



Field Guides Tour Report

FRANCE: CAMARGUE & PYRENEES

Sep 1, 2012 to Sep 11, 2012
Megan Crewe & Jesse Fagan

Enjoy our triplist below! For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please visit our [TOUR PAGE](#).

September is a lovely time to visit southern France. From the Camargue, where golden fields of ripening rice stretch to the horizons and white salt pans bake under cloudless blue skies, to the Pyrenees, where rumbled mountains scrape craggy fingers against the clouds and conifer forests mass darkly against the rock, the landscape provides a beautiful backdrop against which to look for the region's special birds. And there were plenty to search out!



The lovely glacial valley at the Port de Boucharo -- home to Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, both Red-billed and Yellow-billed choughs, Alpine Accentor, Water Pipit, Eurasian Linnnet, Eurasian Griffon and Lammergeier. Photo by guide Jesse Fagan.

We started with four days in the Camargue region, near the mouth of the Rhone River. Here, among salt pans, thick stands of reed and wind-tossed rice paddies, we connected with many migrants and a handful of resident breeders. Clouds of dusty pink Greater Flamingos massed in area waterways. Thousands of shorebirds snoozed or foraged in shallow lagoons, resting and refueling on their long journey from arctic breeding grounds to African wintering areas. Busy flocks of European Bee-eaters flashed golden wings as they chased insects overhead -- or sat, like tastefully bright Christmas ornaments, in dead trees. A Eurasian Hoopoe flew off in a flurry of black and white wings, then settled on a nearby pile of rocks, while Lesser Kestrels hovered overhead or perched on their own stony piles. Frosty-winged Mediterranean Gulls flew over a busy roadway in a seemingly endless stream. Little Bustards lurked in a clover field. A Tawny Pipit froze in the middle of the road, standing motionless for long minutes (hiding in plain sight from the kestrel overhead) while we crept ever closer. An Ortolan Bunting scabbled on a stony path. A little group of Red-legged Partridges high-stepped through a herb-scented olive grove. A Eurasian Eagle-Owl moved higher and higher on a warm limestone cliff as the light faded, providing a satisfying dessert to our hors-d'oeuvres "supper".

Then it was the long transfer to the high Pyrenees, trading the flat coast for spectacular jagged peaks and glacier-carved valleys, tumbling mountain streams, inquisitive flocks of sheep and a whole new suite of birds. A White-throated Dipper bobbed on rocks in the midst of a tumbling mountain stream, then plunged into the torrent. A strikingly peachy Lammergeier sat on a ledge against an equally peachy cliff, tearing hunks from some unseen carcass. A massive Black Woodpecker hitched its way up an arrow-straight pine trunk, then peered around from its tangled branches. An Alpine Accentor nibbled seeds among the boulders in the vast Cirque de Gavarnie. After a few ghostly flyovers, a Tawny Owl perched on the corner of our hotel, gazing wide-eyed down at our group. Eurasian Griffons glided overhead. A Red Kite preened in a leafless tree. Jaunty Crested Tits called from thick pine trees, while Goldcrests and Firecrests swarmed below them. Yellow-billed Choughs formed loose "bird tornadoes" above mountain peaks. An elderberry-strewn scree slope fairly vibrated with migrants -- Black and Common Redstarts, Northern Wheatears, Whinchats, Willow Warblers and Rufous-tailed Rock-thrushes -- which bounced from tree to boulder to grassy tussock in search of food.

Jesse and I greatly enjoyed sharing some adventures -- and some fabulous wining and dining -- with you. We hope to see you all again in the field, somewhere, some day! -- Megan

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

GRAYLAG GOOSE (*Anser anser*) -- A big group grazed along the back edge of the shallow lake at Marais de Grenouillet, an early vanguard of the tens of thousands which will arrive later in the autumn.

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) – Scores dotted the waterways around the Salin de Giraud, including one -- looking enormous -- standing on an island not far from the road.

