

ROMAN RUINS - WITH AN ABRUZZO ASIDE.

12-21ST SEPTEMBER 2014



Introduction

A holiday with the wife with mix of touristy things in Rome (4 days) and some wildlife targets in the mountains of Abruzzo (4 days) along with a quick visit to San Marino. I indulged in 11 ice creams and 7 portions of fried potatoes during the trip which were very nice. We had a few hiccups along the way including a couple of people trying to rip us off.

The wildlife was targeted to a few species, I was not after a large list, so we spent lots of time on these few specific targets and I put in plenty of time on butterflies. I had no luck with herps and was let down by some contacts which was disappointing so rather mixed fortunes.

Temperatures were high upper 20's to low 30's during the day and high teens at night. Heavy rain on Tuesday afternoon and Friday morning was the only deviation from the oppressive heat.

The photos are hyperlinked to larger versions.

Diary

12th September 2014

We flew in to Rome Fiumicino airport and awaited our shuttle bus to collect our hire car, but it did not arrive. After lots of phone calls still nothing and 3 hours later we could do nothing else but take the train into Rome skipping our first couple of sites. A very helpful train employee guided us on a public transport route close to our hotel and I managed to secure a car from a different company on Monday afternoon. We made it to our hotel had some food and got an early night and not best pleased with the situation our day ruined.

13th September 2014

We headed into Rome for the day the first birds were flyover ring necked parakeets. One of the first sites was the Trevi fountain which was covered in scaffolding as were the Spanish steps and a local café tried ripping us off - top start to the trip! But we overcame that and had quite a good day locating monk parakeets, Sardinian warblers and a few lizards between the tourist sites. The lack of fried potatoes in Rome was of concern until I discovered the chip topped pizza – magic!

14th September 2014

Yet another big day visiting the tourist sites the Coliseum, the Palatine and the Forum. In the evening we visited a bat roost under the Victor Emmanuelle Bridge we had four species flying round over the river and surrounding trees but not a massive number of individuals. One species was larger and three smaller ones, ID's by sonogram analysis and Savi's, Kuhl's, Soprano pipistrelle and the larger species as noctule.

15th September 2014

We visited the Vatican a blue rock thrush was of note and late afternoon we went to pick up the hire car, once more this did not go smoothly. Still having the first car on my credit card and the extortionate deposit of 1250 euros they requested was just too much for the card and it was declined. My wife's card would have that amount available but she did not have her driving licence and they would not let me hire the car and her pay the deposit.



Coliseum



Ring Necked Parakeet



Italian Sparrow



Hooded Crow

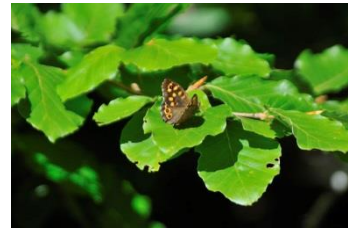
The answer was easy get her to hire the car but she had not brought her driving licence so they would not hire us the car Some phone calls back home to move some money and some calls to the hire company's head office and a couple of hours later we finally had a car – well a Fiat 500 that was not entirely suitable for our plans but that was all they had.

16th September 2014

We awoke to much cooler temperatures than of the previous days and drove the short distance to the Gioia Vecchia viewpoint for dawn, another car arrived just after us and three Italian women with bins and scopes all set up equally spaced along the watchpoint. We joined them filling in the gaps, a couple of wild boar were seen but little else in the first hour or so then one spotted a bear but it was lost to view by the time we got there and no further sign. Anna tired and ill went for some sleep in the car and as you can probably guess this is when one of the Italians spotted the bear again, this time I was stood next to her and was on it straight away as it bounded across a grassy area and then was lost to view in the trees. It was a large adult bear and finally some good fortune for the trip, I woke Anna with the news and we waited another hour without any further sightings before heading for some breakfast. We headed for Civitella Alfedena and located the Val de Rose trail, the long trek up the mountain began in rather warm conditions. This was ideal for butterflies and I was stopping frequently to photograph them and the spectacular views. The climb passed through beech and pine woodlands along with open areas at one point Anna spotted a vole we had great views of it the general appearance and the diagnostic short tail confirmed it as Savi's pine vole (the only short tailed vole present). We climbed higher and higher and the cloud started to build up as we rose above the tree line where we saw our first Abruzzo chamois in the distance. I got closer passing a rock bunting on the way, the chamois were very confiding and we sat eating our lunch a few feet from them with a chough chorus from overhead. After we had our fill of food and chamois we headed down the cloud building all the time. The red deer rut was clearly underway as we heard loud bellows and passed a rather large stag commanding a clearing. The first spots of rain started to fall and had turned quite heavy by the time we reached the tea shop in the village. We headed to Pescasseroli to find our B&B, it was up a rough track but it was delightful and farm animals were wandering round all over the place.



