



WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 25 September, 2010

A Peregrine Falcon's attack is deadly. We first heard its cry, which sent waves of panic among the other birds, many of which scattered in flight. Fast as lighting, the falcon appeared. It struck, and a Woodpigeon fell, dead before it even hit the ground. Excellent technique, perfect execution, but awful planning: instead of falling on dry land, the Woodpigeon ended up in the water, where the falcon could not retrieve it. And now the Peregrine's cries rang out in anger.

Apart from this early morning scene, the day had few other episodes of note, and we were soaked by a persistent rain that lasted until the afternoon. In spite of an apparent lack of birds, we found the first Song Thrush, Chiffchaff, and Stock Dove of the fall .

Only waterfowl were abundant, with hundreds of Teal and the season's first Pintail.

The rain that fell overnight raised water levels by several inches; the waders, whose migration is nearing the end, took this opportunity to leave. Apart from the Lapwings and Snipe – both of which winter here – only a few Ruff and Spotted Redshanks remain.

The fall migration of Ruff started around July 10, although they have never been numerous; a few will linger until October, and may even spend the winter if it is not too cold. The photo of the day is dedicated to them.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 2 October, 2010

The list of birds recorded at La Cassinazza is already quite long, and adding to it is becoming increasingly difficult. It is no surprise then, that today's Grey Plover was greeted with a good deal of enthusiasm: it is the 205th species to be recorded at La Cassinazza. Since this is typically a coastal species, its presence in the middle of the Po Plain is quite unexpected.

Marsh Harriers were today's most visible migrants. They were almost constantly in sight, with up to five birds at once. Today's photo isn't really from today, but it was taken at La Cassinazza. A few migrant Common Buzzards and Sparrowhawks joined the harriers.

The other showy migrant today was not a bird, but a butterfly – the Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* – also heading south at the end of the summer.

The weather was often humid and rainy over the last few weeks, and this has favoured the growth of mushrooms. Along with the usual *Lactarius vellereus* and *Leccinum duriusculum*, which were as abundant as always, there were others that deserve further study.

Finally, we also added a new grasshopper to La Cassinazza's list; it belongs to the genus *Phaneroptera*, but a specific identification will require more time.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 9 October, 2010

This week brought a wave of migrants and lots of Song Thrushes, along with the season's first Penduline Tit, Dunnock, and Hawfinch.

Waterbirds were also interesting today, with many newly-arrived Lapwings, last week's Grey Plover still around, and most of all, a Pectoral Sandpiper. This American wader is the most frequent Nearctic vagrant to Europe, with about 100-200 records each year on this side of the Atlantic. This is now the 3rd record for La Cassinazza, the previous one being just over a year ago. For such a rare species, this is an astonishing total!

The rapid and abundant emergence of mushrooms of all sizes, shapes, and kinds was also notable. Sadly, none of us is an expert in this field, and many are left unidentified.

I've often dedicated the photo of the day to a migratory species about to leave us for the year. Today is the Night Heron's turn: we didn't see any at all, and even if a few are still present, they roost in dense vegetation all day and are only active at night. Most have left for tropical Africa, and we won't see them before March.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 16 October, 2010

As the weather turned colder, our typical wintering birds arrived on schedule: flocks of Siskins, Goldcrests, and Long-tailed Tits, a great many Song Thrushes and Chiffchaffs, and the season's first Wren, Meadow Pipit, and Firecrest.

Even the Moorhens, which are always common, seemed more numerous. Otherwise, waterbird numbers remained similar, with the arrival of a flock of Spotted Redshanks and the surprising sight of three magnificent Ruddy Shelducks. This species is common in captivity, and the birds we see locally are generally deemed escapes from captivity. In this case, however, the birds flew very well, were unringed, and were seen during migration, right after other records of Ruddy Shelducks elsewhere in northern Italy: they may well be wild birds. They probably don't come from Central Asia, their native land, but from one of the many introduced populations that have established themselves in several European countries. In any event, Giorgio did not miss the opportunity for one of his usual great flight shots.

