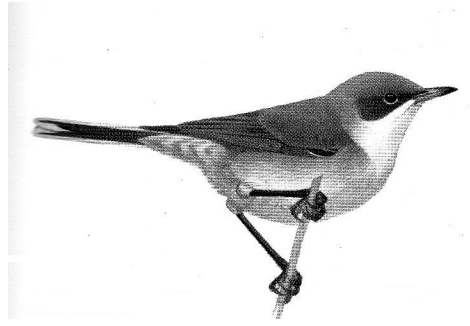


## Orphean in the Undergrowth

On Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> November Peter and I noticed an unusual bird feeding in an apple tree in our garden. It looked like a Lesser Whitethroat, a summer visitor which is not uncommon but rarely seen this late in the year. We posted a message about it on the Pembs. bird blog and it was suggested we tried to get a picture to try and find out which race it was. It was not



until Thursday that Peter managed to get some good pictures through the bedroom window. We posted these on the bird blog and after a short delay, suddenly all hell broke loose! Rich, the Skokholm warden, and Mike Young-Powell simultaneously suggested that this bird was an Orphean Warbler, a bird which breeds well south of the UK and which should now be in Africa or India or somewhere else hot. It is very rare in the UK - this would be only the 6<sup>th</sup> record, and only the second in 32 years.

On Thursday evening we had a phone call from Birdguides, an organisation which sends out information about rarities, asking if we were prepared to host a major "twitch" in our back garden. Well, about 20 phone calls later we were as prepared as we could be - the most critical thing to organise was car parking and we are truly grateful to Yvonne and Russell Evans for letting us use their camping site. So we went to bed, though I can't say we slept much! We were up at 6:15 to put out notices and by 6:45 in the pitch dark there was a queue of people lined up outside the house! Many of them had driven overnight and had arrived in the car parking area in the small hours. By 7:15 at first light there were 45 people at the top of the garden and, thankfully, at 7:20 the bird appeared. It was around all day but not very easy to see but in the end they all had reasonable views. More people kept arriving during the day and we probably had at least 100 people in total, including a couple who arrived as it was almost dark and actually had very good views of the bird as it had its last meal before going to roost.

Breathing a sigh of relief as it got dark and the throngs departed we were greeted with the news that tomorrow was Saturday and it was possible that several hundred people would turn up. How would we organise this? What happens when the car park fills up? Luckily for us, a team of local birders volunteered to marshal and organise the hordes and it actually all ran like clockwork (only 40 in the garden at a time, a queueing system, marshaled car parking etc). The "twitchers" were well behaved keeping behind the tapes we had draped around the viewing area (i.e. our car parking area!) and getting good views of the bird.

Sunday continued in the same vein and over the three days we probably had close to 400 people passing through the garden. We were very pleased to collect **nearly £750** to the Skokholm restoration appeal!

On Monday the Orphean-viewing was officially closed and we were able to breath a sigh of relief as we had a small lie-in and were able to get back to normal life.

But the bird is still here and people still want to come and see it so the saga is not yet over.....