

ORNITHOLIDAYS TOUR TO FRANCE – THE CAMARGUE, CEVENNES & CAUSSES
Birds & Butterflies

26 May – 02 June 2013



Leader: David Walsh

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A Personal Diary

Sunday 26th May

A Mediterranean Gull flew over to entertain the group at Montpellier airport as I obtained the keys to our Mercedes Vito prior to driving up the surprisingly empty motorway. It was bright and sunny, and the first of several Black Kites was noted gliding over the maquis. An hour or so later, at 6.55pm, we arrived at Hotel Robinson on the outskirts of Beaucaire. We were soon in our rooms and getting sorted. A little before 8pm we met in the lounge and relaxed over a glass of kir (white wine and crème de cassis) before heading to the restaurant. Asparagus in mustard sauce, roast pigeon and finally apple tart set the tone for a wonderful week of French cuisine. At Hotel Robinson wine with dinner is complimentary and tonight we were served Vin de Pays du Gard Blanc and Costières de Nimes Rouge. As we retired a Tawny Owl was calling outside our rooms.

Monday 27th May

The weather forecast was unequivocal: today would be the best day of the first three. La Crau is a flat, stony, semi-desert area and a walk in the area demands a calm, fine day; today's conditions were totally perfect. So after breakfast we headed straight to the Ecomusée in St Martin de Crau to pick up our permits for the flagship reserve at Peau de Meau. At 9.45am we set off from the car park on our clockwise loop. The noticeboards on the circuit were splendidly informative, and very soon we met a helpful warden who pointed out a Black Stork soaring overhead: our first 'write-in' within a few minutes of starting birding! Careful scrutiny of the numerous black-and-white butterflies indicated that they were Western Marbled Whites, new for all of us. To our left, two Stone Curlews gave splendid scope views; we were here early enough to avoid any heat haze. A Pin-tailed Sandgrouse flew over calling whilst we were watching the first of several Greater Short-toed Larks; we soon became proficient in distinguishing its song from that of the accompanying Common Skylarks. A Tawny Pipit was seen in song flight, and a Red-veined Darter became our first dragonfly as we drifted towards the 'bergerie', an isolated farm building so typical of the Crau. As we exchanged pleasantries with some German birdwatchers, a male Red-footed Falcon was spotted flying amongst the Lesser Kestrels nesting in the specially created 'boxes'. It flew off before we were able to get close, but any disappointment was short-lived when we heard one of the Germans shouting at us: we looked up, and there was a resplendent male Little Bustard heading towards us! It flew low overhead before disappearing into the distance: a magic moment. We were on a roll, and soon found a male Hen Harrier hunting over the grassland to the south.

Bath White, Clouded Yellow and Swallowtail were added to our butterfly list as we headed away from the buildings towards the Canal de Vergière, the prime dragonfly spot in the whole of Provence. Copper Demoiselle was the star attraction, but we also enjoyed Norfolk Hawker, Scarce Chaser and Banded Demoiselle. Shortly after 1pm, we began our picnic, making the most of the wonderfully warm weather. We decided to leave the two bottles of rosé until the evening, but we made serious inroads into the huge range of cold meats and cheeses as well as a tasty seafood salad. We weren't in a rush and there was plenty of time to look at a male Red-backed Shrike and our first singing Melodious Warbler, whilst a Eurasian Hoopoe and two European Turtle Doves flew past all too quickly. We also studied a couple of the damselflies and they proved to be Mediterranean Bluets, another speciality of the area.

After a brief stop at a meadow up the road, where a fine Short-toed Eagle was noted overhead, we made the short journey to the local range of limestone hills, Les Alpilles. We drove towards the picturesque village of Les Baux and took photos of the castle but, given the number of tourists, we didn't stop, instead making for a side road below Mont Valence. It was surprisingly quiet on the bird front: the eagle holding in the wind above the cliffs proved to be another Short-toed rather than the hoped-for Bonelli's, and the singing Subalpine Warblers were remarkably unco-operative. Nevertheless, Provence Chalk-hill Blue and Southern White Admiral were welcome additions to the butterfly list before we declared and headed back to base, arriving at 5.15pm, in time for some to explore the local area and others simply to relax. We met up at

7.15pm to enjoy our rosé wine from earlier and list the wonderful birds, butterflies and dragonflies we had seen. La Crau really had been at its best: we had been very fortunate with the weather. Parma ham and melon was followed by a veal cutlet, with macaroon and lemon sorbet rounding off a splendid meal.

