

ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO ITALY AT LEISURE
Birds & Wine

05 - 12 June 2013



Leaders: Mike Witherick and Nicola Scatassi

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A Personal Diary

Wednesday, 05 June

One advantage of leaving the UK very early in the morning is that check-ins are speedy and flights leave on time. In fact, our flight from Gatwick to Milan left and arrived a little ahead of schedule. It was good to find that a significant number of clients in the party had previously met on Ornitholidays' tours. The pleasure for me was that all 12 had previously travelled with me, so it was a matter of renewing acquaintances. Our flight over the Alps produced some spectacular views of snow-capped peaks totally clear of any sort of cloud.

Nicola and Luca were at the airport to meet us and soon we were loading our baggage and ourselves aboard two vehicles. Thanks to a splendid network of autostrada, we reached our hotel at Valnontey, high in the Gran Paradiso National Park, in around 150 minutes. The weather was warm and sunny and we gained some good views of the Mont Blanc massif. Earlier on in the journey, as we crossed the area of the Po ricefields, our first bird sightings were of Grey Heron, Little Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron.

Some 30 minutes after checking-in at our welcoming family-run hotel, we were sitting down to a good lunch and, setting the tone for the tour, there were two local wines to compliment the meal - a Petite Arvine and a Mayolet. Afterwards, we allowed ourselves an hour's break in which to rest and settle in our rooms. We met up at 3.30 pm for a gentle walk up one side of the river with its fast flowing meltwater and boulder bed and back down the other. What quickly became evident was that this part of Italy, like the UK, had experienced a very cold spring. The net outcome was that birds were in short supply, and butterflies non-existent. But there were some splashes of colour provided by patches of flowers, such as the Spring Gentian, Alpine Snowbell and Primula. Our best birds were White-throated Dipper and Golden Eagle. We opened our mammal list with Chamois, Alpine Ibex and Marmot. But above all else, we were able to marvel at the magnificent alpine scenery and enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the place.

We met in the basement at 7.15 pm for the checklist. Soon we were sitting down to another splendid meal. The accompanying wines were a local Chardonnay and a Pinot Noir - the latter was well received. Like those at lunchtime, both wines were produced by the local wine co-operative. After the meal, we hastened to our rooms to catch up on lost sleep.

Thursday, 06 June

It was a cold start to the day for those who ventured out for a short spell of pre-breakfast birding. There was little by way of birdlife to be seen, save for our first views of a Red-backed Shrike in the form of a splendid male.

We breakfasted at 7.30 am and an hour later left the hotel for the day's excursion. Our route took us down into the Aosta valley where we joined the autostrada that leads to France under Mont Blanc. For much of the time, we were driving through long tunnels, the construction of which must have required much engineering skill and vast amounts of capital. Eventually, we turned off and climbed up into the La Thuile valley, and eventually we turned off that and climbed up a very narrow track almost to a height of 2,000 metres. We parked the vehicles and spent the remainder of the morning walking along a stretch of more-or-less level track. The views were something to die for. There was certainly much more snow about than on previous tours. It may have been a little quiet birdwise, but nonetheless we saw some good species, such as Rock Bunting, Water and Tree Pipits, Northern Wheatear, Whinchat and Common Linnet. We saw an amazing number of Alpine Choughs and in one flock Luca spotted a lone Red-billed Chough. Several Golden Eagles put in brief appearances, but the star of the birds was an adult Lammergeier which came gliding towards head on.

Whilst things may have been quiet in terms of butterflies, we did manage to see plenty of Green Hairstreaks and both Large and Small Tortoiseshells. There was plenty to see in terms of flora. Attracting particular

interest were the two species of gentian - *Gentiana acauli* and *Gentiana nivalis* (Alpine Gentian). Other interesting plants included *Ranunculus kuepferi*, the Yellow Star of Bethlehem and Carline Thistle.

We ate our very acceptable packed lunches in pleasantly warm sunshine - the cold rice salad was particularly good. Afterwards, we loaded up and started our descent to the ski resort of La Thuile. On the way, we stopped to see some Yellowhammers. But while we were doing so, to our utter delight two immature Lammergeiers flew incredibly close to us and spent some time quartering the slope just above the track. They certainly offered some good photo opportunities. Several Mountain Clouded Yellows were seen.

Most took advantage of the chance to take a nap while Nico and Luca drove us back down to the Aosta valley and then up the Valsavarenche. We were awoken when a small herd of Alpine Ibex was spotted close to the roadside. Such was their tameness that we were able to disembark from the vehicles and take many photos at remarkably close hand. Having climbed to the end of the road, we parked up and made all speed to the bar where we purchased either ice creams or a drink. How lovely to sit out in the sun and to relax for a short while. Suitably refreshed, we then walked further up the valley. During the walk, three species of bird showed particularly well, namely Rock Bunting, Water Pipit and Willow Tit.

Later we descended once again to the Aosta valley, passing the Pope's summer residence at Intro. A short drive took us to the entrance of the Cogne valley where we stopped and watched several White-throated Dippers. The air temperature was comfortably warm and this seemed to have sparked some butterflies to take to the wing. We saw Common Blue, Green-underside Blue and Small Heath.

