



## WEEKLY REPORTS SUMMER 2021



### Weekly Report of 26 June, 2021

Now that the full brunt of the summer heat has arrived, La Cassinazza's shallower impoundments have been drained. This is something we do every out of necessity, but it obviously makes the property much less attractive for waterbirds, and deprives our birdwatching outings of much of their interest. The water will be back once the heat subsides – at the end of August, right as fall migration is taking off – and fun times will return for us birdwatchers.

At this time of year, the landbirds that haunt the woodlands and hedgerows are always the same, and do little to attract our attention – not much fun to be had here, either.

As we wander through La Cassinazza in spite of the heat, we regularly run into a Honey Buzzard excavating wasp and bee nests. It always flies off low through the trees, quickly disappearing from sight. Its presence in late June suggests it is nesting nearby, but during the breeding season Honey Buzzards are very elusive, and discovering their nest is very challenging. And since it is also sensitive to disturbance, I will not be looking for it. Once again, our suspicions of breeding will not be confirmed this year.

Cattle Egrets, on the other hand, are anything but elusive, and in fact can be downright insolent in their boldness.





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### Weekly Report of 03 July, 2021

At this time of year, we can begin taking stock of the breeding season. Judging by the number of juveniles we are seeing, we can assume that Blackbirds, Great Tits, Long-tailed Tits, and Marsh Warblers all had successful breeding seasons. For more elusive species such as the Nightingale, Blackcap, and Cetti's Warbler, breeding success is hard to gauge. After a first successful nesting in a geranium vase on the balcony, the Spotted Flycatcher pair is now incubating a second clutch just underneath the porch. Juvenile Barn Swallows have just barely fledged, and yet their parents are back on the nest, calling and singing to one another. Two naive juvenile Buzzards, which have not yet learned to be wary like the adults, can often be found perched on low branches not too far from their nest.

A sadder fate awaited a juvenile Little Owl that fledged a little too early. In spite of all its cries, it was eventually abandoned by its parents. Yesterday it was hopping around on the ground, but today I found it dead.

Almost all of the Common Tern eggs have hatched, and a few juveniles have already fledged; only one pair is still incubating. Mortality among chicks is high – and in fact, several adults died as well – due to a series of natural causes, but at least predators were not among them. This year, the breeding success of our small colony will be reasonably good.

Two pairs of Bee-eaters continue to be seen at La Cassinazza, but they do not appear to be nesting. I have never observed them carrying food for any young. We may call them summer residents, but sadly not breeders. I realize I devoted the photo of the day to them just a few weeks ago, but this colorful marvel of nature deserves to be celebrated more than once.





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### Weekly Report of 10 July, 2021

I would have wanted to write a report about a boring and uneventful week, with just a handful of interesting insects to add some spice. Dragonflies included the Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*), which is common everywhere except here at La Cassinazza, and the River Clubtail (*Gomphus flavipes*), as rare here as it is everywhere else. Also, a good number of Southern Small Whites (*Pieris manni*), appeared, a white butterflies with black spots like all others in the genus *Pieris*, which makes its identification a veritable headache. I would have wanted to, indeed.

On Thursday, however, violent storms hit La Cassinazza, with gale-force gusts of wind and hailstones the size of lemons, which brought down trees and shredded the vegetation. Wild animals know how to seek shelter from extreme weather, but we still saw several birds with broken wings, and there were likely others that lay dead where we could not see them. At least one of the juvenile White Storks is missing, and the fate of those that already fledged is impossible to know. With great apprehension I went to check our small colony of Common Terns, and I was greatly surprised to find that all of the chicks, including those that hatched just two days before the storm, had incredibly survived. Their infallible instincts must have led them to seek shelter beneath the tiles and pottery fragments we placed on each floating platform for this very purpose. And indeed they all managed to survive the hailstorm.

The same cannot be said for our automobiles...

As I am about to go on holiday, these weekly reports will be on hold until August. I leave you with a photo of another wonderfully colourful marvel of nature: *Chrysis marginata*, a cuckoo wasp that measures but a few millimetres in length.





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### Weekly Report of 24 July, 2021

I had promised you wouldn't hear from me for at least two weeks, I know. And yet, due to a change in plans, here I am again.

An oppressive, sticky heat is plaguing La Cassinazza. The only birds singing at dawn are Blackbirds and Eurasian Collared Doves. Both species nest several times a year, one brood following the next. Other species are only betrayed by their contact calls, with the sole exception of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, which regularly proclaims its territory.

The afternoon is for the cicadas: nothing else is singing or even stirring.

A hint of fall migration has brought us a dozen Wood Sandpipers, a handful of Green Sandpipers, and one or two Greenshanks.

The breeding season is just about over for the Common Terns: they have all fledged save for one last chick. No eggs at all were predated – not by Hooded Crows or any other predator – and a very high percentage of them hatched. Over 50% of the chicks fledged, with a total of 13 juveniles from 11 nests (and we're still waiting on that last chick to fledge). Overall, this is a result we can be very pleased with.