Tuesday 28th May

One of the joys of Hotel Robinson is the fact that there are interesting birds to see and hear in the immediate vicinity, and a number of the group had daily pre-breakfast strolls, sometimes with me, sometimes on their own. Today's highlight along the old railway line was an obliging male Cirl Bunting, with a supporting cast of singing Cetti's and Melodious Warblers, Common Nightingales and European Serins. Red Valerian and Tordylium were two of the flowers adding colour to our walks.

We headed off at 8.30am and just half an hour later we were birding in the northern Camargue. There were many subtly different habitats to explore. First for us was a flooded rice field next to St Cécile farm which was playing host to 22 Glossy Ibis, a notable number even given the recent increase in the population of this species. We also enjoyed watching the handsome Mediterranean Gulls, the adults in pristine summer plumage, as well as our first Squacco Heron. The Cattle Egrets were also very smart and, when a group flew off, they were joined by a Black-crowned Night Heron. Black-winged Stilts in an adjacent field were the first of many, but the most photogenic of the whole day, being right by the road. We then headed down past the reeds and pools near Mas d'Agon ('mas' is the local word for farm) to a viewpoint on top of a small building by the main road. Our reward here was a Great Reed Warbler singing from the top of a reed; it stayed long enough to be scoped by everyone. We also spotted the first of several Common Cuckoos.

We drove to the reserve centre at La Capèlière, but the car park here was uniquely full of mosquitoes so, having got some useful 'gen', we moved on swiftly, first to a slightly rocky viewing platform over Marais de Grenouillet (Frog Marsh). Here we noted our first Crested Larks and Red-crested Pochards, but the birds were generally a bit distant. We attempted to explore the area to the east near Sambuc, hoping to find the Collared Pratincoles I had been told about at Capèlière but, with the wind picking up and a heavy shower threatening, we decided instead to make haste for La Palissade and onwards towards the sea. It was remarkably cold and windy, such a contrast to the previous day, but at least the rain had stopped. On a shallow lagoon, called Baisse de 500 Francs, we scoped an isolated gull which proved to be a full adult Audouin's Gull, my first ever in the Camargue! Buoyed by our success we persevered for half an hour or so, and on the next area of water found our main quarry, a group of 16 Slender-billed Gulls. Nearby there were several waders, with eight Little Stints, two Sanderlings and a Curlew Sandpiper the highlights. The late spring had meant that species such as these were still migrating through southern France when normally they would already be much further north.

We were fortunate that the owner of an outdoor café with a roof, named Chez Kathy, was happy for us to use her tables for our picnic lunch (given the weather, she didn't have many customers today). We were very grateful and, revived by warm drinks, we spent a profitable hour or so in the area. The sun came out and the adjacent tidal lagoon named Grau de Piemanson was home to four Sandwich and 10 Little Terns, a Pied Avocet, four Bar-tailed Godwits and a pair of Kentish Plovers as well as more Slender-billed Gulls, very close and in magnificent plumage. The omnipresent Greater Flamingos gave fine views both as they fed and, equally impressively, as they flew over, presumably en route to their nearby breeding colony. Eventually we headed back north, first for a muddy photostop at an enormous salt pile and then for a welcome comfort break in Salin de Giraud (with a bonus small gecko on the wall near the bus). At the area between Sambuc and Tour du Valat there were still no pratincoles, but we hugely enjoyed watching a pair of White Storks feeding their young at their roadside nest. I dutifully wrote up our sightings in the book at Capelière whilst the group headed to the nearest hide. A Little Egret was typically close and a Coypu our first, whilst a Great Egret was in full breeding plumage with its beak very dark, not the normal yellow.

For our last half hour we headed back to Mas d'Agon where a Savi's Warbler was buzzing close to the road and both Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns were noted feeding over the water. There must have been several thousand Common Swifts in the sky, a real feeding frenzy and one of the sights of the whole tour. We arrived back at the hotel a little before 6pm, meeting up again at 7.30pm to do the list and enjoy our rosé before relaxing over dinner. The weather had been mixed today, but we had been able to stick to our itinerary without any problem, and the list of birds we had seen was very impressive indeed.

Wednesday 29th May

Pre-breakfast highlights today were a singing Western Bonelli's Warbler along the railway line, both Common and Black Redstarts up the hill, a Sardinian Warbler near the tennis courts and a Red Squirrel in the pines. An excellent start to the day!