We arrived back at the hotel around 6.15 pm which allowed us an hour of R and R before meeting up to do the checklist. Afterwards we went up to the restaurant for another fine meal. The wines tonight were a Muller-Thurgau and a Torrete. Both wines received considerable approval.

Friday, 07 June

The number opting for some pre-breakfast birding was significantly down on yesterday. Maybe it was the early morning chill that was the deterrent. However, those who did venture out saw Common Redpolls and Fieldfares busily nest building.

Today's excursion took us to the Mont Avic Regional Park which lies just to the north-east of the San Paradiso National Park. The journey there took a little short of two hours, but involved a long climb up to a height a little short of 2,000 metres - the last part required negotiating a fairly rough track. As we suspected, much of the area we had hoped to explore for its flora and birds was largely snow-covered. As a result, both were in short supply. As for flowers, there were those that are the first to appear after the snow has melted - such as stonecrop, crocus and two species of gentian. Birds seen included Water Pipit, Northern Wheatear and Whinchat. Alas there was no sign of the White-winged Snowfinches that have bred in the stone wall of a gaunt building for a number of years. We were also surprised by the absence of Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes.

In the light of the extensive snow cover, we decided to drive to a lower altitude in the hope of finding some butterflies and more interesting plants. As regards the latter, we came across some Mountain Tulips that were about to flower. Also seen were Early Purple Orchid and Water Avens in amongst dense but extensive carpets of Dandelion. The location of our lunch stop was determined by the presence of a Western Bonelli's Warbler which showed well. In the same vicinity, we also saw Blue, Great and Coal Tits.

After lunch, we descended to Chardonney where, despite the attraction of the name, we went to a bar and enjoyed a hot drink or an ice cream. From there we dropped down into the Aosta valley and revisited the same riverside location as late yesterday at the entrance to the Cogne valley. The same two species of blue butterfly were seen, plus our first Brimstones and a remarkably tatty Camberwell Beauty. Diana was interested to find some specimens of Birthwort.

At 4 pm we boarded the vehicles and drove the short distance to the winery of the Onze Commune, where we learnt about the wine cooperative and were able to see the infrastructure involved in modern wine making. There were some 10 wines on offer in the tasting. Even when it came to the tasting, modern technology was evident, namely in the form of a self-service wine sampler. We sat out in the warm and

worked our way through some, if not most of the wines. Nibbles of cheese and various meats were also provided. From the raised terrace, we were able to admire a fine view up, across and down the Aosta valley. From this vantage point, a Eurasian Hoopoe was seen feeding in a field of recently cut hay, whilst a European Serin was seen using a TV aerial as a perch.

We arrived back at the hotel at 6.15 pm, thus giving us some time to freshen up before doing the checklist and sitting down to another excellent meal. The two wines tonight were a Rose and a Torette Superiore

Saturday, 08 June

The number of pre-breakfast birds was up on yesterday and those who opted to fill their lungs with chill mountain air were rewarded by two new species for the tour, namely Eurasian Treecreeper and Garden Warbler, the latter giving particularly good views. During breakfast, an unusual sighting in this location and at this altitude was of a Eurasian Collared Dove. Is this immigrant species still extending its range?

After breakfast, we dropped down into the Aosta valley and turned left towards the French border. Having left the autostrada, we passed through the attractive town of Courmayeur set against the awesome backdrop provided by the Mont Blanc looking its best in the morning sunlight. Here we turned right and into the Val Ferret. Up until yesterday, the road into the valley had been closed because of fears of a major landslide. Meltwater from the retreating snow had so saturated part of the valley side above the town that a major landslide was thought to be imminent. Indeed, a number of houses had been evacuated. In the event, we found that we could only drive some five km up the valley until the road was blocked by a number of avalanches. However, we made a number of stops mainly for botanic interest. Plants of interest included Elderflower Orchid, Alpine Butterwort, Butterbur, Ox-eye Daisy and Birds-eye Primrose. On the birding front, there were White-throated Dippers, Grey Wagtails and Garden Warblers. At one stop, we watched a Golden Eagle stoop and land in a larch, from there it dropped onto a rocky ledge and disappeared - presumably there was a nest nearby.

From that spot, we retreated to the main road and then made our way up the Val Veny which runs along the foot of the Mont Blanc massif in the opposite direction. Here too our progress was eventually halted - this time by a locked gate. On the way back, we stopped at a point that afforded a good view of tributary glacier, now apparently in full retreat. Particularly impressive were the glacier's lateral and retreat moraines - immense ridge-like features made up of rocks of various sizes - and the glacier's polished rock floor.

In less than an hour, we returned to the location above La Thuile which we had visited two days ago. We first had our lunch and then did a short walk along the track. The only difference was that today there were no Lammergeier, but we did hear the calls of Rock Partridge. However, despite scanning the slopes with scope and binos, we were unable to spot any.

The next stop in the day's itinerary was down in the winter resort of La Thuile, where we indulged ourselves with a hot drink in a busy bar. On the river outside, we enjoyed very good views of an adult and immature White-throated Dipper. Along the same stretch, a young Grey Wagtail was seen nervously climbing some of the boulders. From La Thuile, we took the back road up and over the wooded mountains to the Aosta valley.

