

SICILY

A report on birds seen from 31-03 to 05-04-2022



Mount Etna

By Henk Hendriks
 Hemme Batjes

INTRODUCTION

From 31-03 to 05-04-2022 I birded in the company of Hemme Batjes a few days the eastern part of Sicily.

Our main target was to observe the endemic Sicilian Partridge and additionally some interesting endemic subspecies, mainly the subspecies of Long-tailed Tit and Marsh Tit.

Our main reference was the 2015 report of Eric-Jan Alblas and some additional site info was gathered from www.observado.org.

GETTING THERE – FLIGHT

We flew with Ryanair from Eindhoven (Netherlands) to Catania.

The flight duration was two hours and 40 minutes.

We paid 120 Euros for a return flight.

GETTING AROUND – CAR

We booked a car through Sunny Cars (www.Sunnycars.com) and the local rental company was Sicily by Car. We drove a Opel Mokka XL diesel for 5 days for which we paid 214 Euro, including all insurances.

ACCOMMODATION

The first night after arriving in the early evening of 31-03 in Catania, we stayed at the Catania Airport hotel for which we paid 80 Euro for a double room, including breakfast.

The rest of the time (four nights) we booked an nice apartment at Casa Don Vincenzo in the village of Randazzo. Booked through www.booking.com

We had two rooms, one large room with a double bed and a terrace overlooking the village and a second, smaller one with two single beds.

We paid 225 Euro including breakfast for four nights to stay at this place. The owners are very friendly and the lady prepared a fine breakfast for us every morning at 6.30 am.

FOOD AND DRINKS

We had lunch in the field daily and for this we bought bread, cheese, fruit and some drinks in the supermarket.

Near and in Randazzo you find a few restaurants and twice we had dinner at Etna Quota Mille, a hotel/restaurant, which is a 10 minute drive from Randazzo in the countryside. Generally we paid between 20 and 30 Euro pp. for dinner including some wine or beer.

WEATHER

We encountered variable weather conditions. Mostly sunny but the first two days, a strong, cold wind made the birding, especially in the early morning, rather difficult.

Several layers of clothing, cap and gloves were no luxury.

The second day we had also overcast weather conditions with from time to time short periods of rain and even a short hail storm.

The first time we drove up the flanks of Mount Etna to an altitude of around 1800 meters we had to turn around because it started to snow heavily.

The last couple of days the wind ceased, it was sunny and the temperatures were rather pleasant.

BIRDING

The first two days the birding was not easy mainly because of the strong, cold wind. We tried for the Sicilian Partridge at the area where E.J.Alblas was very successful in 2015. He observed several calling birds when scanning the area from the road but during our visits to the area we never had calling birds. Only when we entered the area and scrambled down the slope into the vegetation (no tracks) we heard some calling birds but only for some brief periods and mainly in response of playback.

We discussed why the birds were not vocal in the area during the first hours of the day and thought that maybe February is a better time for calling birds and also the strong, cold wind could be a factor in this respect.

On the other hand E.J.Alblas saw the species easily in February and the weather during his visit was also rather bad with rain and even snow.

I was the only, lucky one who observed twice (two birds and a single bird) the species in flight.

But at a second site we both had excellent and close views of the partridge.

We also succeeded in finding and photographing a single (Sicilian) Long-tailed Tit and the subspecies of Marsh Tit.

If your aim is to observe a greater variety of species a visit to Sicily in late April/beginning of May is more advisable as in this period migration is in full swing.

REFERENCES

Books

Field Guide to the birds of Britain and Europe – Collins Bird Guide

Reports – articles

– **Sicily 20- 24 February 2015** – E.J.Alblas

– Article describing Sicilian Partridge, published in Dutch Birding 32: 79-96, 2010.

Can be found online: http://www.ebnitalia.it/files/alectoris_whitakeri.pdf

– We also consulted www.observado.org but found surprisingly few records of observations of Sicily. Apparently hardly any Italian and/or Sicilian birder upload their records on this website

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I like to thank Eric Jan Alblas for providing additional info about our target species.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: March 31

At 5.50 pm we flew from Eindhoven to Catania where we landed at 8.35 pm.