This morning we headed east of the Grand Rhone to an area between the 'dry Crau' that we had visited two days previously and the Vigueirat Marshes, a private reserve. En route we marvelled at the Abbaye de Montmajour to our left. We drove down a number of small roads, arriving at a very different habitat of numerous large trees, pastures and woodland. Here our main target was European Roller, known to be relatively common in the area. Our first, inevitably on a roadside wire, didn't hang around, so we pressed on, and soon we were rewarded with a splendid pair perched up on bushes, and we obtained fine scope views. A group of European Bee-eaters were heard flying over and, eventually, we scoped them too. Our run of form continued with a male Eurasian Golden Oriole in the woods behind us. Although our flight views were brief, the song was wonderfully evocative. All these colourful species were trumped by a stunning European Honey Buzzard which was sitting right by the road in front of the bus as we drove along. This was, for many of us, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see this species at such close quarters!

There was no opportunity to explore the heaths in search of shrikes due to the high fences and numerous 'Propriété privée défense d'entrer' signs! Instead we stuck to our main plan and headed back onto the main road, around Arles, then through St Gilles and the vast Costières de Nimes vineyards, and onwards to the Camargue Gardoise, west of the Petit Rhone. This area has the largest reedbeds and, to allow everyone to see the scale of the place, I first drove to a bridge beyond the village of Franquevaux which goes over the canal and gives a spectacular elevated view of the area. Via a comfort stop in Gallician, with yet another café owner happy for us to use the facilities, we mooched along a straight section of road between the vast lakes of Charnier and Scamandre. The reeds near the road had been cut, allowing us reasonable views of the water, and we noted numerous Squacco Herons and Red-crested Pochards as well as a couple of relatively obliging Purple Herons. For some, the highlight here was Bearded Reedling, calling frequently and flying from reed to reed. Western Marsh Harriers proved surprisingly scarce, but from the road we saw a fine pair quartering the reeds.

We enjoyed our picnic on comfortable tables at the new Scamandre visitor centre: there was a choice of sun or shade, with the weather kind to us today despite the breeze. We had a post-lunch stroll along the shortest of the three nature trails, with Lesser Emperor dragonfly proving especially photogenic. We also saw Blue-tailed Damselfly and a recently emerged Black-tailed Skimmer. Large Skipper and Green-veined Whites were additions to our butterfly list, whilst those sticking to the birds continued to enjoy the harriers, herons and ibises overhead.

Mid-afternoon we headed for the western section of the main Camargue north of Les-Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. My main objective was to find some close Greater Flamingos for the photographers, and this was easily accomplished. We chose not to enter the Parc Ornithologique and twitch the Lesser Flamingo which in any case was inevitably 'of unknown origin'! The main road back towards Arles is a fast one, which allowed us to move quickly back to Mas d'Agon for another look at the amazing swifts. A perched Eurasian Hobby gave splendid views, as did several European Bee-eaters on the wires and a party of Gull-billed Terns in a rice field. A Zitting Cisticola (still Fan-tailed Warbler for many of us) zitted over the reeds! There were opportunities for us to stretch our legs, although with storms around we didn't want to venture too far from the bus.

We returned to Hotel Robinson at 5.45pm, meeting up 90 minutes later for a drink and our last dinner at this hotel. The red wine tonight was a robust 14.5% Cotes du Rhone which meant we were in a mellow state as we began our packing in readiness for tomorrow's move. We had had another wonderful day in the Camargue, seeing a great variety of habitats as well as some very special birds and other wildlife. It's obviously not possible to see everything in the area in just three days but, without rushing around, we had made a very good attempt!

Thursday 30th May

A pair of European Rollers was enjoying the sunshine on the wires above the field opposite the hotel this morning, and we wondered whether we'd missed them on previous days or whether they had just taken up

residence? Either way, it was a fun bird to have on your doorstep, especially as we had made such an effort to find it the day before! We chose not to leave until 9am this morning so our breakfast was even more relaxed than usual, with Monsieur, as always, making sure our every needs were met.

Part two of our holiday was about to begin. We loaded up the bus and said our goodbyes before heading north. Pont du Gard was just a 20 minute drive away and, having parked up, we proceeded along the 'right bank' in terms of river flow but 'left bank' as we walked. The area was practically deserted, and the special birds performed splendidly. A European Honey Buzzard gave good flight views overhead, but it was three other species which caught our attention. Alpine Swifts and Eurasian Crag Martins were enjoyed at point blank range, and we ensured we saw both flying under, as well as over, the famous bridge! Soon afterwards, a Common Rock Sparrow was heard calling. I confidently pronounced that it would be on the bridge, not the ground, but was proved wrong. There it was, in front of us, just 20 metres away, close enough to see the yellow throat spot! We soon located three individuals, and one obligingly flew onto the bridge to make the photographs more atmospheric. Then we made sure that there was time to simply 'take in' the ancient Roman aqueduct bridge itself, looking wonderful in the bright sunshine, before returning to the bus along the main track.