Wild Boar



Speckled Wood



Hummingbird Hawkmoth



Dingy Skipper



Wood Mouse



Italian Wall Lizard

Our host was very friendly but spoke little English, but google translate worked well and we got by pretty well. The rain torrential saw us hole up in the local bar for some excellent beer and food and we got an early night.

17th September 2014

We awoke to drizzle and thick mist so went back to bed rather than head to the bear watchpoint, after breakfast we drove 40 mins or so to a place near Avezzano following the directions given to a good site for rock partridge. It was a beautiful day and we spent it searching the hills for rock partridge, there were loads of butterflies the highlight was a couple of Berger's clouded yellows. Bird wise it was great, golden eagle, griffon vulture from the reintroduction, choughs, ravens and a family of kestrels was ever-present and a selection of small birds kept our interest, mid afternoon we head the distinctive calls of rock partridge not far above us and we were quickly trying to locate them, we got the area narrowed down to a section of rocks with a couple of small trees, at this moment a trail bike came down the hill making an almighty racket and we did not hear or see the partridges again. We headed back to the bear watchpoint stopping outside the National park to set some small mammal traps. The watchpoint had a dozen watchers of mixed nationalities when we arrived, we saw several roe, fallow and red deer. Then a coach turned up and a rowdy group of German teenagers disembarked, they had minimal interest in bear watching and their leader had no interest in controlling them. A large sounder of approx. 40 wild boar roamed the hillside and several smaller ones appeared from time to time but no bears and we were the last to leave. We went to a pizzeria who had also discovered there was a market for a chip pizza top draw!

18th September 2014

An early start at the bear watchpoint so we could have a bit of a drive about in the dark, and it was well worth the effort our first encounter was with a mongoose running across the road we both had great views and it was totally unexpected and finally our first red fox of the trip walking lazily down the road. At the watchpoint there were no sign of bears but plenty of wild boars about, a woodpecker flew into a tree and I got the scope on it, a Lifford's white backed woodpecker, I checked out all the features before it flew.



Abruzzo Chamois



Abruzzo Chamois



Abruzzo Chamois



Common Wall Lizard



Italian Wall Lizard



Violet Carpenter Bee

The other bear watcher present was not interested in it at all his loss. We checked the mammal traps a bank vole and a yellow necked mouse the total. We headed up to Civitella Alfedena for the morning and visited the visitor centre dedicated to the wolf, here they have a large enclosure with some wolves in and a couple were showing nicely. We had a general explore of the area stopping in some woodland areas to look for salamanders without any luck but added several more butterflies to the trip total and a few birds along the way as well some nice crag martins the pick. A hummingbird hawkmoth was the best find and it showed nicely for some photographs. A bank vole in the mammal traps before the bear watch resumed. Plenty of wild boar again and a couple of red deer but the real spectacle was in the skies where tens of thousands of hirundines mostly house martins heading south through the valley feasting on the clouds of insects present, again no bear.

19th September 2014

Our last morning in Abruzzo and again we were up early for a drive a red fox the only mammal seen. The bear watchpoint was again bearless and for the first time we were the only ones present, Anna spotted two mongooses but I was the other side of the watchpoint I had a shrew sp but not enough to ID it. Two wood mice in the traps but all traps had been visited just not tripped the shermans do suffer from this problem. We packed up our stuff and headed north into the Gran Sasso National Park, no wildlife targets just a day to explore before the night drive. We made a few stops lizards were literally everywhere and we had some nice views of golden and booted eagles. We did some touristy stops at waterfalls picking up a winter damselfly in the process. We had some food and headed to the night drive. It was frustratingly busy and the drivers travelling at incredible speed in the first area and we only picked up a rat and a vole. But as time wore on the traffic waned we started to see more, several red foxes and lots of rats a couple of mice and the odd frog and toad. We worked our way to the Recanati area when we located eyeshine across a field in the dense scrub, it was herbivore by the single eye, blue eyeshine (usually herbivores with my torch) and not high up like a deer was it a porcupine which we were searching for. I was 90% sure but there was no access to the area it was in.



Tree Grayling



Common Wall Lizard



Common Blue



Keeled Skimmer



Silver Spotted Skipper

It moved about slowly through the vegetation but the distance it was at was too far to get enough on it to be 100% sure. We drove round a bit more and returned to the site a couple of times it was still present much further along the scrub both times we visited but we were still unable to get a positive ID and despite plenty of time it never emerged from the scrub into the open. Eventually it was lost to view and we left a little frustrated, we continued for a couple of hours in the local area but nothing but a couple of foxes. We headed north stopping at a service station for some sleep watching the lightning show approaching us ahead.