After collecting our luggage we walked out of the terminal to the area where the car rental companies are located. It took us some 45 minutes before we could pick up our rental car.

We drove the short distance to our pre-booked hotel, Catania Airport Hotel.

After checking in we had some Messina beers before we went to sleep.

Day 2: April 1

We had a nice breakfast and at around 8 am we left Catania for our drive to Randazzo, which is situated north of the Etna area.

We arrived at 10 am at the start of the road (37.85577, 14.939356), south of Randazzo, which transects a nice area, suitable for **Sicilian Partridge**. The weather was overcast with sunny spells and a rather strong wind.

At the start of the road we encountered a flock of **Italian Sparrows** and identified a lonely single **Tree Sparrow**.

We birded along this road (the first 5 km) until 1.30 pm. Especially the area around refugio Case Giusa, west of the road is supposed to be reliable for the partridge. (37.837148, 14.934112)

A single **Blue Rock Thrush**, a pair of **Cirl Buntings** and our first **Sardinian Warblers** and **Eastern Subalpine Warblers** were observed.

After finishing our birding session we drove the short distance to our accommodation in Randazzo.

We dropped our stuff in our apartment and the owner drove us to a supermarket where we bought provisions for the next couple of days.

During our drive to the supermarket we encountered a short but heavy rain and hail storm.

We had lunch on the terrace of our apartment.

In the afternoon we returned to the same road/area and we birded there from 4 pm to dusk (6.45 pm).

No sign or calls of our target species.

In the evening we had dinner in the center of Randazzo. (restaurant La Bifora)



Randazzo, village just north of the Etna area.

Day 3: April 2

Breakfast at 6.30 am.

Just after 7 am we arrived at the refugio and started to scan the area for the partridge. It was sunny but cold and the strong wind made the scanning not easy.

After a while we decided to walk down into the scrubby valley to try our luck there. As there were no obvious tracks the going was not easy. Several times we heard **Sicilian Partridges** call but only for short periods and the strong wind made it difficult to locate the exact area where the calls were coming from. At one time I observed two birds in flight which gave nice but rather distant views. Unfortunately Hemme missed these birds.

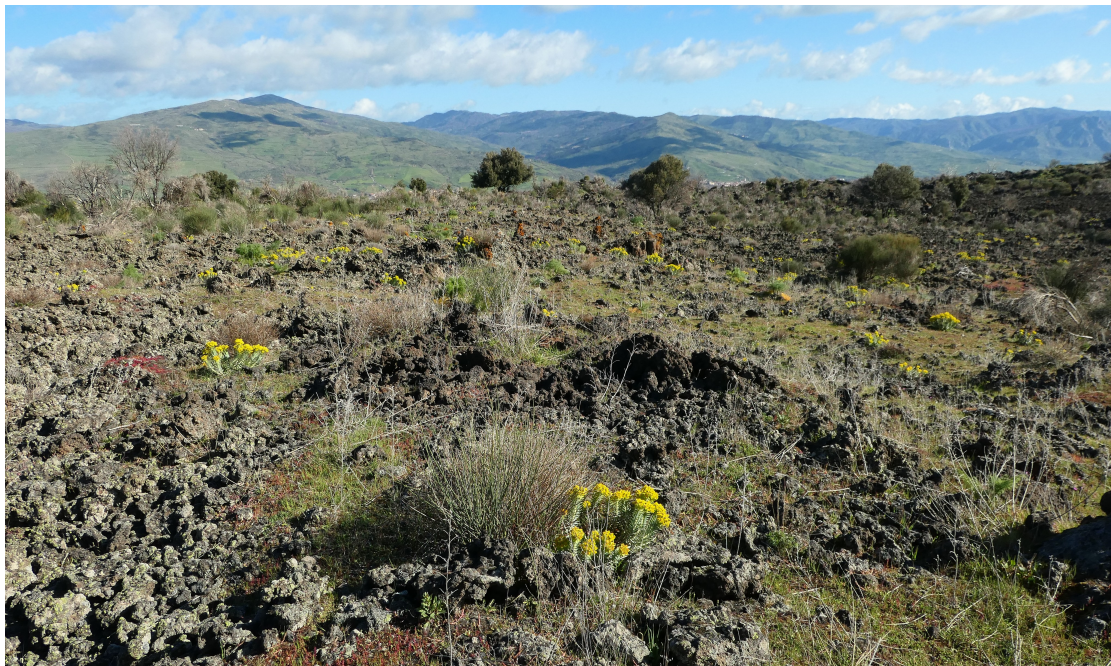
We decided to walk in the direction where the birds had landed and suddenly we flushed another partridge which gave fine and close views from above but again only by me.