COMMON SHELDUCK (*Tadorna tadorna*) – Several family groups, with dull-billed youngsters in tow, floated on the salt pans of the Salin de Giraud.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN) (*Anas crecca crecca*)

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE (*Alectoris rufa*) – A little group scurried through an olive grove near the base of some limestone cliffs near Les Baux, seen as we waited for the Eurasian Eagle-Owl to make an appearance.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*) – Particularly nice looks our first afternoon, when we found a big group snoozing and preening just beyond our first flamingos.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – Good numbers, all in basic (winter) plumage, paddled near the fishing weirs along the eastern edge of the Etang des Vacarres.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

GREATER FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) – Very common in the Camargue, where their pale pink flocks made drifts of color against tawny backdrops -- and created traffic jams on nearby roads! We also saw a handful of grayish youngsters, including a trio that stalked regally across a salt pan at Salin de Giraud.

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (*Ciconia nigra*) – A trio fought the wind on our first full day in the Camargue, wheeling back and forth over the tossing rice fields.

WHITE STORK (*Ciconia ciconia*) – Scattered birds seen in roadside fields, and one big kettle of birds circled in a thermal developing beyond a rice field near Mejanès. Flocks of thousands pass through some of the migration bottlenecks further south in Europe and the Middle East.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*) – Regular in the Camargue, with especially nice looks at one that flapped low over us as we birded along the road near Aigues-Mortes on our first afternoon.

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea*) – Two different gingery youngsters were seen in flight, both times from the vans.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*)

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – One stood motionless along the edge of a little stream near Mas d'Agon for long minutes before suddenly springing into the air and flapping away in a flurry of white wings -- nice spotting, Michael!

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – One flapped past, low over the waving reeds, as we birded near Mejanès.

EURASIAN SPOONBILL (*Platalea leucorodia*) – One flew past -- high overhead, with its spoon-shaped bill silhouetted nicely against the high cirrus clouds -- early on our visit to Mejanès.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – One sat on a dead snag far out on the salt pans at Salin de Giraud, and another flew over us at Mejanès.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

EUROPEAN HONEY-BUZZARD (*Pernis apivorus*) – A trio right overhead at Mejanès -- part of a little run of raptors -- gave us particularly nice chance for study. This species can be quite variable in plumage, but the narrow head and the big dark circles at the wrist are distinctive.

RED KITE (*Milvus milvus*) – We had distant looks at our first, circling above the vulture scrum in the Vallee d'Ossoue and only slightly better looks at our second, soaring over the peaks just outside La Mongie. But our third bird, perched in a dead tree just outside Cieutat, provided leisurely and very satisfying views as it preened and called.

LAMMERGEIER (*Gypaetus barbatus*) – Wow! We had some nice flight studies of this striking raptor, but our best views were of one that flew in and landed on a ledge near our picnic spot in the Vallee d'Ossoue. It proceeded to spend long minutes ripping some tasty morsel to bits while we ogled through the scopes.

EGYPTIAN VULTURE (*Neophron percnopterus*) – Our first was a very dark, distant youngster which made a few low, sweeping passes over the craggy ridges at Pic du Pibeste. Fortunately, we had much better looks at an unexpected adult which winged past us outside Cieutat, while we stood at the ancient church enjoying views of a perched Red Kite.

EURASIAN GRIFFON (*Gyps fulvus*) – Particularly common on our day in the Vallee d'Ossoue, when one bird found something tasty high on the hillside and dozens of others came streaming in to check it out. After a brief period of threatening each other with flapping wings and outstretched talons, most of them quickly departed, so it must have been a SMALL tasty thing!

SHORT-TOED EAGLE (*Circaetus gallicus*) – Regular throughout, including one showing crisply white against a blue, blue sky near Mas d'Agon in the Camargue.

EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*)

MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus pygargus*)

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*)

COMMON BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Two near the Cirque de Gavarnie gave us good flight views as they coursed back and forth against the hillside and the blue sky. One eventually landed, which gave us the chance to study it (albeit distantly) in the scopes.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

LESSER KESTREL (*Falco naumanni*)

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Daily, with especially nice looks at a pair hunting back and forth over the hillsides at the Port de Boucharo.

EURASIAN HOBBY (*Falco subbuteo*)

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

Otididae (Bustards)

LITTLE BUSTARD (*Tetrax tetrax*) – It started as a bit of a "where's Waldo" moment, as we tried to find bustard heads in a field full of clover near St. Martin de Crau. Eventually, preening birds proved more cooperative. And when another 20 arrived in a flurry of black and white wings, well, that was the best view of all!

