

Country Notes for October 2015

It does not seem so long ago that one of the exciting birds to see on a trip to the RSPB reserve at Dungeness was the Mediterranean Gull. They had been slowly creeping into the most southerly parts of Britain for a few years when there began to be stories of them breeding as well. Sometimes they chose to cross breed with Black Headed Gulls which are very similar – and it must certainly have been difficult to identify exactly the offspring of those pairings!

The principal difference between a Mediterranean Gull and a Black Headed Gull is that unlike the Black Headed Gull, the Mediterranean Gull has pure white wings. Additionally the red beak, which both birds have, is much heavier looking on the Mediterranean Gull. The black head on a Black Headed Gull is actually dark grey – but the Mediterranean Gull really does have a black head! The ‘black’ finishes at the back of the head near the top on a Black headed Gull but on the Mediterranean Gull it goes right down to the neck.

Why, I hear you ask, am I telling you about a bird from southern Europe that now breeds on parts of the south coast. The answer is simple. I am sure that like me, you often see flocks of gulls flying over our village. Often they are Herring Gulls or Black Headed Gulls. However recently careful examination with binoculars has started to reveal that from time to time quite a few of these ‘Black Headed Gulls’ are actually Mediterranean Gulls. It really is worth having a look at them both in a bird book and then having a close look at the gulls as they fly over. Sometimes the numbers of Mediterranean Gulls in a flock go into double figures!

What a change in fortune, in so short a time, for a single species!

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