During our walk in the area Hemme briefly saw a **Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** but the bird disappeared in the scrub and could not be relocated.

We did have nice and lengthy views of a patrolling fox.



Refugio Case Giusa



Area behind the refugio which is reliable for Sicilian Partridge.

At 10 am we left the area and started to bird along the strada provinciale Etna settentrionale in the direction of Linguaglossa. We took several short side tracks, mainly to try for Long-tailed Tit. Before Linguaglossa we turned south on de Via Mareneve, which runs along the eastern side of Mount Etna. At 37.81054, 15.0856 there is a nice picnic site (Piano Donnavita). We birded the forest and forest edge. north of the road and at one time we heard the song of a **Marsh Tit**.

While trying to locate the **Marsh Tit** we suddenly heard the unmistakable call of a **Long-tailed Tit**. It did not take long before we had excellent views of the interesting, distinctive subspecies *siculus* of **Long-tailed Tit**. which gave nice photographic opportunities aswell. (37.81126, 15.084091)

The next half hour we tried to lure the **Marsh Tit** into view but I only had a few fleeting views of the bird. We had lunch at this site and decided to check other areas further along the road. (Via Mareneve)



the picnic site at Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.



Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus siculus*

After a short drive we turned right at 37.796713, 15.062857 towards Ristorante Monte Conca, which is situated around 1800 meters of altitude. But unfortunately it started to snow heavily and we decided to turn around.

We slowly drove back towards Randazzo where we arrived at 6 pm.

We had dinner again in the same restaurant in the center of Randazzo.(La Bifora)

In the evening we discussed our options and decided that we would visit the same area for the partridge again the next day but earlier.

Day 4: April 3

Breakfast at 6 am.

We arrived at the refugio at 6.45 at dawn. It was extremely cold and windy which made the scanning for the partridge even more difficult than the day before.

After some scanning we warmed up in the car and decided to try again to find the species on foot.

We birded the scrubby valley, below the refugio for several hours and though we heard the partridge a few times we never saw one. This was of course disappointing, especially for Hemme.

The fox we saw yesterday in the area popped up again and could be followed running over the rocks.

At 11.30 we left and we drove again to the picnic area, along the Via Mareneve.

We birded the forest around the picnic area but could not locate the **Long-tailed Tit** and **Marsh Tit** again. Highlight was the unexpected observation of an adult **Golden Eagle**.

Meanwhile the weather improved and we decided to drive straight up to Ristorante Monte Conca. We had a picnic lunch in a small park in the village of Millo.

We birded for an hour around ristorante Conca and among the snow patches we located several **Rock Buntings**, a singing young male **Red Crossbill**, many **Chiffchaffs**, **Coal Tits** and a vocal **Marsh Tit** which gave brief but fine views.



The area around ristorante Monte Conca.



Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra poliozona*



Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

As we were not very far from a site where a Dutch birder had observed **Sicilian Partridge** a few years ago we decided to drive to that site. We arrived at the site along the SP92 at 4 pm and birded around for a time but nothing moved. When we returned to the car I noticed a small track on the opposite side of the road and we decided to check that out. When I randomly played the call of the partridge we suddenly had a response.