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus chloropus*) – An adult paddled across a pond near Aigues-Mortes while a brown youngster prowled along the muddy edges. This species was recently split; North America's subspecies became the Common Gallinule.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*)

Burhinidae (Thick-knees)

EURASIAN THICK-KNEE (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) – Some great spotting by Jesse got us one resting on the stony Crau steppe, keeping a large yellow eye on the group. Eventually, it rose to its feet and crept (crouching) away.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

NORTHERN LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*) – Joanna spotted a couple flapping over a field as we returned to our hotel from our afternoon at Les Alpilles.

KENTISH PLOVER (KENTISH) (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) – A handful pattered among the mobs of shorebirds at Salin de Giraud. Their pale plumage, black legs and lack of neck ring help to quickly separate them from the other small plovers.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius dubius*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus ostralegus*) – Some in Jesse's van spotted one foraging on mudflats near Montpellier as we zoomed along the highway there.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*)

PIED AVOCET (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

COMMON REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*)

EURASIAN CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*) – One rested with a mixed tern and gull flock on a salty puddle near the Etang des Vacarres.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

RED KNOT (*Calidris canutus*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – A half dozen or so foraged and rested on the mudflats of Salin de Giraud among the masses of other shorebirds.

LITTLE STINT (*Calidris minuta*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – Thousands and thousands slept or preened or fed in the salt pans at Salin de Giraud, vastly outnumbering all the other shorebird species.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferruginea*) – Regular (though in far smaller numbers than the previous species) on the salt pans of Salin de Giraud, with a few still showing traces of their striking breeding plumage.

RUFF (*Philomachus pugnax*) – A handful, looking pot-bellied and small-headed, mingled with the other shorebirds on the salt pans at Salin de Giraud.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SLENDER-BILLED GULL (*Chroicocephalus genei*) – One preening among a mob of Common and Sandwich terns was a pleasant surprise -- and a "good karma" payback for our flat tire.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)

MEDITERRANEAN GULL (*Ichthyophaga melanocephalus*) – Dozens, scores, HUNDREDS flapped across the road near Aigues-Mortes, showing well their distinctively frosty wingtips. We also had nice studies of a big mob standing on the mudflats edging the salt pans there.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL (*Larus michahellis*)

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – One lounged among a huge mixed flock of Yellow-legged and Black-headed Gulls in a soggy field along the road down to the Crau steppe. Once we all found the right bird, its dark back and long wings allowed us to easily keep track of it.

LITTLE TERN (*Sternula albifrons*)

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A trio snoozed (occasionally lifting those massive red beaks into view) on the mudflats at Salin de Giraud, dwarfing a couple of nearby Sandwich Terns. This is the world's largest tern.

BLACK TERN (EURASIAN) (*Chlidonias niger niger*)

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*)

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*)

COMMON WOOD-PIGEON (*Columba palumbus*)

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Strigidae (Owls)

EURASIAN EAGLE-OWL (*Bubo bubo*) – After our delightful hors-d'oeuvres picnic in a handy olive grove, we rambled into a pretty nearby canyon for an evening encounter with one of these big owls. It changed perches a few times, eventually sitting right up against a bare rock -- and looking remarkably cat-like.

LITTLE OWL (*Athene noctua*) – One sat for long minutes atop a tumbled-down shed in the Crau steppe.

TAWNY OWL (*Strix aluco*) – Wow! A very responsive bird near our Gèdre hotel flew over several times as we whistled for him, and then landed on the corner of the hotel to check us out. Spectacular!!

Apodidae (Swifts)

ALPINE SWIFT (*Apus melba*) – Best seen near St. Martin de Crau, where a half-dozen or so coursed back and forth over distant trees beyond the bustard field. The white bellies on these huge swifts (nearly a two-foot wingspan) are distinctive.