We drove onwards towards Alès for an hour or so before stopping for a coffee. The bypass itself was full of boy racers, but once we were north of the town the roads quietened down, and soon after 12.30pm we arrived at Chateau Portes, a fine castle, where we took advantage of the picnic tables. It had clouded over so there was little point in looking for butterflies, although Small Heath and Common Blue were found in the grass. We were pleased to find our first singing Firecrest of the week. From here it took exactly an hour to reach Le Pont de Montvert and our hotel, home for the next three nights. The road was rather windy but remarkably free of traffic, and we enjoyed the lush woodland en route.

Finding the car park behind the hotel meant negotiating a narrow space between the building and the post vans, but it wasn't long before we had picked up the keys from an unmanned front desk and begun to settle into our rooms. Each of them had a balcony overlooking the River Tarn, although at this stage the temperature was sufficiently low that closing shutters and turning on radiators was the way forward!

There was time for a brief siesta before we gathered at 3.30pm to begin our exploration of the Cévennes. It was cloudy and drizzly so I decided a tootle was the best plan with roadside stops i) when we found something and ii) if it was dry enough to disembark. This proved very successful and, in the event, there was very little precipitation. We headed north-east of the town along a narrow but deserted road through a couple of small hamlets named Villeneuve and L'Hôpital; it was clear that many buildings were unoccupied, but we were told later that some were being restored as holiday homes. We thoroughly enjoyed the flowers which included Meadow Saxifrage, Wild Pansies and the leaves of Yellow Gentian. There were several Elder-flowered, Heath Spotted and Early Purple Orchids by the road and carpets of Pheasant's Eye Narcissi and Wild Daffodils in the fields. We added a number of relatively common birds to our list, including Tree Pipit and Common Stonechat, but we saved the best till last. Three Ortolan Buntings gave magnificent views just a kilometre or so from our hotel, perching on the ground, low bushes and wires. One of the Cévennes' star birds was safely under the belt. We were pleased we studied them carefully because, as it happened, we never found any others!

We arrived back at 5.45pm and there was time for some of the group to stroll into town, locating our first White-throated Dippers and Grey Wagtails. It wasn't warm enough to sit outside, so we convened in the hotel bar at 7.30pm. The room next to the restaurant proved a satisfactory place to do our bird list before we adjourned to eat. Our hotel provided us with splendid four course meals, usually starting with a tasty soup and ending with a choice of desserts. The town of Le Pont de Montvert was full of signs and books reminding us that Robert Louis Stevenson had passed through on his travels and, indeed, our most popular wine, a fine Gamay, was named *Modestine* after his donkey! We had made the most of our 'transfer day' and retired in eager anticipation of a full day in the hills.

Friday 31st May

Some of us had an early morning stroll into the woods south-west of the town, noting European Serin, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Nuthatch and Marsh Tit. Breakfast was at 7.45am; we enjoyed the superbly fresh croissants, and tried to identify the various jams. It was clear that our picnic would arrive when it

arrived, and that was unlikely to be any time soon, so I suggested to the group that they looked for the White-throated Dipper from one of the bridges in the town, and it obliged splendidly!

At 9.10am, dressed in full winter plumage, we headed north. Would it really be June tomorrow? It was too windy to spend long looking for Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush at our stake-out, so instead we carried on to the Col de Finiels, the highest point on the road at 1,541 metres altitude. The moorland looked promising, but we couldn't see a bird, so we proceeded to the ski station below Mont Lozère. We found a couple of sheltered spots and, listening intently, soon located Goldcrest and Coal Tit before finding our two main targets, Crested Tit and Citril Finch. The former perched up wonderfully, really showing off its distinctive shape, but the latter was, at first, a little less obliging. We persevered for a while before pausing for coffee in a surprisingly up-market auberge. Revived, we tried again for Citril Finch, and this time everyone scored with three birds seen in the pines and then feeding on the ground. This species can be elusive at times so we were thrilled to have seen it so well and with relatively little effort.