We walked further and Hemme, who was a little ahead of me, flushed a **Sicilian Partridge** at very close range. That was of course a huge relief.

We heard more birds calling and we decided to climb up a hill where we could scan the surrounding area. And here we had great views of two birds walking over the rocks in full view giving very nice views.

SP92 at 37.697156, 15.06381.

After this success we travelled back to Randazzo and at 8 we drove to restaurant Etna Quota Mille where we had a nice dinner. When we left the restaurant a **European Scops Owl** was calling from the tree just above our car. But no views were obtained.

Day 5: April 4

Breakfast at 6.30 am.

After breakfast we drove straight to the site where we observed the **Sicilian Partridge** the previous day. We arrived at 8.40 am and birded the area until 11 am. A **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was calling and several **Mistle Thrushes** were heard. It took a while but finally we observed a single **Sicilian Partridge** both walking on the rocks and in flight.

As we had observed our main targets by now of our short trip to Sicily, we decided to head for the coast to do some general birding.

At 11.00 am we left the site and drove to the coast to the Penisola Magnisi, just north of Syracuse, where we arrived at 12.30 am. We had lunch in glorious sunshine and in fine spring temperatures.

After lunch we birded the peninsula for a few hours. We observed three **Stone Curlews**, flocks of **Common swifts**, a single **Pallid Swift**, **Corn Buntings** and **Woodchat Shrike**. Crested Larks and **Zitting Cisticolas** were singing in the sky and the many flowers in the area attracted quite a few butterflies.

Later in the afternoon we visited the nearby Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.

From a hide we scanned the lake but because of the high water levels there were no waders around.

We observed some small flocks of **Flamingo**, **Northern Shoveler**, a pair of **Garganey**, a single **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Sandwich Terns**, **Yellow-legged Gulls** and three species of Swallow. **Cetti's Warbler** were vocal and very common in the area.

At 5 pm we left and drove back to Randazzo.

Dinner at Etna Quota Mille. The **Scops Owl** was heard again in the tree above the parking lot.

At night a **Tawny Owl** was heard by Hemme.



Penisola Magnisi



Eurasian Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus saharae*



Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

Day 6: April 5

Breakfast at 6.30 am.

After packing our stuff we said goodbye to our friendly host and left Randazzo.

We had decided that on our way to Catania for our afternoon flight back home we would bird some of the areas we visited before the last couple of days.

We first visited the picnic area, along the Via Mareneve. We finally had brief but fine views of **Great Spotted Woodpecker** but not a trace of the **Marsh Tit** and **Long-tailed Tit** we observed here previously.

A large accipiter, harassed by some **Hooded Crows**, passed over our heads. The jizz, size and the obvious rounded tail made this a **Northern Goshawk**. This is probably the best observation of our trip as the species is according to literature very rare on Sicily.

The second stop was the area around Ristorante Monte Conca.

Another **Greater Spotted Woodpecker** was heard and several **Rock Buntings** and **Red Crossbills** were observed.

At 11.00 am we left for our drive to Catania. Unfortunately our navigation app. directed us straight through Catania to the airport instead of going more or less around the town.

As a result this took more time than we anticipated and we arrived a little late at the airport.

The return of the car and the checking in for the flight went smoothly and at 2.50 pm we flew from Catania to Eindhoven Airport where we arrived at 5.35 pm.

And so this short but successful trip came to an end.