COMMON SWIFT (*Apus apus*) – A handful mingled with a big Barn Swallow flock over Mejanès. Unlike the previous species, this one is pretty much dark all over, with a slightly paler throat.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*) – Distant scope views of one perched on a post in the water at Mejanès, with flight views of another zipping past the platform at the Marais de Grenouillet.

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

EUROPEAN BEE-EATER (*Merops apiaster*) – Common in the Camargue, with especially nice views of a big flock scattered like ornaments in a dead tree beside a road near Salin de Giraud.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

EUROPEAN ROLLER (*Coracias garrulus*) – One perched on a fence post right near the parking lot for the Peau de Meau proved surprisingly tolerant of our noisy vans pulled up right beside it. We saw many others perched on roadside telephone wires all throughout the Camargue.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

EURASIAN HOOPOE (*Upupa epops*) – One flashed away in a flurry of black and white wings, as we approached in the vans across the Crau steppe. Fortunately, it only went as far as the nearest pile of stones, where it flashed its crest and then sat for long minutes.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

BLACK WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus martius*) – A last-morning visit to a forest near Luz gave us wonderful views of this big woodpecker -- great spotting, Michael! It flew up from the ground and perched on the trunk of a nearby pine, where it spent long minutes peering around. We also got to see it in flight, where its wingspan (and a surprisingly loud territorial wing noise) made quite an impression.

GREEN WOODPECKER (*Picus viridis*) – As usual, this species was heard more frequently than it was seen, and most of the views we DID have were of flying birds bounding past. The pre-breakfast birders got nice scope views of one perched atop a telephone pole near our Camargue hotel one morning.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

RED-BACKED SHRIKE (*Lanius collurio*) – All too brief views of a youngster perched in a bush near the far end of the track through the Crau steppe.

SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE (*Lanius meridionalis*) – One hunted from several bushes in a scrubby field near the Crau steppe. This species was recently split from the Northern Shrike; its pinkish belly is distinctive.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

EURASIAN JAY (*Garrulus glandarius*) – One with the big flock of Mistle Thrushes on the track to the Cirque de Gavarnie showed nicely, as did one perched for long minutes in an apple tree behind our Gedre hotel on our last morning.

EURASIAN MAGPIE (*Pica pica*)

RED-BILLED CHOUGH (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) – Far less common than the next species, with especially nice views of one that made repeated calling passes above us at the Port de Boucharo.

YELLOW-BILLED CHOUGH (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) – Very common in the mountains, with scores forming big swirling tornadoes of birds over the ridge lines and a big group rummaging through the rough turf at the Port de Boucharo. Their yellow bills can be seen at a surprising distance!

EURASIAN JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*) – Very common in the Camargue, with especially nice looks at a couple -- looking pretty shaggy with molt -- resting on the orange tiled roof of the Ecomusee in St. Martin de Crau.

ROOK (*Corvus frugilegus*)

CARRION CROW (*Corvus corone*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Alaudidae (Larks)

GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) – A few of these chunky larks fled from us across the stony ground on the Crau, dropping quickly back down into cover.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*)

EURASIAN CRAG-MARTIN (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) – Best seen in Gavarnie, where they circled low against the hotel near our parking spot -- so close we could even see the little white squares in their tails.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (*Delichon urbicum*) – Hundreds (thousands?) boiled around a big cave at Lac de Gloriettes, sometimes briefly landing on ledges and outcroppings.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

MARSH TIT (*Poecile palustris*) – A trio showed their tiny bibs nicely as the rummaged along bendy branches -- often hanging upside down in typical "chickadee" fashion -- in trees near Mauvezin.

COAL TIT (*Pariparus ater*)

CRESTED TIT (*Lophophanes cristatus*) – Close encounters with at least two different pairs of these striking little tits on the walk up to the Cirque de Gavarnie, including one pair that spent long minutes in a tree right beside the path. Some of the group had another while we searched for Black Woodpecker on our quiet afternoon around Le Lienz. There's a definite "Bridled Titmouse" feel to these guys.

