

BLDT01-23 Day trip Minervois – Hérault (34) 24th February 2023

Guide of the day: Sébastien Roques (with Philippa Benson for logistics)

8 Participants: Ian, Nigel, Steve, Alex & Lizzie, Megan & Chris, Mark

Weather conditions: A cold grey start improved into sunshine Temps: 4° - 12°C

Highlights of the day: 2 excellent and prolonged views of Wallcreeper – both preening!

Itinerary and birding spots of the day

We started out from the top carpark at Minerve and made our way down the road into the village. Our first stop overlooking the Briant gorge offers good views towards plenty of rock face, but despite plenty of eyes to scan, no Wallcreeper were seen. We did however see a number of Jackdaws (flying around noisily all morning), quite a few Crag martins and a Raven collecting nesting material.

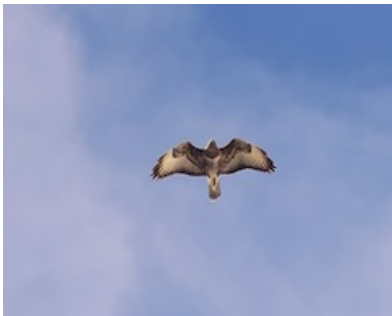


Gorges du Briant – Minerve ©PBenson

On down into the village where Chris managed to get a sneaky photo of an Alpine accentor on a wall while we were all looking elsewhere! Down the steps and along the newly opened path that continues to overlook the Briant, but water levels in the Briant and the Cesse rivers were



Crag martin ©SROques



Common buzzard ©NWillkinson

disturbingly low – so no Dipper, Kingfisher or Grey wagtail today. We did however, see a Peregrine falcon and a Common buzzard.

Walk back up into the village – where to our great disappointment the Paroli the café/bookshop that is open all year round... had a sign in the window announcing a “fermeture exceptionnelle”!



As we headed back up the road towards the carpark, a House martin was spotted flying over – a pleasant surprise! Of course, we stopped for a last look down into the Briant gorge, and last looks are often a good idea! Just when we were about to give up, Steve spotted something creeping on a rock... and yes, it was a beautiful Wallcreeper! Great excitement and this particularly fine individual gave us extended views as it sat in the sun and preened! Everyone got very good, if distant views, through the scope and in our bins. We enjoyed watching it for a good 15 minutes, before it disappeared around the back of a buttress, as they do!

On to Aire des Gorges de la Cesse for our picnic and a quick walk along a vineyard for a look down into the Cesse gorge – but no luck with Blue rock thrush.

Now to one of our favourite Wallcreeper spots just outside Caunes Minervois. A beautiful site surrounded by vertical rock faces, much appreciated by climbers too... But today we were lucky and there were no humanoid wall creepers at the entrance to the gorge... where after a good while scanning both sides of a very steep gorge we picked up our second Wallcreeper of the day!



Wallcreeper ©NWilkinson

Wallcreeper ©SROques

It too was preening and we all got excellent views in the scope. Then it caught a very large flying insect (we think a moth), which it took quite a while to kill and then eat! Quite a spectacular scene, and one we all felt quite privileged to have witnessed, knowing how hard these furtive birds are to find. As if that wasn't good enough, Ian had seen a darkish bird flitting around at the top of the cliffs above the Wallcreeper and finally it decided to show itself... at last a beautiful male Blue rock thrush, which eventually came right out onto the top of the rock, and we all got excellent views of this elegant bird in the sunshine.



Blue rock thrush © NWilkinson



Common kestrel © NWilkinson

We heard Green woodpecker (which may have been an Iberian or a northern Green or even a hybrid – as we didn't actually see it). Out of the sun it was quite chilly so we wrapped the day up at about 16h.

All in all, a great start to the 2023 season!

See below for the bird list.

Bird List 25/02/23

Bird List - Birding Languedoc

Common name	French Name	Scientific name
Common buzzard	Buse variable	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Sparrowhawk	Épervier d'Europe	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Kestrel	Faucon crécerelle	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Peregrine falcon	Faucon pèlerin	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Yellow-legged gull	Goéland leucopnée	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Wood pigeon	Pigeon ramier	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Collared dove	Tourterelle turque	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Eurasian/Iberian green wood	Pic Vert / de Sharpe	<i>Picus viridis / sharpei</i>
Woodlark	Alouette lulu	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
Crag martin	Hirondelle de rochers	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
House martin	Hirondelle de fenêtre	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Meadow pipit	Pipit farlouse	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
White wagtail	Bergeronnette grise	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Grey Wagtail	Bergeronnette des ruisseaux	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Wren	Troglodyte mignon	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Dunnock	Accenteur mouchet	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Alpine accentor	Accenteur alpin	<i>Prunella collaris</i>
Robin	Rougegorge familier	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Black redstart	Rougequeue noir	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Blue rock thrush	Monticole bleu	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Song thrush	Grive musicienne	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Blackbird	Merle noir	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Blackcap	Fauvette à tête noire	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Sardinian warbler	Fauvette mélanocéphale	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Chiffchaff	Pouillot véloce	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Great tit	Mésange charbonnière	<i>Parus major</i>
Blue tit	Mésange bleue	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Wallcreeper	Trichodrome échelette	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>
Magpie	Pie bavarde	<i>Pica pica</i>
Jackdaw	Choucas des tours	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Raven	Grand corbeau	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Starling	Etourneau sansonnet	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Golden oriole	Loriot d'Europe	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
House sparrow	Moineau domestique	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Chaffinch	Pinson des arbres	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Linnet	Linotte mélodieuse	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
Goldfinch	Chardonneret élégant	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Greenfinch	Verdier d'Europe	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Serin	Serin cini	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Cirl bunting	Bruant zizi	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>

(H) : species just heard

A total of 40 species were seen or heard.