20th September 2014

We awoke to torrential rain, lightning and thunder so after a quick breakfast we headed to San Marino, stopping at the Ghurkha war cemetery on the way putting the holiday woes earlier in the week into perspective! We continued into San Marino and took the cable car to the historic capital for a touristy day, but even here we found plenty of wildlife including a couple of cracking swallowtail butterflies and some Queen of Spain Fritillaries. We drove back to Rome area late afternoon and did some night driving around Lake Bracciano for a few hours but we only had a fox and after a few hours we gave up and got some sleep.

21st September 2014

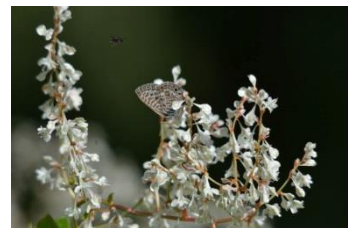
We got some breakfast and headed to the airport, a quick fill up at the petrol station got me into an argument, they tried a fast one putting super V power petrol about 35c a litre more expensive, I stopped them pretty soon and I could tell this was a ploy as the hire car has a massive sticker on the outside stating standard unleaded, they tried to tell me that was wrong so I kicked off and they knew they were rumbled and we only paid the standard price for the fuel but I was fuming which is a rare occurrence, we flew home without any further incident.



Wall Brown



Swallowtail



Lang's Short Tailed Blue



Water Frog sp



Wolf (Captive)

Herps - 4

Common Toad	Water Frog sp	Common Wall Lizard
Italian Wall Lizard		

Birds - 61

Great crested grebe	Grey Heron	Mallard
Griffon Vulture	Golden Eagle	Peregrine Falcon
Common Buzzard	Sparrowhawk	Kestrel
Coot	Yellow Legged Gull	Rock Dove
Woodpigeon	Collared Dove	Tawny Owl
Swift	Ring Necked Parakeet	Monk Parakeet
Green Woodpecker	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Liffords White Backed Woodpecker
Skylark	Sand Martin	Crag Martin
Barn Swallow	House Martin	Meadow Pipit
White Wagtail	Yellow Wagtail	Dunnock
Wren	Robin	Black Redstart
Wheatear	Blue Rock Thrush	Mistle Thrush
Blackbird	Sardinian Warbler	Chiffchaff
Pied Flycatcher	Great Tit	Blue Tit
Coal Tit	Marsh Tit	Nuthatch
Short Toed Treecreeper	Red Backed Shrike	Magpie
Jay	Jackdaw	Chough
Hooded Crow	Raven	Starling
Italian Sparrow	House Sparrow	Chaffinch
Linnet	Goldfinch	Greenfinch
Serin	Rock Bunting	

Insects – 39

Peacock	Red Admiral	Large White
Southern Small White	Small White	Cleopatra
Berger's clouded Yellow	Clouded Yellow	Brimstone
Lang's Short Tailed Blue	Southern Comma	Wall Brown
Large Wall Brown	Tree Grayling	Meadow Brown
Marbled Ringlet	Small Copper	Swallowtail
Grizzled Skipper	Speckled Wood	Chalkhill Blue
Silver Spotted Skipper	Geranium Bronze	Great Banded Grayling
Grayling	Southern Gatekeeper	Autumn Ringlet
Common Blue	Queen of Spain Fritillary	
Winter Damselfly	Southern Hawker	Keeled Skimmer
Orange Ladybird	Ruddy Darter	Hummingbird Hawkmoth
Meal Moth	Shark Moth	Moth 3
Moth 4		

Mammals - 20

Red Squirrel	Brown Rat	Yellow Necked Mouse
Wood Mouse	Bank Vole	Savi's Pine Vole
Marsican Brown Bear	Abruzzo Chamois	Red Deer
Roe Deer	Fallow Deer	Wild Boar
Red Fox	Indian Grey Mongoose	Shrew sp
Long Eared Bat sp	Savi's Pipistrelle	Kuhl's Pipistrelle
Soprano Pipistrelle	Noctule	Porcupine?
Hedgehog *	Mole **	Brown Hare *

*RTA ** Signs only ?Probably

Notes

Night driving and spotlighting down the back roads was very tricky we saw plenty of vehicles driving at high speeds. Trying to find areas open enough to spotlight was also tricky.

Everyone was very friendly and helpful but I had a few contacts who never came through with any help and particularly for herps I had absolutely no help and no luck and could not visit Ostia Antica a good herp site due to the car issues.

Butterflies were everywhere and we saw plenty of species.

Food was excellent although prices varied quite a bit.