Our final stop of the day was in the village of Gimillan, just above Cogne. Our intended walk was curtailed by the threatened onset of some persistent rain. Yellowhammer and Black Redstart were all that we could manage to see in the time. We arrived back at the hotel a little before 6 pm.

Our final meal at the Hotel Herbetet was a particularly convivial affair. This was not just due to the wine, but also to the liqueurs and the 'friendship cup' which four of us shared - a lethal mixture of hot black coffee, grappa and brandy! Needless to say we all slept well and decided to dispense with any pre-breakfast birding tomorrow.

Sunday, 09 June

It was just as well that there was no pre-breakfast birding as the start of the day was distinctly damp. There were even a few rumbles of thunder. With commendable punctuality, we were all loaded up and ready to leave the hotel by 8.30 am. Having said farewell to Natalie, we headed down to the Aosta valley for the last time. By now the rain was heavy and thunder claps frequent. However, once we had left the mountains for

the Po lowlands, the cloud base lifted and precipitation reduced to a few spots. Around 10 am we stopped at a motorway service area for a break and here we came across our first Italian Sparrows, while some saw a Short-toed Eagle.

Soon we left the autostrada and took a lesser road running between ricefields. Three species of bird were present, namely Little Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron and Hooded Crow. In some fields there were also Black-winged Stilt and Lapwing. Eventually, we made a stop outside a thermal power station. The cooling water pond held large numbers of Mallard and a few Great Crested Grebes. Several Purple Herons flew over. But possibly the keenest interest focused on three species of butterfly - Marbled Fritillary, Painted Lady and a fine specimen of the rare Large Chequered Skipper. A hawk moth also showed well.

Our next stop was at a set of gravel workings that are in the process of being groomed into a nature reserve. Here we saw Great Egret, Little Grebe and Common Tern. Fairly close by there was a small European Bee-eater colony and some time was spent admiring these birds, especially when they were perched. Marsh Warblers sang nearby and some of the group converted the 'heard' into a checklist tick.

It was a little before 1 pm when we reached the San Sebastiano Resort, our base for the next three nights. It did not take too long for us to be shown to our rooms (rooms being the operative word for some of the allocations). Soon we met for a truly excellent three-course lunch. The two wines chosen to accompany the meal were a Piemonte Cortese and a Barbera de Monferrato. Feeling more than replete, we had an hour of R & R in which to ready ourselves for the 'second half' of a very tough day.

We left base at 3.30 pm and made for the village of Vignale. The countryside here to the south of the River Po is one of rolling farmland and hill-top settlements. Unfortunately, as we made our way there, we passed through some very heavy rain. Although it had stopped raining by the time we reached the location for starting our intended walk, the track surface was found to be one of highly glutinous mud. Undaunted, we completed most of the intended walk. New sightings included Melodious Warbler, European Turtle Dove and Common Pheasant. Eurasian Golden Orioles were heard. Several Large Skippers and many Meadow Browns were seen, despite the recent rain and dripping vegetation. Betony and St Bernard's Lily were two notable plants. Much time and effort was spent cleaning our footwear before boarding the vehicles and entering the premises involved in the next part of the day's programme.

It was after 5 pm when we drove up to Vignale and spent the next couple of hours at a small organic winery. Here we tasted four different reds. All were agreed that the Barbera Superiore was the best and enquiries were made about the possibility of shipping a case or two to the UK. From here, we then went to an 18th century house where we sampled a Cortese made by the owner and then proceeded upstairs to a lovely room where we sat down to a splendid nine-course meal, during which we tasted two more reds.

It was well after 10 pm when we arrived back at the resort. We hastened to our rooms in the hope, digestion permitting, of a good night's rest.

Monday, 10 June

There was a modest turnout for 30 minutes of pre-breakfast birding which involved a gentle stroll along the road to the village and back. There were plenty of Blackcaps singing, but only one of them was glimpsed. Eurasian Tree Sparrow and Great Spotted Woodpecker were new sightings for the tour.

After breakfast, we drove for just over an hour to a location on the eastern side of the Scrivia River, and it was here on the flood plain that we spent the rest of the morning, not just bird watching but also looking at flowers and butterflies. The most common bird in this particular area was European Bee-eater. The remarkable features of the European Bee-eaters here is that they dig nesting holes in level ground rather than in embankments. The holes are excavated in slightly raised areas of sandy soil. At the river itself, a Stone Curlew was seen in flight; Little Ringed Plovers were clearly nesting hereabouts; Black-winged Stilts waded in the shallow waters. We saw several Eurasian Hobbies and a single Black Kite. A Melodious Warbler sang from a perch in a dead tree. Butterflies seen included Western Dappled White, Small White, Brown Argus, Painted Lady and Common Blue. Two species of orchid - Fragrant and Pyramidal - were seen in the dog-training area. Another notable sighting was of Meadow Clary.

Our picnic lunch was a very splendid affair laid out on some shaded picnic tables - a rustic tart, cold meats, a splendid cheese and an almond torte were amongst the fare on offer. Three bottles of Cortese added to the pleasure of the meal.