There was no escaping the fact that it was cold on the mountain so we headed back to base and then south-west along the Tarn valley towards Florac, before heading right to a meadow by the Briançon stream. This should have been full of butterflies; our highlight was a fine Sooty Copper, with Glanville Fritillary, Orange Tip and Brown Argus the supporting cast, but it was cool so little was flying. The flowers were interesting and included Navelwort and Meadow Clary.

Rather than retracing our steps, we decided to complete a clockwise loop, so continued up the valley, stopping and pottering at a couple of likely spots, with a rather cold Green-underside Blue our best find. At the top of the valley we admired the pimple-shaped Bondon Hills to our left and prehistoric menhirs (standing stones) to our right. We were pleased when a Red Kite gave a close fly-past. Drifting on through an area of road works, I heard a Rock Bunting so stopped the bus, got out and scanned. Eventually we located it on top of a bush and, through the scope, it was very impressive, a particularly well-marked individual.

Back in Le Pont de Montvert we enjoyed a tea stop in the village. Some decided to spend a little longer in the shops, whilst others joined me for the short journey into the Bougès forest to the south. The trees were wonderful but the birds very quiet, which made it all the more startling when a Black Woodpecker flew across a gap in the trees calling repeatedly. What a bonus! It vocalised for several minutes but didn't show again, so we returned to the hotel with time to spare before dinner. We'd had a splendidly varied day but hoped for sun in the morning.

Saturday 1st June

We strolled into the woods to the south-east this morning; they were remarkably quiet but the walk at least meant we were suitably ready for breakfast!

At 9.15am, with picnic and extra bananas on board, we headed expectantly down the road towards Florac and then up some awesome hairpins onto the Causse Méjean, an area of rolling limestone uplands, essentially 'steppe' habitat not found elsewhere in France. A number of new species awaited us, and we weren't in a hurry, so we stopped whenever we saw something of interest. It wasn't long before our first group of Eurasian Griffon Vultures were noted holding into the wind, and a little further on I heard a Short-toed Treecreeper singing in a roadside plantation; we disembarked and had very respectable views. Several Stinking Hellebores were growing nearby. A trilling Cirl Bunting caused us to pause again, and we quickly added Red-billed Chough, Common Raven, Woodlark, Mistle Thrush and Pasque Flower to our list.

A little later came one of the absolute highlights of the trip. We turned left by a small airstrip, by which time we really were in the middle of nowhere with fields of grass on either side. We drove slowly, anticipating raptors, and almost immediately an immature Montagu's Harrier appeared, soon followed by a stunning adult male. We watched both for several minutes at very close range, the audible silence inside the bus reflecting the splendour of the moment. Bird of the Trip!

Our good form continued in the village of Nivoliers, its thick-walled buildings typical of the area. 'What's that bird on the post?' was the question, 'Wryneck' the answer! A couple of kilometres further on, we made a planned stop just beyond another hamlet, le Villaret, where we found Corn Buntings, Red-backed Shrikes and Common Rock Sparrows as well as information about the local Przewalski horses. After confirming that

the wheatears were Northern, not Black-eared, we returned to Nivoliers where we enjoyed hot drinks at an auberge and obtained permission to picnic on their tables. The locals really were wonderfully friendly throughout the week. The decision to have our lunch here proved a masterstroke for all sorts of reasons, with a Western Orphean Warbler singing just outside and a Common Quail calling down the road.

Just beyond another hamlet, Hures, we looked for our stake-out, 'an isolated tree'! It took a bit of finding, but our perseverance paid off. For the best part of an hour the group did their own thing and between us we found an Aymonin's Orchid, endemic to these parts, as well as a number of Early Spider and Burnt Orchids and Little Blue, Small Copper and Grizzled Skipper of the southern race. I have to say that this period was one of my personal highlights of the tour, everyone engrossed in whatever took their fancy. Common Globularia and Yellow Rockrose were amongst the other plants noted.

We headed for the Col de Perjuret, a noted orchid spot. Here and elsewhere we could unfortunately only find Early Purple and Elder-flowered Orchids, it being clear that the season was significantly less advanced than usual. There was time for a brief visit to another hamlet, l'Hom, from where we could admire the karst rock formations of Nimes-le-Vieux (named because the features were supposed to remind us of a petrified city, the old Nimes). A Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush was noted briefly, but good views were clearly going to elude us. A Tawny Pipit on the ground right next to the bus was much more obliging.

