeding plumage now, were living up to their name and stalking about in amongst the grazing cattle. Corn Buntings were singing from the wire boundary fences spaced at frequent intervals along their length. The path passed by a muddy pool of water and looking down into it we could clearly see the biggest tadpoles most of us had ever seen as they came up for air; a snake was swimming around at the far end of the pool too, but we weren't able to see it clearly enough to identify and Pond Skaters straddled the water's surface.

The pathway curved around again and headed through scrubby shrubbery back towards the beach; here there were several pairs of Stonechats and we had some lovely close views, particularly of the colourful little males as they perched, typically, on top of the low bushes. Small flocks of Goldfinches passing by were another frequent sight throughout the day; it is likely that they had just made the crossing back from Africa.

As the morning progressed the sun began to burn off the cloud and it gradually got warmer; the sun brought out the insects and in the flowery meadowland there were soon Spanish Festeos, Clouded Yellow and Painted

Lady butterflies flying and also the more unusual Provencal Hairstreaks. There were dozens of Chafers and also a lot of quite large beetles flying around in a very noisy, bumbling kind of way then crash landing on flowers or the ground.

On the beach were Turnstones, a busy little flock of Sanderlings, a few Kentish Plovers and a pair of Terns that flew by fast and close to the sea edge. They dived in several times from a good height, hardly slowing down at all; they were some distance away, travelling fast and we had no telescope so initially assumed them to be Sandwich Terns but it was tricky to make out if there was yellow on the tips of their bills and any crest was flattened, so it was suggested they may rather have been Gull-billed Terns, but Sandwich is most likely. A Little Egret was much easier to identify as it flew by in the opposite direction to the Terns and there was no mistaking the distinctive fruity chirruping of several small flocks of Bee-eaters that flew over our heads, clearly heralding their return from across the sea and for me, announcing the imminent onset of the summer.



We had reached an area at the back of the beach which was well-covered with shrubbery but with open, sandy areas in between. Here we heard Blackbirds, were scolded several times by Sardinian Warblers, saw more Stonechats and had our first glimpse of Whitethroats. A lovely little group of Linnets flew down onto the ground ahead of us and a lone Kentish Plover pecked around close by for several minutes. We also saw Black Kites and a Short-toed Eagle in the distance and in the far distance inland, Griffon Vultures. We deliberately looked for Woodchat Shrikes and Wheatears here too as this was perfect habitat for both species

and eventually did have several sightings of them, albeit from a distance. We also heard a Nightingale singing from amongst the bushes, but again from a distance away.



The pathway back took us back past the other end of the rough, fenced pastureland that we had passed at the beginning of our walk, and this relatively small field, complete with cattle turned out to be a real bird species hot-spot. As we approached the back fence there were two Woodchat Shrikes and Northern Wheatears perched upon it and on the side furthest from us there were Whitethroats alternating between the fence and bushes close by. In the field itself there was a pair of Yellow Wagtails, exactly where they 'should' be – at the feet of the cattle - and in the long grass around the field edge was a pair of Subalpine Warblers, the male seeming somehow to have lost most of his tail feathers, and what sounded like dozens of Fan-tailed Warblers all zitting at once. Corn Buntings also favoured the

fence as well as the tops of nearby shrubs to sing from and we watched a charming Stonechat family with three young ones who were clearly keeping their parents busy with their constant demands for food.

Other things that took our interest along this part of the path were a little black and white moth, more Provencal Hairstreak butterflies and a dried-out Swordfish beak that I would have assumed was a couple of pieces of wood had it not been pointed out.





By far the strangest sight here though was the completely surreal view of a herd of long-horned cattle sitting on the beach gazing out to sea, with an air of this being perfectly normal and 'don't all cows do this then?!'

The cow spectacle almost detracted from our next bird sighting; just past the cattle field the path fords a shallow stream and looking upstream to where



the water arrives at the beach a Common Sandpiper was probing amongst the small rocks, not a common sight for us at all but quite

ordinary after the sunbathing bovines! Almost back at the car park now, our final sightings were of, Collared Doves, Spotless Starlings, House Sparrows, Serins, a single Greenfinch and Red-rumped Swallows. In the car park a pair of Crested Larks and a party of House Sparrows were thoroughly enjoying dust baths and another Corn Bunting sang from the overhead cables.



After a very pleasant meal and some interesting conversation in the restaurant we had taken coffee in earlier on, we said our goodbyes and headed back homewards. Jill and I stopped once along the way back to the main road to watch a Short-toed Eagle that was hovering very low over a field very close to the road, clearly with something in its sights. We then carried on and a little further on saw our only Kestrels of the day. Past Tarifa we stopped again, as we usually do when in this area, at the 'Mirador' that overlooks the Strait of Gibraltar to the Moroccan coast. We have had some great views of migrating raptors from here, depending on the season of course, that were either flying towards Spain or waiting for an opportune moment to leave here. Today there was little sign of movement, although we did see an incoming, fast-flying Sparrowhawk that seemed to have been upset, not surprisingly, by the wind turbines and had



turned to follow the road instead of passing over them. A large flock of low-flying Bee-eaters also chose to follow a similar route.

Our bird checklist for the day included 41 species:

Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Nightingale (heard)	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
Mallard (flying)	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Blackbird (heard)	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Sparrowhawk (Mirador)	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Cuckoo (heard)	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		
Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida thelkae</i>		
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>		
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		



Leslie & co.