Having cleared up, we boarded the vehicles and drove for some 30 minutes into the foothills of the Apennines - a lovely rolling countryside. Here we enjoyed views of a variety of colourful birds. All in all, we came across four European Rollers, and of these the most memorable were the pair spotted sitting on a bale roll. A rare sighting in Italy was of a pair of Black-headed Buntings which were seen well as they perched on telegraph wires. Corn and Ortolan Buntings showed well, but a Moltoni's Warbler was only prepared to give glimpses. Skylarks and Woodlarks were spotted in flight. We saw our first Marbled White butterfly.

We arrived back at San Sebastiano around 6.30 pm and met up an hour later to do the checklist in the garden. A glass of Chardonnay helped us to cope with a double log call, there being no opportunity yesterday to do a checklist. It was around 8 pm when we retired indoors to consume an excellent four-course meal.

Tuesday, 11 June

There was a good turn-out for this morning's pre-breakfast stroll up to the village and back. Long-tailed Tits were seen in the fir tree by the gate and a Green Woodpecker was heard.

After a buffet breakfast taken in the garden, we drove the relative short distance to the San Genuario Reserve down on the Po flood plain. This set of former fish ponds has been nurtured into a first-class bird sanctuary for dragonflies, bats and breeding bird species, such as Great and Little Bitterns, Purple Heron and Western Marsh Harrier. Before we reached the reserve, a Great Bittern was observed trying to conceal its presence out in a paddyfield where the rice was no more than 15 cm high! Needless to say, superb views were obtained. In addition to the four species just mentioned, a number of species were heard in the reserve, such as Great Reed, European Reed and Cetti's Warblers, European Golden Oriole and, most interesting of all, the frequent calls of a Little Crake. Further sightings included Green Sandpiper, Melodious Warbler. In addition to at least six species of dragonflies we came across a Grass Snake and a Lesser Purple Emperor butterfly. Honeysuckle was much in evidence.

After some two hours at the reserve, we drove to a location where Black-tailed Godwits are being encouraged to breed. We saw in the order of 10 birds. On the way to a second stop, we passed a lone White Stork. This next stop was in a tract of original woodland on the margins of the Po flood plain. Here is one of the largest colonies of breeding herons in Europe - in excess of 3,000 pairs of Black-crowned Night Herons, Little, Great and Cattle Egrets, Grey and Purple Herons, plus a few Glossy Ibis and Eurasian Spoonbills.

We arrived at our lunch stop in the village of Fontanetto Po at 1 pm and left about two hours later all the better for a substantial six-course meal and a generous issue of white and red wine. Afterwards we returned to the resort for a spell of recovery before meeting in the garden at 4.45 pm to do the checklist. Afterwards, we boarded the vehicles for our last wine tasting.

The winery visited was a family-run business - Olivetta at Moncalvo. We tasted three wines - a Cortese, a Chardonnay and a Barbera Superiore. The last was most favoured by all. However, to round off the session the family opened a bottle of Piemonte Moscato, which went down a treat - just the wine for a warm early evening. On the way there and back, two Grey Partridges were seen in a recently cut hay meadow.

Our last evening meal together was consumed in the banqueting hall upstairs. In all, we were presented with five different courses, each of a high quality. Coming after a substantial lunch, the meal presented most of us with something of a challenge. Afterwards, everyone in the group was given one of Matteo's bird prints as a souvenir. As we were leaving the table, a Little Owl was heard and quickly located on a telegraph wire. Minutes later a Tawny Owl was seen perched on a TV aerial. What a way to finish our last evening together!

Wednesday, 12 June

We again breakfasted in the garden at 7.30 am and an hour later we were all loaded and being seen off the premises by the manager. We spent the rest of the morning in the area of Casei Gerola and in La Fologhe

Reserve alongside the Po River. Two Black Kites were seen being mobbed by two Hooded Crows. One of our target species was Lesser Grey Shrike. This was duly seen by those in the lead vehicle, but by the time the second vehicle reached the spot, the bird had disappeared. Despite our best efforts, the bird could not be relocated. At the river, we saw both Common and Little Terns, and a European Honey Buzzard was seen making its way northwards. In the reserve, we had glimpses of Eurasian Golden Orioles and Yellow Wagtails. We added two duck species to the tour list, namely Red-crested Pochard and Ferruginous Duck. Impressive were the fields of Common Poppy in full bloom. Diana's plant of the morning was Pink Phlomis. During our time in the reserve, I was able to realise a life's ambition, namely to drive a 'Bee' - an antiquarian mode of propelled transport that can still be seen in the remoter, rural areas of Italy!

We ate our picnic lunch at a table and chairs provided by the local angling club. The hotel had provisioned us with two bottles of nicely-chilled Cortese and Roger kindly provided a bottle of Barbera Superiore purchased from the winery visited yesterday. We did the checklist, packed up the remains of the picnic and drove to a nearby village for the final treat of the tour - an ice cream chosen from an incredible variety on offer.

