

## BOC Evening Walk on Compton Downs, 2nd June 2021

After a hot humid day and some rain in the afternoon, a small group of us met at the top of Churn Road, Compton at 19:00hrs and walked east towards Roden Downs on an overcast evening. We were fortunate to see a Grey Partridge in the field adjacent to our parked cars, a bird not easy to come across nowadays on the Berkshire downs. Our tally for the evening was only 19 species. We saw the expected corvids: Rook, Jackdaw and Crow, and Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers, Skylarks, Chaffinch, Whitethroat and Goldfinches. We managed to pick out a family of Stone Curlews from the Ridgeway path, although the birds were nearly a kilometer away on a "Stone Curlew plot"! Patient scanning through the scope at maximum magnification of x60 was required. Further on, we found another Stone Curlew which was mostly obscured in an overgrown plot. From what we could see of the bird we thought it a juvenile.

Our walk was punctuated by occasional stops to scan and listen, and whilst doing this on Roden Downs we were delighted to hear a Quail singing its characteristic trisyllabic "wet-my-lips" in the field adjacent to the Ridgeway. Another was heard in the field behind us and one much further away in Oxfordshire. Of course, the chances of actually seeing one were nil. Further up the track at the plantation we heard and saw Willow Warbler. Over the years this has been a regular spot for this species, which is less common in the south nowadays. In fact, this bird was in exactly the same tree I photographed it last year.



*Willow Warbler, Jun 2021 © Andy Tomczynski*

*Willow Warbler, Apr 2019 © Andy Tomczynski*

We lingered in the area for some time as dusk fell. We saw some Lapwing on the bare areas of Roden Downs. Then we heard an owl calling, but it was not immediately obvious to us, what species. Then we realized it was a Long-eared owl calling, something I haven't heard before. I am more familiar with the early spring adult hoots or the juvenile "squeaky gates" call of the youngsters at this time of the year. It was probably a female calling. One of our party saw it flying from one wood to another and we managed to pick it up as it mostly glided across the open field in the near darkness. At this point on the Ridgeway, we were hearing Quail, Stone Curlews and Long-eared Owls calling; not an everyday occurrence. Just before we started to make our way-back we picked up an adult Stone Curlew, which must have flown in, at much closer range on a bare chalk area and had good scope views albeit in low light conditions. It was a bit of a trudge back to the cars, with a few bats to accompany us.

Although we hadn't seen so many species, we were satisfied with the birds we did see and hear.

Andy Tomczynski