We headed back to Nivoliers for a tea break before retracing our steps to Florac, where there was a convenient petrol station, and thence to Le Pont de Montvert. Here the sun was shining and the locals were actually sitting outside at the cafés! We returned to our hotel and, having done the bird list, convened in the restaurant for dinner. We were treated to a complimentary 'kir chataigne' (white wine and chestnut) before another excellent meal. It had been a superb day in one of the most understated parts of the Massif Central.

Sunday 2nd June

I offered a final pre-breakfast excursion in the bus, and so some of us headed up towards Mont Lozère, more in hope than expectation. It was extremely cold and windy so we quickly abandoned thoughts of looking for Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and continued on to the marshy area beyond the col, with a few Northern Wheatears as our reward. The forests weren't much birdier, although we did see our first Brown Hare of the week, so we returned to base for a hot coffee and our last breakfast together. En route we were able to photograph Eurasian Crag Martins as they sat in the sun on one of the houses.

We packed up and left around 9.30am, allowing ourselves time to enjoy a last look around the town; it was sunny, and warming up by this stage. We tried again for Black Woodpecker; no joy, but some recorded Common Crossbill by way of compensation. Then we headed on up into the hills, splendid mixed woodland on the wetter northern side and very different trees on the warmer southern flank, which today was remarkably sheltered. A Woodlark as well as a pair of Eurasian Bullfinch were noted from the bus, the latter our first of the week. We had nearly reached the main road at St Julien d'Arpaon when I spotted a butterfly from the bus so we decided to investigate. Green Hairstreak and Wall Brown were easy to identify, Chapman's Blue and Sooty Copper a little less so and a fritillary required a photo! It was later found to be a Provençal Fritillary, new for everyone!

The main road down to Alès was wonderfully scenic and, as elsewhere, relatively free of traffic. As lunchtime approached, we found a shady lay-by with a picnic table; as a bonus, there was also a pleasant café which served coffee and provided the necessary facilities. Then, via the main road to Nimes and the motorway, we made our way to the airport, a convoy of Christian caravans delaying us only briefly. We returned the bus and checked-in without undue hassle, and it wasn't long before Easyjet were delivering us safely to Gatwick. Despite the mixed weather in the hills, it had been a splendidly enjoyable week with a great variety of wildlife and scenery and some super food and wine. We said our goodbyes knowing that some fine photos would be exchanged and many memories shared.

Birds of the Trip (voted by the group)

- 1st Montagu's Harrier
- 2nd Little Bustard
- 3rd European Honey Buzzard
- 4th Citril Finch
- 5th Ortolan Bunting
- 6th Eurasian Wryneck
- 7th European Bee-eater
- 8th European Roller
- 9th Crested Tit
- 10th Common Swift (in vast numbers)

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all of you for sharing your knowledge so freely during week – it was great to be able to identify so many butterflies, dragonflies and flowers as well as the birds. Thanks too for your fortitude when it was colder than expected, but most of all thanks for your enthusiasm and good humour which made the week such fun. Special thanks to Sandy and John for allowing us to use your photographs in this report, and to Andrew for sending me a list of the flowers after the trip. Thanks, too, to Guy Padfield for helping us identify the mystery fritillary.

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August 2013



Elder-flowered Orchids



Aymonin's Orchid



Burnt Orchid

Itinerary and Weather

Sunday 26th May	Flight from Gatwick to Montpellier, arriving late afternoon, then transfer to Hotel Robinson in Beaucaire
Monday 27th May	Morning walk and picnic on La Crau Afternoon in Les Alpilles Sunny and calm am, sunny spells pm, max 22°C
Tuesday 28th May	Whole day in the north and east Camargue Cloudy with occasional showers, windy, max 14°C
Wednesday 29th May	Morning on the 'Wet Crau' east of the Grand Rhone Lunch and early afternoon in the Camargue Gardoise west of the Petit Rhone Late afternoon in the west and north Camargue Sunny and calm am, scattered showers pm, max 18°C
Thursday 30th May	Drive to Le Pont de Montvert via Pont du Gard and Chateau Portes, arriving at our hotel mid-afternoon Late afternoon drive north-east of village Sunny am (max 21°C), cloudy and showery pm (max 10°C)
Friday 31st May	Morning around Mont Lozère Lunch in the Briançon valley then clockwise loop to Pont de Montvert Late afternoon in Bougès Forest Showery am, mainly cloudy pm, cold NW wind, max 12°C
Saturday 1st June	Whole day on Causse Méjean including Nivoliers and Nimes-le-Vieux Sunny, windy am easing pm, max 18°C
Sunday 2nd June	Drive via Bougès Forest to Montpellier for late afternoon flight to Gatwick Sunny, windy, max 21°C



