

Sardinia - May 2004

by Colin Wilson

I went with my wife and another couple to Alghero, a Ryanair destination, for a long weekend. It wasn't a birdwatching trip but who can resist packing the binoculars!

Around Alghero, a nice old town with lots of restaurants and cafes, generally reasonably priced, the birdlife was limited but the surrounding seashore contained Shag and Yellow-legged Gulls. The highlight was the Swifts, hundreds of them and at night they filled the sky with their screaming. The other bird of the town was the Spanish Sparrow, very common everywhere.

Our hotel, the Angedras was ten minutes walk from the town and breakfast on the terrace allowed House Martins and Collared Doves to be added to the list, with more Sparrows! From our balcony, Serin was heard continuously and Greenfinch. Spotless Starlings were also observed here.

The town is small and only occupied us for a day so we hired a car and headed for Capo Caccia, a headland with a lighthouse and Neptune's caves, a tourist attraction beneath it. A brief stop to run down the 653 steps to the caves and back up, and then take oxygen for a few minutes was a very productive birding experience! From the steps the views of bird filled cliffs - Yellow-Legged Gulls at close range with lovely photo opportunities of them amongst flower strewn ledges, and the sound of Alpine Swifts twittering overhead was enjoyable. Once back on top and recovering a Peregrine flew past with an unfortunate bird in its claws, possibly one of the many Crag Martins feeding around the rocks.

On the hillsides Sardinian Warblers were evident and Linnets in brilliant summer plumage. Most enjoyable was a Blue Rock Thrush enjoying the sunshine and working back and forth giving great views.

We moved on to places North and on route found plenty of Bee-eaters, Kestrels and numerous interesting birds we didn't stop for. Close to Stintino the furthest point North we visited a good marshland area was found but we had no time to stop and a Common tern (probably) was all we could note.

The following morning, leaving wives in bed, we ventured out at 6am and, in somewhat dank conditions found a marshy area between Alghero and the airport. Our list included Cetti's, Nightingale, Zitting Cisticola, Little Egret, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Stonechat.

After breakfast, we headed South along a beautiful coast road to Bosa. Stopping on the way we saw Buzzard and Griffon's Vulture in good numbers and the whole area was worthy of exploring further. During the afternoon a stop in the hills at Monteleone (see picture) provided more sightings of Blue Rock Thrush and Woodlark. This latter bird seemed to be singing in lots of places in the countryside and was a delight.

All in all I think Sardinia is an island worth exploring further. It is interesting because many of the Field Guides show holes in the bird populations and species like Lesser Whitethroat, Nuthatch, Olivaceous Warbler and Dipper don't appear there at all. Redstart, Whitethroat and Meadow and Tree Pipits only pass through. The habitat in the North looked good and it is quite a substantial island where there are lots of wild areas offering more potential. If you get

the chance, I recommend you go birding there and see what you can find - the island is nice enough even if it you don't find massive rarities.