Mushrooms continued to be abundant and I managed to identify *Lactarius controversus*. Very few insects remained active in the cold weather, but a small beetle (*Chrysolina rossia*) was a first record for La Cassinazza.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 23 October, 2010

Today was so dreary and gloomy that it seemed the day had never dawned. Even the colours of the fall foliage were dull. On the other hand, a typically wintery mix of migrant birds rained down on La Cassinazza. There was an astounding number of Long-tailed Tits, in mixed flocks with Chiffchaffs, Goldcrests, and tits, including a few Coal Tits, the year's first. Reed Buntings and Black Redstarts made their first seasonal appearances. There were also many Chaffinches, and the first large flocks of thousands of Woodpigeons. Mallard numbers also increased.

On the other hand, there are very few Snipe or other waders left, apart from a few Ruff and Spotted Redshanks, two species that often attempt to spend the winter. With them was a Greenshank, which will most likely be gone by this time next week. This is a good excuse to dedicate the photo of the day to it, although the photo itself was taken several weeks ago.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 30 October, 2010

The arrival of Woodcock, Brambling, and Fieldfare marks the beginning of the ornithological winter much better than any weather event could. Migration shuffled the deck once again, and turned up different cards this week: the Goldcrests and Long-tailed Tits that were so abundant last Saturday have returned to their normal numbers, while today's commonest birds included Wrens, Reed Buntings, and Chiffchaffs, with migrating Blackbirds much in evidence as well. Thanks to many newly arrived individuals, the number of Lapwings nearly doubled, to about 500. Starlings are still forming an evening roost in the reedbed, but there are only a few thousand of them, a mere shadow of the flock from two months ago. Most have moved to warmer climes. I have owned up to my fondness for Teal on several other occasions: the drakes of this diminutive duck are simply enchanting. They will stay with us for many months, and I will not miss a single chance to photograph them. A break in the clouds in the early afternoon allowed me to snap this image.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 6 November, 2010

The medlars – our real, local medlars (the fruit of *Mespilus germanica*, not the imported medlars one buys in spring) - are finally ripe. As the proverb says, good things take time. And they are delicious: their rare, almost forgotten flavour will long remind me of these early winter days.

Back to our usual topics, the bushes are swarming with Blue Tits and Chiffchaffs, in far greater number than any other passerines, many of which are nevertheless common. New arrivals include Water Pipit, Redwing, and Mistle Thrush (the first record for 2010!) and a nice flock of Fieldfares. It is always nice to see Firecrest, and the Penduline Tits in the reedbed have their own irresistible charm. The number of Lapwings continues to grow, and the only other relevant news regarding waterbirds concerns a nice influx of Gadwalls. The drake Gadwall – with its understated, grey and brown plumage - is not as gaudy as most other ducks. In spite of this, it has an elegance all of its own, but I confess that this photo of mine does not do it full justice.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 13 November, 2010

Today was great fun: we saw lots of everything. Although there were no rarities, all the common wintering birds were present and accounted for: Redwing, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Goldcrest, Firecrest, Hawfinch, Blue Tit, Penduline Tit, Cetti's Warbler, Black Redstart, Siskin, Goldfinch, and Greenfinch all vied for our attention. During the week, the season's first Great Bittern and Hen Harrier put in appearances, and a Tawny Owl started singing at night. A few more Gadwall also arrived; a total of 30 individuals are now present.



A lone Squacco Heron remains, long after all the others left at the end of September. It flies well, and seems neither injured nor ill, but it did not migrate south. The weather has remained mild so far; we'll see how it fares as the winter wears on. Last but not least, a large, perfectly wedge-shaped flock of Sacred Ibis flew over at dusk. The day's fog and rain meant that little light was available for photography, so I am sending a photo that has long been in our archives, waiting

for an occasion to be published. Eurasian Collared Doves depend closely on humans and live close to their homes; for this reason, they are often taken for granted, even in our reports.



WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 20 November, 2010

I wasn't keeping track, but this morning's weather forecast did it for me: this would be the ninth weekend in a row of bad weather. The forecast was spot on, with pouring rain and wretched visibility. Us birdwatchers didn't stand a chance, and so we beat a hasty retreat: today's species total says it all.