Pont du Gard

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

Max no of days seen or heard	Locations	Abundance scale
Maximum = 7	A = Camargue/Crau/Alpilles/Pont du Gard	Maximum seen (on one day)
h = heard only	B = Cevennes/Causse Mejean	1 = 1-4
		2 = 5-9
		3 = 10-99
		4 = 100-999

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Locations	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Mute Swan	2	A	3	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
Common Shelduck	1	A	3	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Mallard	3	A	3	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Gadwall	1	A	1	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Northern Shoveler	1	A	1	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Red-crested Pochard	2	A	3	<i>Netta rufina</i>
Red-legged Partridge	1	1h	B	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>
Common Quail	-	1h	B	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
Common Pheasant	2	A	1	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Little Grebe	1	A	1	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	2	A	2	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Great Cormorant	1	A	1	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	2	A	1	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Squacco Heron	2	A	3	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Cattle Egret	3	A	3	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Little Egret	3	A	3	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Great Egret	2	A	2	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
Grey Heron	4	A	B	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Purple Heron	3	A	2	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
White Stork	3	A	3	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Black Stork	1	A	1	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
Glossy Ibis	2	A	3	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Greater Flamingo	2	A	4	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
Eurasian Griffon Vulture	1	B	3	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>
Short-toed Eagle	5	A	B	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Red Kite	1	B	1	<i>Milvus milvus</i>
Black Kite	7	A	B	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	3	A	1	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Hen Harrier	1	A	1	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	1	B	1	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
Common Buzzard	7	A	B	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
European Honey Buzzard	2	A	1	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
Common Kestrel	8	A	B	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Lesser Kestrel	1	A	1	<i>Falco naumanni</i>
Red-footed Falcon	1	A	1	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>
Eurasian Hobby	2	A	1	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Common Moorhen	2	A	1	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot	2	A	3	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Little Bustard	1	A	1	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	1	A	1	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Pied Avocet	1	A	1	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Black-winged Stilt	2	A	3	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Stone Curlew	1	A	2	<i>Burhinus oedinenus</i>
Common Ringed Plover	1	A	2	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Kentish Plover	1	A	1	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Northern Lapwing	1	A	1	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Sanderling	1	A	1	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	1	A	1	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Little Stint	1	A	2	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
Common Redshank	1	A	3	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	1	A	1	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>

Black-headed Gull	2		A		4	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Slender-billed Gull	1		A		3	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>
Mediterranean Gull	3		A		3	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	5		A		3	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Audouin's Gull	1		A		1	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
Gull-billed Tern	2		A		2	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
Little Tern	2		A		3	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
Sandwich Tern	1		A		1	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
Common Tern	2		A		2	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Whiskered Tern	2		A		1	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	-	1h	A		1	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	6		A	B	3	<i>Columba livia</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	6		A	B	2	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	6		A	B	3	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
European Turtle Dove	1	2h	A		1	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Common Cuckoo	2	1h	A	B	1	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Tawny Owl	-	1h	A		1	<i>Strix aluco</i>
Common Swift	7		A	B	5	<i>Apus apus</i>
Alpine Swift	1		A		3	<i>Apus melba</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	3		A	B	1	<i>Upupa epops</i>
European Bee-eater	2	1h	A		3	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
European Roller	3		A		1	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
Black Woodpecker	1			B	1	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
European Green Woodpecker	-	4h	A	B	1	<i>Picus viridis</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1			B	1	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Eurasian Wryneck	1			B	1	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
Common Skylark	5		A	B	3	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Crested Lark	2		A		2	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Woodlark	2	1h		B	2	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
Greater Short-toed Lark	2		A		2	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Common Sand Martin	1		A		1	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Eurasian Crag Martin	4		A	B	3	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
Barn Swallow	7		A	B	3	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common House Martin	7		A	B	3	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Tawny Pipit	2		A	B	1	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Tree Pipit	3			B	2	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
White Wagtail	4		A	B	2	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Yellow Wagtail	2		A		2	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Grey Wagtail	4			B	2	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White-throated Dipper	4			B	1	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>
Dunnock	1	1h		B	1	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
European Robin	3	2h	A	B	2	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Common Nightingale	3	4h	A	B	3	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
Common Redstart	2	1h	A	B	1	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Black Redstart	8		A	B	3	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Northern Wheatear	2			B	2	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Common Stonechat	3			B	2	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
Mistle Thrush	1	1h		B	1	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Common Blackbird	2	2h		B	2	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush	1			B	1	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>
Blackcap	4	3h	A	B	2	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Common Whitethroat	4			B	1	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
Western Orphean Warbler	-	1h		B	1	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>
Sardinian Warbler	1	2h	A		1	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Subalpine Warbler	1		A		1	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
Cetti's Warbler	2	2h	A		1	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Zitting Cisticola	2	1h	A		1	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Savi's Warbler	-	2h	A		1	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>
European Reed Warbler	1	2h	A		2	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Great Reed Warbler	2		A		2	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
Melodious Warbler	5		A	B	1	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
Western Bonelli's Warbler	1		A		1	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>
Common Chiffchaff	-	2h		B	1	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>

