

## Birding News

The heat of the Spanish summer down here in southern Spain is with us so do not expect to see many birds this month or next. Unless you are prepared to be up and very early, then you are unlikely to see many of our smaller passerines. Rather, enjoy the antics of some of our summer visitors before they, once more, return to Africa from mid-August onwards.

So what is about at the moment? Certainly, there seem to be plenty of Kestrels hovering over the mountains and the youngsters born earlier this summer are now busy building up strength and fat reserves for the coming migration. Now is the time to enjoy those birds that you will not be seeing from about September onwards; our common (Barn) Swallow, the rare Red-rumped Swallows plus the related House Martins and unrelated Swifts; all very busy feasting on small insects above our heads and, apart from the Swifts, drinking from the pool. (Come September we should start seeing, depending upon the local weather, the first of the Crag Martins as they come down from the higher breeding slopes to visit our pools and natural waters.)

Enjoy the Woodchat Shrike with their “ginger” caps and white wing flashes as sit on the electricity wires and then appear to fall off as you approach. If you are really lucky, you may have Golden Orioles on your area, more likely if you live in the valleys rather than the higher parts of the mountains, and if you do have a regular, resident bird or family I should like an invite to photograph /observe as it is not a bird that I see up here on our mountain top.

The Hoopoes seem to have had a good breeding season and I have seen, and so have people who tell me about their birding experiences, young being fed by the parents on the local tracks and/or in neighbouring almond plantations where the birds seem to favour the mature and rotting trees for their nest holes. There are Bee-eaters about but they seem to be in fewer numbers than past years. Does this mean they have exhausted the wasp grub supply near me and have found a new or better food source? Early days yet but we certainly seem to have fewer wasp nests in our garden and can, at the moment, get out of the pool without having to disperse hundreds of the little \*\*\*\*\*.

Have you all seen the Turtle Doves which, as in the UK, are summer visitors to Spain? If you see a slightly smaller dove, but bigger than a Blackbird, with a lovely brown pattern on the wing with more of a gentle “coo-ing” sound, you probably have a Turtle Dove. I suggest you follow the sound and run your binoculars along the electricity wires to find the bird’s song post.



Turtle Dove



Collared Dove

It has been a disappointing season for seeing our Short-toed Eagles. I suspect the local pair have either passed on or passed over! This summer, I have been lucky to see a pair twice a month rather than on a daily basis in past years. Perhaps my loss has been a gain for others on the other side of the mountain or in the valley bottom.

It is not only we who like a night out on the tiles accompanied by good food, good music and good company. Judging by the antics at the “Summer Ball” we seem to have met up with a pair of juvenile delinquents swanning (or should that be swallowing?) around as they tried to out-fly and out-dive each other during the meal and following music. But, like all youngsters who have yet to learn how to pace themselves, come midnight they had given up and were exhausted and had to resort to a dark corner to sulk away the rest of the night!



House Martin

Which brings me to the point in question. How many of you were able to identify the birds as young Barn Swallows rather than House Martins as I heard one person remark?

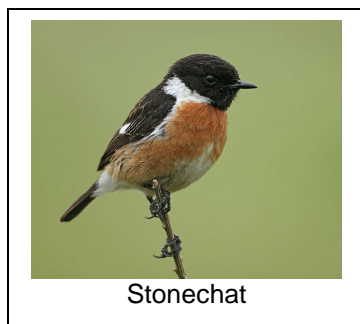
Fooled by the lack of tail streamers but the real give away was the lack of a white rump and the very white underside.



Swallow

Now is a good time to practise your identification skills as family groups of swallow make use of your pools. Adult males have long tail streamers, appearing to be about two inches (5 cm), whilst the female tail streamers are nearer to about one and a quarter inches (approximately 3 cm) and, as we now know, the youngsters have no streamers at all for the first few months of their lives.

Summer, post breeding, is also the time when most passerines (small perching birds) have their annual moult which includes replacing flight and tail feathers. So, from June to August



Stonechat

you are likely to see birds without tails, shabby wings and a general “dulling” of colours. For example, your resident Stonechats will lose that glossy black head and appear quite “female like”, no disrespect intended ladies. Blackbirds appear to have gaps in their wings as flight feathers are replaced. However, some larger birds, such as geese, complete the job in one go and find themselves without flight feathers for a period of about two weeks. Fortunately, geese are able to sit out this period on water as a means of self-preservation; albeit local game-keepers are aware of this phenomena and mid-June is a

good time to take out the odd bird for the table! It is also the time when most geese are caught (trapped) for migration studies when licensed ringers are able to measure wings, weigh and generally check the birds’ condition before ringing and releasing unharmed back into the wild. But the adventures and “mis-timings” that go with this experience are another story.

Well, that's all for this month which has been shortened so that I can return to the UK again to help sort out probate following my aged father's death last month. Enjoy the summer birds and, perhaps, visit some of the recommended sites as more of a country visit for a picnic to show your friends and family the beautiful scenery we have out here in the Axarquia and surrounding area.

See you all on "Race Night".

Happy birding

Bob the Birder