GREAT TIT (*Parus major*)

EURASIAN BLUE TIT (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

LONG-TAILED TIT (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – The last new birds of the trip were a noisy family group which flitted past our supper table at the Toulouse hotel. A handful of us tracked them down and had wonderful close views of one inquisitive bird, and watched as a quintet of others swiveled and pirouetted side by side on a branch near the top of the tree.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

EURASIAN NUTHATCH (*Sitta europaea*) – A pair with a mixed tit flock along the track up to the Cirque de Gavarnie scrambled around on thin branches, showing those rusty undertail coverts to perfection.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

EURASIAN TREECREEPER (*Certhia familiaris*)

SHORT-TOED TREECREEPER (*Certhia brachydactyla*) – One in a rest stop parking lot near Lourdes proved most cooperative, hitching its way up a little tree right near our vans. We saw another in the trees near our supper table on our last night in Toulouse.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

EURASIAN WREN (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – Some of the group heard one singing from the woods at Mauvezin, shortly before we climbed back into the vans. [*]

Cinclidae (Dippers)

WHITE-THROATED DIPPER (*Cinclus cinclus*) – Wonderful views of one in a little stream at Lac de Gloriettes, alternately bobbing on rocks, flinging itself into the water and swimming around with its head submerged looking for prey. The flashing speed with which it pursued prey once it found it was pretty impressive! We saw others along a stretch of river north of Gavarnie.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*) – A handful in a wind-tossed oak near our Camargue hotel proved a bit hard to get much of a look at (though we all saw their undersides nicely!); fortunately, a busy mob in conifers along the track up to the Cirque de Gavarnie proved far more accommodating.

FIRECREST (*Regulus ignicapilla*) – Best seen near the Cistercian abbey we visited on our drive back to Toulouse; one worked its way through low branches just across the road, incessantly sounding its high-pitched call.

Cettiidae (Bush-Warblers and Allies)

CETTI'S WARBLER (*Cettia cetti*) – As usual, we heard far more of these than we saw, but Michael and Laura spotted one near our lunch spot en route to the Salin de Giraud and most of the group got a look at another as it crept through bushes near our picnic spot at La Capeliere.

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

WILLOW WARBLER (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – Our best looks came on the hike up to the Cirque de Gavarnie; we found scattered individuals foraging in little trees all along the route. Their habit of regularly dipping their tails -- as well as their dark legs and buffy (rather than yellowish) plumage -- helps to distinguish them from the similar Willow Warbler.

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

MELODIOUS WARBLER (*Hippolais polyglotta*)

EURASIAN REED-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) – One flicked through a scruffy tamarisk across the canal from the observation tower at the Marais de Grenouillet, looking very golden. Though it's generally a skulker, it spent a fair bit of time sitting on open branches, which allowed everybody to get a look -- eventually!

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

ZITTING CISTICOLA (*Cisticola juncidis*) – We heard the distinctive "zit zit zit" call of this species (and watched tiny dots bounding over the fields and reedbeds) regularly in the Camargue, but it took several days before we finally got one in the scope for a good study. Fortunately, one little bird near our hotel cooperated nicely!

Sylviidae (Old World Warblers)

BLACKCAP (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – Regular in the highlands, with particularly good looks at many in the red-berried elder bushes along the track up to the Cirque de Gavarnie, and others near the little chapel at Le Lienz.

GARDEN WARBLER (*Sylvia borin*) – One, showing the very plain face which helps to identify it, gleaned for insects in a big roadside oak near our Camargue hotel, seen on a very windy pre-breakfast outing.

GREATER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia communis*) – One sallied from the top of a prickly bush along the canal in the Crau steppe, not far from where we were watching the Ortolan Bunting.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa striata*) – Two in with a big flock of European Pied Flycatchers near our first picnic lunch spot in the Camargue (that little corridor of Stone Pine trees) allowed for great comparisons. This species is declining over much of Europe.

EUROPEAN ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*) – Especially nice views of a still-spotty youngster resting in the lowest branches of a tree near the track up to the Cirque de Gavarnie, and of an orange-bellied adult further up the hill. Boy, those American colonials sure must have been homesick to call our big fat thrush a robin!

EUROPEAN PIED FLYCATCHER (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

COMMON REDSTART (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

BLACK REDSTART (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) – Dozens. Scores. Hundreds? We certainly saw many, bouncing from rock to rock with their distinctively rusty tails quivering every time they moved, in the highlands. While most were drabber females or youngsters, we did see at least two gorgeous adult males in the bowl of the Cirque de Gavarnie.

