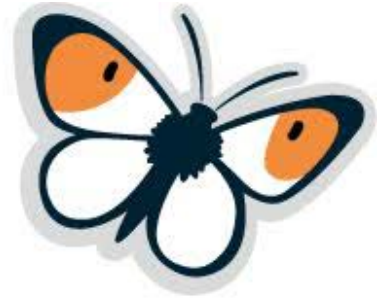




newwildlifetours

journey into the natural world

Cirl Bunting Devon

28th February 2017

We left Highworth on a trip to see the Cirl buntings and wildlife of South Devon in early morning sunshine after a few days of dull rainy weather.

On the way down we saw Buzzards and Red kite. While we were passing through Somerset we saw several Mute swans in the lush wet fields and channels.

As we reached the Devon border there was still snow on the surrounding hills to remind us it was still February.

We arrived at the first reserve at Labrador bay. Despite the really windy weather there was immediately a skylark singing in the sky in front of us and we encouragingly also heard a male Cirl Bunting singing, with its call similar to a yellowhammer.



The arable fields surrounding the reserve are managed for the birds and there was a nice flock of about 40 linnets circling along the field edges.

A Dunnock could be heard singing in the hedges as we walked to the more sheltered valley area and we could see a female Cirl bunting.



Robin, Great tit were also calling and easy to see in the bushes.

Out to sea it was all calm and a Gannet flew by.



As we reached the more sheltered area of Gorse there was a lovely male Cirl Bunting singing in the sun on a small Gorse bush. The yellow Gorse flowers looked so lovely in the really bright sunshine. Also on one of their regular spots was a male Stonechat.



There were a few other flowering species out with the Gorse these included Daisy and Red dead nettle.

Jackdaws, a Magpie and two Jays flew around the hedges and small trees surrounding the site and we heard the call of a Goldcrest which allowed us to have good views of this lovely little bird and its golden yellow crest.

We could also hear Song thrush and Blackbird.

The short turf allowed the sun to reach the soil and warm it allowing the early Lesser celandine and the gorgeous dark violet flowers of a group of Sweet violets to flower on the path edge.



The Cirl buntings were still around in good numbers and a male sat singing his heart out on a low gorse bush.



As we walked along the paths a male Chaffinch was seen in the hedge.



Walking further along the cliff path we had an opportunity for some sea watching. We watched a lovely group of about seventy five Common scoter which were just off shore for several minutes. They were diving one by one until there were hardly any at the surface and then they all appeared again so was rather tricky to get a photo of them all on the surface.



We also saw Cormorant, Herring gull and Lesser black backed gull as they flew by.



Rabbits were seen on the short turf and along with the 3 Exmoor ponies they grazed the grass. This is ideal conditions for waxcap fungi. Species of waxcap fungi are currently on the decrease and so it was good to see the yellow caps in the grassland site.



A storm was brewing and as we walked back to the vehicle for lunch we took the time to scan for plants along the edges of the arable fields and saw Dandelion, Field speedwell and Chickweed and Bitter-cress sp.



Just as we reached the vehicle and got in a storm blew through with driving rain and strong winds. In the warm and dry we decided to stop for a welcome hot coffee and some lunch.

We then made our way to the Exe estuary for an afternoon of bird watching at this wonderful site.

From the car park we passed some houses and as we walked to the estuary we saw a Starling.

We reached the estuary and the tide was well out giving wide views of the rich mud flats which were now at their maximum benefit for the feeding birds. Straight away we could see Black-tailed godwit, Shelduck, Redshank and Teal with a calling Curlew. But the most exciting view was of about 100 Avocet busily feeding with feeding on the invertebrates in the mud with their amazing bill.



As we walked along the coastal path there were plenty of Lapwing, Wigeon and a few Moorhen.

We walked up to the estuary viewing platform to look over the mud flats and saw Dunlin and also a nice group of seven grey plover on the far mud flats.

A small group of Goldfinch and Blue tits were in the bushes along the walk to the hide. There were Canada geese and also a lovely male and female Pintail on the shallow pools. Both were continually up ending to feed, showing off the long thin tail feathers.



From the bird hide we saw Black-tailed and Bar-tailed godwit, Shoveller, Tufted duck, Grey wagtail, Coot on the water's edge.



On the nature reserve bird feeders was a lovely showing of a very defensive Nuthatch fighting off a lovely Greenfinch and some House sparrows.

A Stock dove call was heard and also the calls of Rooks and Long tailed tits as we walked to the car for our journey home after a great day in south Devon.

During the trip back we saw Kestrel, Mute swan again and a pheasant.

Michael (copyright NWT Limited)