The drive from there to Malpensa Airport took well under two hours, arriving there a little after 3.30 pm. The easyJet check-in was fairly speedy and having seen the group to the security check, our ways parted as I was to stay on for another week for a private holiday. My hopes on parting were that their homeward flight would be on schedule.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Nico and Luca for all their efforts on our behalf - their safe driving, their expertise in the field and their good company. Thanks to the welcoming and friendly staff at our two hotels who looked after us so well. Thanks to you all for coming on this tour. I do so hope that you enjoyed this 'taste' of north-west Italy. I could not have wished to have been in better company, so I am hoping that we will meet up on another Ornitholiday in the very near future. Finally, thanks to Peter, Diana and Luca for providing the images illustrating this report and to Diana for the flower list.

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August 2013

Itinerary & Weather

- Wednesday, 05 June am: London Gatwick > Milan Malpensa > Aosta valley > Valnontey
pm: Local walk
Sunny at first, becoming overcast 18°C
- Thursday, 06 June am: around hotel, La Thuile valley
pm: Valsavarenche
Mainly sunny 5 - 21°C
- Friday, 07 June am: around hotel, Mon Avic Regional Park
pm: Chardonney, Wine tasting at Cooperative
Mainly sunny 6 - 28°C
- Saturday, 08 June am: around hotel, Val Ferret and Val Veny
pm: La Thuile, Tete d'Arpy, Gimiilan
Sunny morning; drizzle in the afternoon 7 - 23°C
- Sunday, 09 June am: Valnontey > Camino (Casel san Pietro)
pm: Vignale and environs, Wine tasting in Vignales
Rain and a few bright periods 8 - 23°C
- Monday, 10 June am: village walk, flood plain of Scrivia River
pm: Foothills of Apennines at Monperone
Some cloud, but mainly sunny 14 - 26°C
- Tuesday, 11 June am: San Genuario Reserve and environs
Fontanetto Po
pm: Wine tasting at Moncalvo
Hot and sunny 15 - 30°C
- Wednesday, 12 June am: > Casai Gerola > La Folaghe Reserve
pm: > Milan Malpensa > London Gatwick
Hot and sunny 18 - 30°C

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Locations	Abundance Scale (max. seen on 1 day)
1 2h means seen on 1 day and heard on 2 other days	A = Alps P = Po plain, Piedmont & Apennine foothills	1 = 1 – 4 individuals 2 = 5 - 9 3 = 10 - 99 4 = 100 - 999 5 = >1000

The sequence and nomenclature of this list follow Collins Bird Guide 2nd Edition 2010. *i* = introduced

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Locations	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Mallard	6	A P	3	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Ferruginous Duck	1	P	1	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
Red-crested Pochard	1	P	1	<i>Netta rufina</i>
Rock Partridge	- 1h	A	1	<i>Alectoris graeca</i>
Grey Partridge	1	P	1	<i>Perdix perdix</i>
Common Quail	- 1h	P	1	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
Common Pheasant	2	P	1	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Little Grebe	1	P	2	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	2	P	1	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Great Cormorant	5	P	1	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Great Bittern	1	P	1	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
Little Bittern	2	P	1	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	5	P	4	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Cattle Egret	3	P	2	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Little Egret	5	P	3	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Great Egret	2	P	1	<i>Casmerodius alba</i>
Squacco Heron	3	P	1	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Grey Heron	5	P	1	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Purple Heron	3	P	3	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
African Sacred Ibis (i)	1	P	1	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>
Lammergeier	1	A	1	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>
Golden Eagle	3	A	1	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Short-toed Eagle	1	P	1	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Black Kite	2	P	1	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	1	P	2	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Common Buzzard	7	A P	1	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
European Honey Buzzard	1	P	1	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	2	P	1	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Common Kestrel	8	A P	1	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Eurasian Hobby	2	P	1	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Little Crake	- 1h	P	1	<i>Porzana parva</i>
Common Moorhen	3	P	2	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot	3	P	3	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Black-winged Stilt	4	P	2	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Stone Curlew	1	P	1	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>
Little Ringed Plover	2	P	1	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Northern Lapwing	4	P	3	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Green Sandpiper	1	P	1	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	1	P	2	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Black-headed Gull	2	P	3	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	3	P	3	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Little Tern	1	P	1	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
Common Tern	1	P	2	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	4	P	3	<i>Columba livia</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	5	P	2	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
European Turtle Dove	3	P	2	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	5	P	2	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Common Cuckoo	2 5h	A P	1	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>