Goldcrest	1	1h		B	1	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Firecrest	1	3h		B	2	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
Winter Wren	-	3h		B	1	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Great Tit	7		A	B	3	<i>Parus major</i>
Coal Tit	1	1h		B	3	<i>Pariparus ater</i>
European Blue Tit	5		A	B	2	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Crested Tit	1			B	1	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>
Marsh Tit	1	1h		B	1	<i>Poecile palustris</i>
Bearded Reedling	1		A		1	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	1			B	1	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Short-toed Treecreeper	1	2h	A	B	1	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
Red-backed Shrike	2		A	B	2	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
Common Magpie	8		A	B	3	<i>Pica pica</i>
Eurasian Jay	6		A	B	2	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Red-billed Chough	1			B	3	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Western Jackdaw	7		A	B	4	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Carrion Crow	7		A	B	3	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Common Raven	1			B	1	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Common Starling	7		A	B	3	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Eurasian Golden Oriole	1	3h	A		1	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
House Sparrow	8		A	B	3	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	1		A		2	<i>Passer montanus</i>
Common Rock Sparrow	2		A	B	1	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
Common Chaffinch	7		A	B	2	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Common Linnet	4		A	B	3	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	5	1h	A	B	2	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Citril Finch	1			B	1	<i>Carduelis citrinella</i>
European Greenfinch	1	1h	A	B	1	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
European Serin	6	1h	A	B	2	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	1			B	1	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Common Crossbill	1			B	1	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
Ortolan Bunting	1			B	1	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
Yellowhammer	2	1h		B	1	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Cirl Bunting	4	1h	A	B	1	<i>Emberiza cirrus</i>
Rock Bunting	2			B	1	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
Corn Bunting	3		A	B	2	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>

BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	Provence Chalk-hill Blue	<i>Lysandra hispana</i>
Green-veined White	<i>Artogeia napi</i>	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>	Southern White Admiral	<i>Limenitis reducta</i>
Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	Glanville Fritillary	<i>Melitaea cinxia</i>
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>	Provençal Fritillary	<i>Mellicta deione</i>
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	Western Marbled White	<i>Melanargia occitanica</i>
Sooty Copper	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
Little Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
Green-underside Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>	Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae malvoides</i>
Chapman's Blue	<i>Agrodiaetus thersites</i>	Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes venatus</i>

DRAGONFLIES

Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>	Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Copper Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx haemorrhoidalis</i>	Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	Scarce Chaser	<i>Libellula fulva</i>
Mediterranean Bluet	<i>Coenagrion caerulescens</i>	Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>
Norfolk Hawker	<i>Aeshna isoceles</i>	Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>

This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.



Greater Flamingo



Slender-billed Gulls



Black-winged Stilt



Squacco Heron



Common Rock Sparrow



Crested Tit



Citril Finch



White Storks on nest



European Bee-eater



Green-underside Blue



Pheasant's Eye Narcissus



Eurasian Hobby



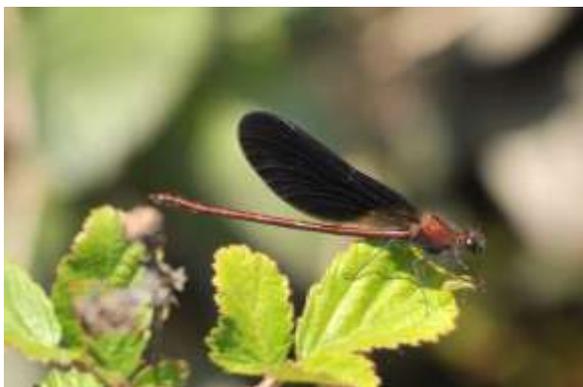
Cirl Bunting



Western Marbled White



Sooty Cooper



Copper Demoiselle



Lesser Emperor

Front cover: European Honey Buzzard

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