The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, which has been quite vocal in recent days, is a difficult species to photograph. It stays high in the canopy and is only rarely seen low enough to photograph. This photo dates back to the early spring, when there were few leaves to conceal it.



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### Weekly Report of 31 July, 2021

There's not much to say about this week, except for the severe storm early on. The first departures are making our birdwatching outings poorer in species: Nightingales, Common Swifts, Cuckoos, Spotted Flycatchers, and Turtle Doves are nowhere to be seen or heard. We might bump into a few others in the coming weeks, migrants from further north, but the local breeders are gone. Only the Golden Orioles continue to be conspicuously noisy. Even the Mallards – always the most numerous species at La Cassinazza, in their hundreds if not in their thousands – are now down to a few dozen. They are undergoing their annual full moult, which leaves them quite vulnerable, and they seek shelter in out-of-the way places.

Sightings of Wryneck and Red-backed Shrikes could not quite balance out this lack of birds. Both species used to breed at La Cassinazza regularly and would not have been worthy of note. Now their populations have fallen dramatically, and at best we can hope for a migrant or two, and not every year.

The best photo to go along with such a dull report is one depicting the dullest of our resident species, the Eurasian Collared Dove, a species that only thrives in the vicinity of man, near towns and farmhouses.





## WEEKLY REPORTS SUMMER 2021



### Weekly Report of 15 August, 2021

Due to the summer holidays, the weekly reports have not been as timely. During a break between my sojourns away, I returned to La Cassinazza at the end of what I was told was the hottest week of summer. I was just in time to see the last brood of Swallows fledge.

Despite the torrid heat, migration was evident: the most visible migrants were the Pied Flycatchers, followed by Spotted Flycatchers, high-flying Bee-eaters, and a large flock of Woodpigeons.

Waterbird movements, on the other hand, seem to be at a standstill. Only a dozen or so Teal remain, while the few other species that were around earlier in the month – the first returning Garganey, plus a handful of Black-winged Stilts, Wood Sandpipers, and Greenshanks - are gone. There are several hundred Mallards around, but they remain concealed in the rice fields, which have now grown quite tall.

All of the Common Terns have left, now that the last pair has finally fledged a juvenile, from an initial clutch of two eggs.

Wild Boar sows have formed a single herd together with their piglets of various ages. They were quite forthright in claiming the right of way. Who am I to argue with them?





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### Weekly Report of 28 August, 2021

It snuck up on me, but the days are now at least three hours shorter, the trees cast long shadows even in mid-morning, and the torrid heat has made way to some delightful September weather, with blue skies, bright sunshine, and a cool breeze. The change has been drastic.

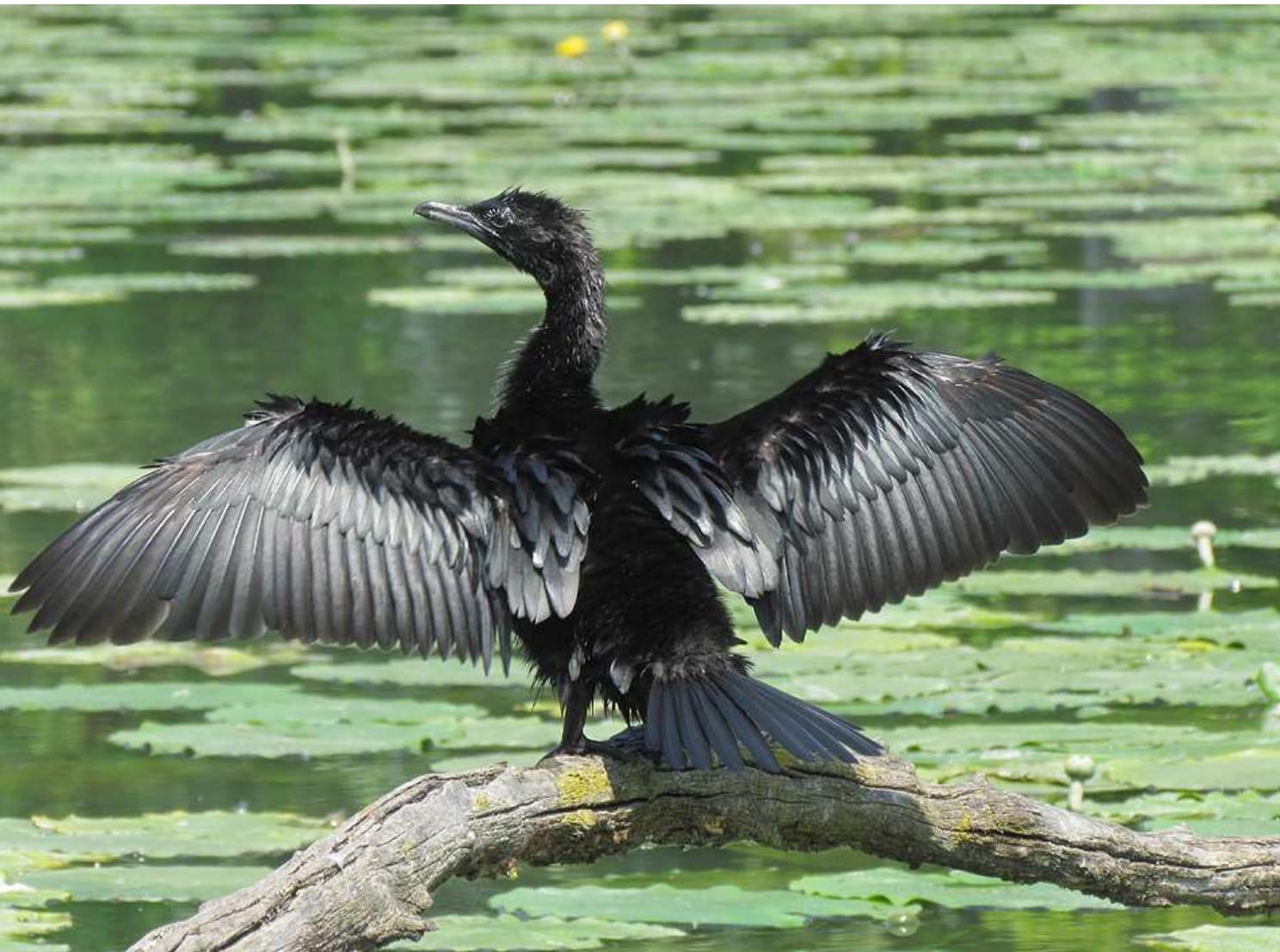
Early in the fall migration period, the most numerous passerine is the Pied Flycatcher, followed by Garden Warblers in much smaller numbers; a few isolated individuals of Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, and Bonelli's Warbler are also turning up.