Little Owl	1		P	1	<i>Athene noctua</i>	
Tawny Owl	1		P	1	<i>Strix aluco</i>	
Common Swift	7	A	P	3	<i>Apus apus</i>	
Eurasian Hoopoe	2	A	P	1	<i>Upupa epops</i>	
Common Kingfisher	-	2h	P	1	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	
European Bee-eater	2		P	3	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	
European Roller	1		P	1	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	
European Green Woodpecker	-	2h	P	1	<i>Picus viridis</i>	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	2	1h	P	1	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	
Common Skylark	3		P	1	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	
Woodlark	1		P	1	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	
Eurasian Crag Martin	4	A		2	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	
Barn Swallow	8	A	P	3	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
Common House Martin	4	A	P	2	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	
Water Pipit	2	A		2	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	
Tree Pipit	3	A		2	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	
White Wagtail	5	A	P	1	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	
Western Yellow Wagtail	1	1h	P	1	<i>Motacilla flava cinereocapilla</i>	
Grey Wagtail	2	A		1	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	
White-throated Dipper	4	A		2	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	
Dunnock	-	2h	A	1	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	
European Robin	-	3h	A	1	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	
Common Nightingale	2	2h	P	2	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	
Common Redstart	4		P	1	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	
Black Redstart	7	A	P	2	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	
Northern Wheatear	3	A		1	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	
Whinchat	3	A		1	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	
Common Stonechat	1		P	1	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	
Song Thrush	1	A		1	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	
Mistle Thrush	2	A		1	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	
Fieldfare	4	A		1	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	
Common Blackbird	8	A	P	2	<i>Turdus merula</i>	
Garden Warbler	1	2h	A	1	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	
Eurasian Blackcap	-	1h	A	1	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	
Common Whitethroat	2		P	1	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	
Lesser Whitethroat	2	2h	A	1	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	
Moltoni's Warbler	1		P	1	<i>Sylvia moltonii</i>	
Great Reed Warbler	-	2h	P	1	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	
European Reed Warbler	-	1h	P	1	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	
Marsh Warbler	1		P	1	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	
Cetti's Warbler	-	1h	P	1	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	
Melodious Warbler	3		P	1	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	
Western Bonelli's Warbler	1	A		1	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	
Common Chiffchaff	-	2h	A	1	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	
Winter Wren	-	2h	A	P	1	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	2	A		1	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	
Great Tit	6	A	P	1	<i>Parus major</i>	
Coal Tit	2	2h	A	1	<i>Periparus ater</i>	
European Blue Tit	1	A		1	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	
Marsh Tit	-	2h	P	1	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	
Willow Tit	1	A		1	<i>Poecile montanus</i>	
Long-tailed Tit	1	2h	P	1	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	
Eurasian Treecreeper	1	A		1	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	
Lesser Grey Shrike	1		P	1	<i>Lanius minor</i>	
Red-backed Shrike	3	A	P	1	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	
Common Magpie	5	A	P	1	<i>Pica pica</i>	
Eurasian Jay	7	A	P	2	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	
Western Jackdaw	1		P	1	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	
Red-billed Chough	1	A		1	<i>Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax</i>	
Alpine Chough	4	A		3	<i>Pyrhcorax graculus</i>	
Hooded Crow	5		P	4	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	
Carrion Crow	4	A		2	<i>Corvus corone</i>	
Common Raven	4	A		1	<i>Corvus corax</i>	

Common Starling	7		A	P	3	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Eurasian Golden Oriole	1	3h		P	1	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
House Sparrow	2	1h	A		1	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Italian Sparrow	8		A	P	2	<i>Passer italiae</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	2			P	1	<i>Passer montanus</i>
Common Chaffinch	7	1h	A	P	2	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Common Linnet	3		A		1	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Common Redpoll	3		A		1	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>
European Goldfinch	5		A	P	2	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
European Greenfinch	-	1h		P	1	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
European Serin	3		A	P	1	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	1		A		1	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Ortolan Bunting	1			P	1	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
Black-headed Bunting	4	1h		P	1	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>
Corn Bunting	1			P	2	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Rock Bunting	2	1h	A		1	<i>Emberiza cia</i>



Lammergeier



Rock Bunting



Alpine Chough



Ortolan Bunting



White Stork



White-throated Dipper



Willow Tit



Squacco Heron



Black Redstart



Purple Heron



Great Bittern

MAMMALS

Eastern Cottontail Rabbit
European Hare
Chamois
Alpine Ibex
Alpine Marmot
Roe Deer
European Weasel

Sylvilagus floridanus
Lepus europaeus
Rupicapra rupicapra
Capra ibex
Marmota marmota
Capreolus capreolus
Mustela nivalis

REPTILES

Marsh Frog
Common Wall Lizard
Western Green Lizard
European Pond Terrapin

Pelophylax ridibundus
Podarcis muralis
Lacerta bilineata
Emys orbicularis



Alpine Ibex



Chamois



Group Picnic

BUTTERFLIES

Papilionidae

Swallowtail V *Papilio machaon*

Pieridae

Black-veined White M *Aporia crataegi*
 Small White M *Pieris rapae*
 Mountain Green-veined White V *Pieris bryoniae*
 Green-veined White M *Pieris napi*
 Peak White V *Pontia callidice*
 Western Dappled White M *Euchloe cf. crameri*
 Orange Tip V *Anthocharis cardamines*
 Common Brimstone V *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Lycaenidae

Green Hairstreak V *Callophrys rubi*
 Green-underside Blue V *Glaucopsyche alexis*
 Silver-studded Blue M *Plebejus cf. argus*
 Brown Argus M *Aricia agestis*
 Common Blue V M *Polyommatus icarus*

Nymphalidae

Lesser Purple Emperor R *Apatura ilia*
 Camberwell Beauty V *Nymphalis antiopa*
 Red Admiral V M *Vanessa atalanta*
 Painted Lady R *Vanessa cardui*
 Small Tortoiseshell V *Aglalis urticae*
 Comma R *Polygonia c-album*
 Marbled Fritillary R *Brenthis daphne*
 Marbled White M *Melanargia galathea*
 Meadow Brown M *Maniola jurtina*
 Small Heath V *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Hesperiidae

Southern Grizzled Skipper V *Pyrgus malvoides*
 Dingy Skipper V *Erynnis tages*
 Large Chequered Skipper M *Heteropterus morpheus*
 Essex Skipper M *Thymelicus lineola*
 Large Skipper M *Ochlodes sylvanus*

Many thanks to Luca Boscain for the Butterfly list and photographs.