The only sighting of note was a large flock of at least 150 thrushes, almost all Fieldfares, with a few scattered Redwings and Song Thrushes. Hawfinches were common as well. Finally, a single Golden Plover stood out amidst a large flock of Lapwings.

Once again, it was impossible to take photos. I'm sending a beautiful image of a running Hare, taken by Giorgio, which had remained in my archives far too long.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 27 November, 2010

Winter is suddenly upon us. After Friday's snowfall came a clear, frosty night and a bright sunny morning. In the afternoon, yet another weather front brought new snow showers.

The cold temperatures caused passerine numbers to drop, except for thrushes, which are now in their hundreds, mostly Fieldfares. Waterbird numbers have held steady, with one notable exception: the number of Teal has now reached a historic high. In spite of the cold, two Spoonbills, a Squacco Heron, and two Spotted Redshanks are lingering at La Cassinazza. We'll see how they fare if these freezing temperatures continue. Equally incongruous for both its location and the time of year was a drake Brazilian Teal (*Amazonetta brasiliensis*), a certain escape from captivity, which has been present for about a month now. Today's photo is dedicated to one of the commonest, yet most ignored of all birds: the House Sparrow, which lives and breeds in the eaves of farm buildings. This may well be the first time it rates a mention in these reports





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 4 December, 2010

Although the rainy night did not bode well, it was a beautiful sunny day after all; it's a shame that there are so few hours of sunlight at this time of year. A large storm of Lapwings, estimated at 1,500, arrived at La Cassinazza, with a few other waders scattered among them: 15 Ruff, a Dunlin, a Golden Plover, and a few Common Snipe. Watching (and hearing) them, in a single shallow impoundment with about 800 Teal – not to mention the Mallards – was a riveting spectacle we felt privileged to witness. There were other arrivals, too, and the numbers of Wigeon and Gadwall – a few dozen of each – are actually rather significant at the regional level. Once again, there was an excellent variety of species on show today; it took Ottavio's keen eye to realize that a lone gull flying high overhead was actually a Common Gull, the first and only record of this species for 2010.

The Roe Deer materializing out of the early morning fog deserve the photo of the day.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 11 December, 2010

The temperature dropped below freezing during the cold, clear night, and most of La Cassinazza's impoundments were frozen, driving away most of the Lapwings and all of the lingering waders and Cattle Egrets. This same cold snap, which seriously affected the countries to our north, also caused an influx of Teal – there are over 1,000 now, probably the highest count ever for La Cassinazza – and Gadwall, which now number 50, quite a significant count for this area. The flock of 150 or more Fieldfares does not seem to be affected by the cold, while the numbers of smaller passerines are decreasing before our very eyes. The only exception is the smallest, most delicate passerine of all: the Goldcrests seem to be quite at ease in spite of the cold. There are still very numerous and frenetically inspect every twig and bush as they search for food. They move restlessly, unpredictably, and quick as lightning: a true test of a photographer's patience and nerves.





WEEKLY REPORTS AUTUMN 2010



Weekly report for 18 December, 2010

With temperatures dropping many degrees below zero, last night must have been quite tough on wildlife. The two Spoonbills seemed particularly affected: the ice gives them no chance to find food, and they spent the day huddled up and motionless in a desperate attempt to save every last ounce of energy. Choosing not to migrate is proving to be a very risky strategy. Several of the Great White Egrets we saw also seemed to be struggling. Waterfowl are faring better, in spite of the limited amount of open water and so are passerines, which are much in evidence and quite approachable. With the cold weather and limited daylight, they are focused exclusively on finding food: eating has surpassed escaping predators as the main survival priority. Only two Lapwings remain, out of 1,500 just two weeks ago. The merciless weather also brought us some new arrivals: yet more Fieldfares, a large flock of Water Pipits, several Stonechats, a Carrion Crow, and a Red Kite, which we had not seen so far in 2010. For today's photo, instead of choosing the usual portrait of a species, I am sending an image of winter.