Henk Hendriks

hhendriks@onsmail.nl



Italian Sparrow *Passer italiae*

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF OBSERVATIONS

- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos nom.*
04-04: 3 in flight near Adrano
- Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*
04-04: 12 at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.
- Garganey** *Spatula querquedula*
04-04: A pair at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.
- Sicilian Partridge** *Alectoris whitakeri* *IOC include this still in graeca*
02-04: Three (two + one) in flight in the area below refugio Case Giusa.
03-04: Heard in the area below refugio Case Giusa.
Three (One + Two) observed along the SP92 at 37.697156, 15.06381
04-04: Heard and one observed at 37.697156, 15.06381
- Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix nom*
04-04: Heard and one flushed twice at Penisola Magnisi
- Common Swift** *Apus apus nom*
Recorded on 4 dates and larger flocks at Penisola Magnisi on 04-04.
- Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus brehmorum*
04-04: One identified at Penisola Magnisi
- Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus nom*
04-04: Heard along the SP92 at the partridge site.
- Common Wood-Pigeon** *Columba palumbus nom*
Observed.
- Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*
02-04: A single bird near Randazzo.
04-04: A single bird near Adrano.
- Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus nom*
04-04: Heard at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.
- Common Coot** *Fulica atra nom*
04-04: 100+ at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.
- Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus nom*
04-04: A single bird at sea, Penisola Magnisi
- Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis nom*
04-04: Commonly heard and two seen at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.
- Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus*
04-04: 40 at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.
- Eurasian Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oediconemus saharae*
04-04: calling and three seen at Penisola Magnisi.
- Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michaelis nom*
Daily a few observed
04-04: 10 at Penisola Magnisi.
- Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis*
04-04: A single bird at Penisola Magnisi.
04-04: Three at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.
- Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*
04-04: Two at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.
- Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*
04-04: One in flight near Adrano.
- Western Marsh-Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus nom*
04-04: Seen twice at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.
- Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis nom*
05-04: One at Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.
- Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo nom*
Heard on three dates but no views!

Golden Eagle

Aquila chrysaetos nom

03-04: An immature bird above the picnic site at Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.

Common Scops Owl

Otus scops nom

03/04-04: Heard at the parking lot of Etna Quota Mille hotel/restaurant.

Tawny Owl

Strix aluco sylvatica

02/05-04: Heard at Randazzo. Hemme Batjes only.

Eurasian Hoopoe

Upupa epops nom

Daily heard and a total of 9 birds seen on three dates.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos major italiae

02-04: One in flight along the strada provinciale Etna settentrionale. Henk Hendriks only.

04-04: Heard along the SP92.

05-05: Heard and one seen at the picnic site at Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.

05-05: Heard at Ristorante Monte Concan.

Common Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus nom

A total of four on three dates.

Woodchat Shrike

Lanius senator nom

04-04: A single bird at Penisola Magnisi.

Eurasian Jay

Garrulus glandarius jordansi (IOC include this in albipectus)

Daily heard and seen.

04-04: At least six seen, perched and in flight.

Eurasian Magpie

Pica pica nom

Observed.

Eurasian Jackdaw

Corvus monedula spermologus

04-04: Six at the church near our hotel at Randazzo.

05-04: Two at the church near our hotel at Randazzo.

Hooded Crow

Corvus cornix nom

Observed,

Marsh Tit

Poecile palustris italicus

02-04: Heard and one briefly seen picnic site at Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.

03-04: Heard at picnic site at Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.

03-04: Heard and brief but fine views of one at Ristorante Monte Concan,

Coal Tit

Parus ater nom

A total of 12 during three visits at the picnic site at Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.

A total of seven during two visits to the area around Ristorante Monte Concan,

A total of four during two visits to the site along the SP92.

Great Tit

Parus major aphrodite

Observed.

Eurasian Blue Tit

Cyanistes caeruleus nom

Observed

Crested Lark

Galerida cristata apuliae

04-04: 10+ at Penisola Magnisi.

Wood Lark

Lullula arborea pallida

Observed.

House Martin

Delichon urbica nom

04-04: Two at Penisola Magnisi.

04-04: Four at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.

Sand Martin

Riparia riparia nom

04-04: Two at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica nom

04-04: Common Penisola Magnisi and Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.

Cetti's Warbler

Cettia cetti nom

04-04: Commonly heard at Reserva Naturale Saline di Priolo.

Long-tailed Tit

Aegithalos caudatus siculus

02-04: A single bird of this interesting species was seen at the picnic site at Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.

Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita nom</i>
Observed.	
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis nom</i>
04-04: 10+ at Penisola Magnisi.	
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla paulucci</i>
A total of six on two dates in the area near Refugio Case Giuso.	
Regularly singing.	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis nom</i>
03-04: A single bird near Case Giusa.	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala nom</i>
Observed on four dates.	
Eastern Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans nom</i>
Observed on three dates.	
Up to six on 01-04 in the area near Refugio Case Giusa,	
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus nom</i>
02-04: Heard at the picnic site Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.	
05-04: a single bird seen at the picnic site Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.	
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus nom</i>
01-04: A single bird heard and seen in a forest patch just south of refugio Case Giusa.	
05-04: Heard at the picnic site Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes nom</i>
Recorded on three dates. Mostly heard but a few seen well.	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea cisalpina</i>
Heard on three dates.	
At least five birds seen on two dates at the picnic site Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla nom</i>
Heard on three dates.	
02-04: A single bird at the start of the road to the Refugio Case Giusa.	
At least six birds seen on two dates at the picnic site Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.	
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
Observed on five dates.	
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula nom</i>
Observed.	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus nom</i>
05-04: Heard at the picnic site Piano Donavitta, along the Via Mareneve.	
04/05-04: Heard in the forest along the SP92, Sicilian Partridge site.	
Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius nom</i>
01-04: A single bird near Refugio Case Giusa.	
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes nom</i>
02-04: Hemme briefly saw a bird in the scubby valley below the Refugio Case Giusa.	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula nom</i>
Observed.	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros gibraltariensis</i>
01-04: A pair was seen from the balcony of our hotel room at Catania.	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubricola nom</i>
02-04: Single birds near Randazzo.	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe nom</i>
04-04: A nice male Penisola Magnisi.	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispanoliensis nom</i>
04-04: Two birds identified at Penisola Magnisi.	
Italian Sparrow	<i>Passer italiae</i>
Observed.	
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
01-04: A single bird identified near the start of the road to Refugio Case Giusa.	

White Wagtail

Motacilla alba nom

01 and 03-04: Single birds at the start of the road to Refugio Case Giusa.

03-04: A single bird at Milo.

05-04: Two along the Via Mareneve.

Grey Wagtail

Motacilla cinerea nom

Heard on three dates at Randazzo.

Meadow Pipit

Anthus pratensis

04-04: 20+ at Penisola Magnisi

Common Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs nom

Observed.

Brambling

Fringilla montifringilla

03-04: A single bird near Ristorante Monte Conca.

European Serin

Serinus serinus

02-04: One heard at the start of the road to the refugio Case Giusa and one singing in the centre of Randazzo.

03-04: A singing male was seen at a small park at Milo.

European Greenfinch

Carduelis chloris

A total of 5 on three dates.

European Goldfinch

Carduelis carduelis tschusii

Observed.

Common Linnet

Carduelis cannabina

01/02-04: A single bird near Refugio Case Giusa.

Red Crossbill

Loxia curvirostra polioyoga

During two visits to the area around Ristorante Monte Conca we observed two birds. More birds were heard.

04-04: Four birds were observed along the SP92.

Cirl Bunting

Emberiza cirlus

During three visits to the area around Refugio Case Giusa we observed a total of seven birds.

Rock Bunting

Emberiza cia

03 and 05-04: Two and a single bird were observed around Ristorante Monte Conca.

03 and 04-04: Three and two birds were heard and seen along the SP92, partridge site.

Corn Bunting

Miliaria calandra

01-04: One was seen along the road near Bronte.

04-04: Five birds were heard and seen at Penisola Magnisi.

Siskin

Carduelis spinus

02-04: Heard along the Via Mareneve.

03 and 05-04: 20+ around Ristorante Monte Conca.

SOME BUTTERFLY SPECIES IDENTIFIED AT PENISOLA MAGNISI ON 04 APRIL

Swallowtail

Papilio machaon

Small White

Pieris rapae

Eastern Bath White

Pontia edusa

Clouded Yellow

Colias croceus

Small Copper

Lycaena phlaeas

Southern Blue

Polyommatus celina

Speckled Wood

Pararge aegeria

Small Heath

Coenonympha pampholus