V = Aosta valley

R = Rice fields and Casei Gerola areas

M = Monferrato and Appennine hills



Small White



Mountain Green-veined White



Green-veined White



Peak White



Western Dappled White



Orange Tip



Green Hairstreak



Green-underside Blue



Silver-studded Blue



Brown Argus



Camberwell Beauty



Painted Lady



Marbled Fritillary



Marbled White



Small Heath



Dingy Skipper



Large Chequered Skipper



Essex Skipper



Common Blue

FLOWERS

Family	Common Name	Locations	Scientific Name
Alliaceae	Allium	A	<i>Allium amethystinum</i>
Amaryllidaceae	Poet's Narcissus	A	<i>Narcissus poeticus</i>
Apiaceae	Athamanta	A	<i>Athamanta cretensis</i>
	Cow Parsley	A	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>
Aristolochiaceae	Field Eryngium (leaves only)	A	<i>Eryngium campestre</i>
	Birthwort	A P	<i>Aristolochia clematitidis</i>
Asteraceae/Compositae	Butterbur	A	<i>Petasites paradoxus</i>
	Coltsfoot	A	<i>Tussilago farfara</i>
	Cornflower	P	<i>Centaurea cyanus</i>
	Daisy	A	<i>Bellis sylvestris</i>
	Dandelion	A	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>
	Groundsel	A	<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>
	Heliachrysum	P	<i>Helichrysum arenarium</i>
	Italian Thistle	P	<i>Carduus pycnocephalus</i>
	Michaelmas Daisy	P	<i>Aster alpinus</i>
	Ox-eye Daisy	A	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>
	Scentless Mayweed	A	<i>Tripleurospermum inodorum</i>
	Scotch Thistle	P	<i>Onopordum acanthium</i>
	Stemless Carline Thistle	A	<i>Carlina acaulis</i>
	Yarrow (Milfoil)	P	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
	Yellow Milfoil	P	<i>Achillea tomentosa</i>
Boraginaceae	Forget-me-not	A	<i>Myotosis alpestris</i>
	Pale Bugloss	P	<i>Echium italicum</i>
Brassicaceae	Purple Viper's Bugloss	A	<i>Echium plantagineum</i>
	Alpine Pennycress	A	<i>Thlaspi caerulescea</i>
Caprifoliaceae	Yellow Whitlowgrass	A	<i>Draba aizoides</i>
	Elderflower	P	<i>Sambucus sp.</i>
Caryophyllaceae	Etruscan Honeysuckle	A P	<i>Lonicera etrusca</i>
	Field Mouse-ear Chickweed	A	<i>Cerastium arvense</i>
Cistaceae	Italian Catchfly	A	<i>Silene italica</i>
	Lesser Stitchwort	A	<i>Stellaria graminea</i>
	Red Campion	A	<i>Silene dioica</i>
	Spotted Rock Rose	A	<i>Tuberaria guttata</i>
Clusiaceae	Common Rock Rose	A	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>
	Perforate St John's Wort	A P	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>
Convolvulaceae	Field Bindweed	A	<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>
Crassulaceae	Biting Stonecrop	P	<i>Sedum acre</i>
	Common House leek	A	<i>Sempervivum tectorum</i>
	House Leek	A	<i>Sempervivum arachnoideum</i>
	White Stonecrop	A	<i>Sedum album</i>
Euphorbiaceae	Cypress Spurge	A P	<i>Euphorbia cyparissias</i>
	Spurge	A	<i>Euphorbia seguieriana</i>
Fabaceae	Birdsfoot Trefoil	A	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>
	Black Medic	A	<i>Medicago lupulina</i>
	Common Vetch	P	<i>Vicia sativa</i>
	Horseshoe Vetch	A	<i>Hippocrepis comosa</i>
	Kidney Vetch	A	<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>
	Lucerne	A	<i>Medicago sativa</i>
	Red Vetchling	P	<i>Lathyrus cicera</i>
	Spanish Broom	P	<i>Spartium junceum</i>
	Hop Trefoil	P	<i>Trifolium campestre</i>
	Red Clover	A	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>
	Sainfoin	A	<i>Onobrychis viciifolia</i>
	Upright Vetch	P	<i>Vicia orobus</i>
	White Clover	A	<i>Trifolium repens</i>
	White Melilot	P	<i>Melilotus alba</i>
	Yellow Melilot	P	<i>Melilotus officinalis</i>
Gentianaceae	Stemless Gentian	A	<i>Gentiana acaulis</i>
Geraniaceae	Spring Gentian	A	<i>Gentiana verna</i>
	Dovesfoot Cranesbill	P	<i>Geranium molle</i>

