

BLDT01 - Saturday 22nd Feb 2020 - Minerve & Caunes Minervois

Clear blue skies and glorious sunshine, temps ranging from 6°C to 20°C+

For our first day trip of the spring 2020 season it was a chilly start, but the wall to wall sunshine soon warmed us - and the insects - up.

Serenaded by a Serin, a feisty Robin and some Blue tits as we left the car park, we headed down the hill to scan the sides of the gorge above Minerve for Wallcreeper, but saw only Jackdaws and Crag martins and plenty of both.

Carrying on down into the village, nothing much showing until, to everyone's delight we first heard the long squeaky call of a Rock sparrow (quite unlike a House sparrow) posing beautifully on the edge of a roof singing its heart out. Everyone got excellent views and some good photos! Keith's photo below clearly shows the yellow patch on the throat (though you may not see this distinctive feature very often).

From the viewing platform overlooking the river, a Kingfisher was having a bit of an altercation with a Grey wagtail, then a Blue rock thrush kindly perched on the very top of the catapult! Another Rock sparrow put in an appearance on a nearby bush and there were Blue tits flitting around in the trees. As we headed along the path at the bottom of the cliffs to loop back up into the village, the ever closer views of Crag martin and their aerial antics delighted everyone, with several sitting along the cornice of the bridge allowing us excellent views in the scopes.

Along the path, Andy managed to spot an Alpine accentor amongst some Dunnock and a very smart Black redstart posed on a fence for us. With a bit of wishful thinking, we thought we had seen a Spotless starling or three - but they turned out to be of the common variety or as we renamed them - Lesser spotted Marsicano starlings ☐

A welcome pause at the Librairie Paroli* refreshed us before we headed back up the narrow streets for another attempt at finding Wallcreeper on the sides of the gorge - now bathed in glorious sunshine. But sadly to no avail.

Steve, who was unfortunately incapacitated, had in the meantime been waiting for us, and his patience was rewarded with seeing two Ravens.

*Librairie Paroli is a delightful bookshop + café and amazingly is open all year round from after 10h30!







The Cesse river gorge stop, also drew a blank for Wallcreeper but we saw a fine pair of Cirl bunting in a bush and a Stonechat in a vineyard.

On to the lovely site at Notre Dame du Cros for our picnic, where we quickly realised that with the number of families around with small children birdwatching would be unfruitful – otherwise we could have started up the gorge a little way to look for... yes, you guessed – Wallcreeper! On our way back to the cars we did see a soaring Sparrowhawk. So it was on up the hill to the top end of the same gorge, where the task was challenging to say the least!

Searching for a small grey bird on a grey rock face some several hundred metres high and as many wide, posed a serious challenge. But quite amazingly Astrid's eagle eyes picked out a Wallcreeper fussing around in the shadows of a shallow recess in the rock. We managed to follow this individual for several minutes as it worked its way up and down the rock face looking for spiders and insects in the cracks. It flew left and we soon lost it. But as a lifer for

several people in the group, despite being a distant view, it was nonetheless a clear view through the scope, and Keith got a record shot to prove that we saw it!

With that achievement under our belts we walked back down the hill to enjoy the spectacular view south to the snow-clad Canigou and the whole range of white-topped Pyrenees stretching westwards. After seeing a pair of Kestrels attacking a buzzard, a further four Buzzards appeared to the south, seemingly in two pairs, giving us a bit of a display. A Sardinian warbler was flitting around in the garrigue below us - noisily warning of our presence and that of two daredevil young boys who we managed to deter from sliding down a vertical shale bank...

Cleopatra (*Gonepteryx cleopatra*) and Common brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*) as well as Wall brown (*Lasiommata megera*) butterflies were spotted as were a number of non-identified whites and other butterflies all out enjoying the warm sunshine.

We also saw plenty of flowering Mediterranean spurge (*Euphorbia characias*); Dwarf or Crimean iris (*Iris lutescens*), Etruscan Honeysuckle (*Lonicera etrusca*), and quite amazingly a Grey-leaved cistus (*Cistus albidus*) in flower!!! There were also Rush-leaf jonquils (*Narcissus assoanus*) in flower up the hill (seen by Keith and Mandy).



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BLDT01-20 Bird list

English name	Nom français	22/02/20
Black Redstart	Rougequeue noir	x
Blue Rock Thrush	Monticole merle-bleu	x
Cirl Bunting	Bruant zizi	x
Common Blackbird	Merle noir	x
Common Buzzard	Buse variable	x
Common Chiffchaff	Pouillot véloce	x
Common Firecrest	Roitelet à triple bandeau	x
Common Kestrel	Faucon crécerelle	x
Common Kingfisher	Martin-pêcheur d'Europe	x
Common Starling	Étourneau sansonnet	x
Duncock	Accenteur mouchet	x
Eurasian Blackcap	Fauvette à tête noire	x
Eurasian Blue Tit	Mésange bleue	x
Eurasian Collared Dove	Tourterelle turque	x
Eurasian Crag Martin	Hirondelle de rochers	x
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Épervier d'Europe	x
European Goldfinch	Chardonneret élégant	x
European Robin	Rougegorge familier	x
European Serin	Serin cini	x
European Stonechat	Tarier pâtre	x
Great Tit	Mésange charbonnière	x
Grey Wagtail	Bergeronnette des ruisseaux	x
House Sparrow	Moineau domestique	x
Rock Sparrow	Moineau souldie	x
Sardinian Warbler	Fauvette mélanocéphale	x
Wallcreeper	Tichodrome échelette	x
Western Jackdaw	Choucas des tours	x
White Wagtail	Bergeronnette grise	x
Woodlark	Alouette lulu	x