At the same time, the very last Golden Orioles and Cuckoos of the year can still be seen. The Marsh Harriers that are flying overhead, up to four at a time, are not using La Cassinazza's habitats, but merely passing through on their way south.

The only tangible signs of waterbird migration are just a few dozen Teal and a handful of Garganey.

Now that the breeding season is over, the Pygmy Cormorants are coming back. There have been about thirty or so in recent days. I don't know where they breed, presumably not too far, but for whatever reason La Cassinazza's wetlands are not to their liking.

Although they are now an expected species, Pygmy Cormorants were a major rarity here until a few years ago, and it is always satisfying to be able to photograph them.





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### Weekly Report of 04 September, 2021

There came an evening this week when I realized the Barn Swallows, nearly all of them, were gone. There are still a handful left, probably the juveniles from the last brood, which fledged no later than three weeks ago and may not yet be ready for the great journey south.

The Lawplings are back in the wetlands, a flock of 50 or 60 fresh juveniles, still lacking their characteristic tufts. The fall's first Ruff and Common Snipe were with them. There are now almost a hundred Teal, which have been joined by a few Shovelers; the Garganey, on the other hand, have left, and were likely the last of the season. I would have never heard or seen a Little Crake this week if it wasn't for the fact that as we were clearing some waterside vegetation, a bird shot out of a clump of sedges only to immediately disappear into another one. We flushed a second bird shortly thereafter.

Pied Flycatchers, Garden Warblers, and Willow Warblers were already on the most last week, and this week they were joined by Sedge Warblers, a flock of Bee-eaters perched on wires like so many colourful pearls, and a small flock of restless Spotted Flycatchers that did everything possible to catch my attention. And to pose for some photos.





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### Weekly Report of 11 September, 2021

Now that summer is finally over, the water is back in La Cassinazza's impoundments, which had all been drained. The ducks wasted no time in coming back: a couple hundred Mallards and about the same number of Teal have also been joined by some unwanted guests, the Sacred Ibises. Along with them are a few dozen Lapwings, and a handful each of Wood Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Greenshank, and Common Snipe; the last-named species was the only one to break the double-digit barrier.

The reedbed is alive with Water Rails and Reed Warblers, but as vocal as they are, they remain impossible to see. The other migrants are the same as last week's, albeit perhaps in slightly better numbers: Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, and Bee-eater.

The appearance of Migrant Hawkers (*Aeshna mixta*), a dragonfly that becomes abundant as summer gives way to fall, is another sign of the changing season.





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### Weekly Report of 18 September, 2021

In just a few days, Mallard numbers grew by an order of magnitude, from a couple hundred to a couple thousand. Their quacking, one of the most typical features of La Cassinazza's soundscape, could once again be heard everywhere.

Apart from this, migration seems to have slowed down this week, perhaps due to the uncertain weather, with frequent rains and the first early-morning fog. We logged the season's first Song Thrush and Common Redstart, but the only migrants that were in any numbers were Spotted and Pied Flycatchers. The former have been a constant and common presence for the last three weeks: their migration has never been as conspicuous as it has been this year.

On the other hand, the fall migration of Pied Flycatchers has always been prolonged and abundant, and this year is no exception. From mid-August to early October, this species always seems to be the commonest migrant at La Cassinazza.

Finally, I need to mention the reappearance of the Violet Dropwing (*Trithemis annulata*), a dragonfly of warm climates – as northern Italy has become – which was first recorded at La Cassinazza in September of last year.