	Herb Robert	A	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>
	Wood Cranesbill	A	<i>Geranium sylvaticum</i>
Globulariaceae	Matted Globularia	A	<i>Globularia cordifolia</i>
Iridaceae	Crocus	A	<i>Crocus albiflorus</i>
	Field Gladiolus	P	<i>Gladiolus italicus</i>
Lamiaceae	Betony	P	<i>Betonica officinalis</i>
	Bugle	A P	<i>Ajuga pyramidalis</i>
	Marjoram	A	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>
	Meadow Clary	P	<i>Salvia pratenseis</i>
	Wild Clary	A	<i>Salvia verbenaca</i>
	Yellow Woundwort	A	<i>Stachys recta</i>
	Pink Phlomis	P	<i>Phlomis herba-venti</i>
	Wild Thyme	A	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>
Lentibulariaceae	Alpine Butterwort	A	<i>Pinguicula alpina</i>
	Butterwort	P	<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>
Liliaceae	False Helleborine	A	<i>Veratrum album</i>
	St Bernard's Lily	P	<i>Anthericum liliago</i>
	Wild Tulip	A	<i>Tulipa sylvestris</i>
	Yellow Star of Bethlehem	A	<i>Gagea lutea</i>
Linaceae	Pale Flax	P	<i>Linum narbonense</i>
Malvaceae	Common Mallow	P	<i>Malva sylvestris</i>
Oleaceae	Wild Privet	P	<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>
Orchidaceae	Early Purple Orchid	A	<i>Orchis mascula</i>
	Fragrant Orchid	P	<i>Orchis cariophora fragrans (subsp)</i>
	Pyramidal Orchid	P	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>
	Elder-flowered Orchid	A	<i>Dactylorhiza sambucina</i>
Orobanchaceae	Bellardia	P	<i>Bellardia trixago</i>
	Yellow Rattle	A	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>
Oxalidaceae	Wood Sorrel	A	<i>Oxalis acetoselle</i>
Papaveraceae	Red Poppy	A P	<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>
Plantaginaceae	Alpine Plantain	A	<i>Plantago alpina</i>
	Ribwort Plantain	A	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
Polygonaceae	Bistort	A	<i>Polygonum bistorta</i>
	Common Sorrel or Dock	P	<i>Rumex patientia</i>
Primulaceae	Alpine Snowbell	A	<i>Soldanella alpina</i>
	Birdseye Primrose	A	<i>Primula farinosa</i>
	Cowslip	A	<i>Primula veris</i>
	Stinking Primrose	A	<i>Primula hirsuta</i>
	Scarlet Pimpernel (red and blue forms)	P	<i>Anagallis arvensis</i>
Ranunculaceae	Buttercup sp	A	<i>Ranunculus sp</i>
	Globe Flower	A	<i>Trollius europaeus</i>
	Large White Buttercup	A	<i>Ranunculus platanifolius</i>
	Kingcup	A	<i>Ranunculus kuepferi</i>
	Pale Pasque Flower	A	<i>Pulsatilla vernalis</i>
	Pasque flower	A	<i>Pulsatilla alpina</i>
	Water Crowfoot	P	<i>Ranunculus aquatilis</i>
Resedaceae	Mignonette	A P	<i>Reseda lutea</i>
Rosaceae	Alpine Lady's Mantle	A	<i>Alchemilla alpina</i>
	Blackberry/Bramble	P	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>
	Dog Rose	A P	<i>Rosa canina</i>
	Mediterranean Salad Burnet	P	<i>Sanguisorba minor subsp magnolii</i>
	Potentilla	A	<i>Potentilla pensylvanica</i>
	Water Avens	A	<i>Geum rivale</i>
	Wild Strawberry	A	<i>Fragaria vesca</i>
Rubiaceae	Bedstraw	A	<i>Galium sylvaticum</i>
	Cleavers	P	<i>Galium aparine</i>
	White Bedstraw	P	<i>Galium boreale</i>
Scrophulariaceae	Mullein	P	<i>Verbascum sp.</i>
Thymelaeaceae	Daphne	A	<i>Daphne mezereum</i>
Violaceae	Heartsease Pansy		<i>Viola tricolor</i>
	Violet	A	<i>Viola calcarata</i>
	Yellow Wood Violet	A	<i>Viola biflora</i>

Notes

1. I have indicated the general locations of the flowers using A for the mountain region from 5-8th June, and P for the Po Valley/Plains region from 9-12th June. Many were of course found on several different days and in several locations. Not every flower that was seen by the group has been included.
2. I have compiled the list using the following sources:
The Wild Flowers of Britain & Northern Europe, Richard Fitter, Alistair Fitter & Marjorie Blamey, Collins, 1974;
Mediterranean Wild Flowers, Neil Fletcher, Dorling Kindersley, 2007;
Wild Flowers of the Mediterranean, Marjorie Blamey & Christopher Grey-Wilson, A&C Black, 2008;
Wild Flowers of the Valle d'Aosta
Wikipedia

Diana (& Roger) Forder 8.7.13



Pasque Flower



Stemless Gentian



Elder-flowered Orchid



Alpine Pennycress



Birdseye Primrose



Stinking Primrose



False Helleborine



St Bernard's Lily



Spring Gentian



Fragrant Orchid

These lists represent those birds and other species seen by party members of this tour.

Front cover: View of Mont Blanc

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