RUFIOUS-TAILED ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola saxatilis*) – Nice views of a winter-plumaged male singing softly from a rock outcropping along the road at the Port de Boucharo, with others in the Vallee d'Ossoue and around Lac de Gloriettes.

WHINCHAT (*Saxicola rubetra*) – Seen most days, including one hunting from fence wires around the horse pasture near our Arles hotel and others flitting among the rocks and elderberry bushes in the Vallee d'Ossoue.

STONECHAT (EUROPEAN) (*Saxicola torquatus rubicola*) – A male spent long minutes standing atop a big rock near our picnic spot in the Vallee d'Ossoue, giving us all excellent opportunity to study him at leisure in the scopes.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – Common throughout, with dozens flashing among the rocks on the Crau steppe and others hunting among the cows and sheep in the mountain pastures. The name "wheatear" is a corruption of the Saxon for "white ass" -- a reference to that distinctive white rump and tail.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*) – Several flashed across the road in front of the first van as we worked our way through a series of little towns on the eastern side of the Col du Tourmalet.

MISTLE THRUSH (*Turdus viscivorus*) – A big mob of migrant birds (40-50 of them in total) bounced around in a grassy meadow edging the track up to the Cirque de Gavarnie, searching for tidbits, while a handful of others perched atop conifers in the same area. We don't typically see these spotty migrants in quite such big numbers!

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Prunellidae (Accentors)

ALPINE ACCENTOR (*Prunella collaris*) – One in the boulder field at the Cirque de Gavarnie was a bit of a surprise, as most are found at higher elevations -- great spotting, Joanna!

DUNNOCK (*Prunella modularis*)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flava*) – Quite common in the Camargue, including some big migrant parties along the edges of the hotel driveway on several mornings, and many wagging along the mudflats of Salin de Giraud.

GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*)

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*)

TAWNY PIPIT (*Anthus campestris*) – Fantastic studies of one crouched in the middle of the track at the Crau steppe. It stayed put while we crept closer and closer, getting better and better looks. Eventually, we figured out just why it was standing so still for so long -- far, far above us, a kestrel was circling in the sky. Once it moved off, the pipit wandered off into the vegetation.

TREE PIPIT (*Anthus trivialis*) – Our best views came on our final pre-breakfast walk in the Camargue, when we found one perched on a telephone wire right outside our hotel.

WATER PIPIT (*Anthus spinoletta*) – Common in the highlands, either striding around in the short grass or flitting past with their white outer tail feathers flashing.

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

ROCK BUNTING (*Emberiza cia*) – A little group flicked along a scree slope near the Lac de Gloriettes, proving exceptionally difficult to catch up with. Fortunately, one bird eventually perched for long minutes in a little bush, giving us all a chance to study it in the scopes.

ORTOLAN BUNTING (*Emberiza hortulana*) – One Jesse spotted mooching along the bank of the little canal through the Crau steppe was unexpected; it showed nicely as it rummaged around looking for tidbits. This is the endangered species that made up Francois Mitterand's last meal!

CORN BUNTING (*Emberiza calandra*)

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

COMMON CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*) – Common in the highlands (where their distinctive "SPINK" call was a regular part of the tour soundtrack), with particularly nice looks at a flock rummaging among the pebbles near the parking lot at Lac de Gloriettes.

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – A male sat atop a conifer along the track down from the Cirque de Gavarnie, his crossed mandibles showing nicely in the scope.

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis*) – Small flocks bounded over the fields around our Camargue hotel each day, with a few settling into nearby trees occasionally to feed. Most were youngsters, lacking the red faces of their parents.

EURASIAN LINNET (*Carduelis cannabina*) – Best seen in the Port de Boucharo, where a little group clung from thistle heads near the pass, nibbling seeds.

EUROPEAN SERIN (*Serinus serinus*) – Fine scope views of a couple of streaky birds on the path with a handful of Common Chaffinches near the parking lot at Lac des Gloriettes.

EURASIAN BULLFINCH (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) – A couple of young males munched their way through berrying trees along the track down from the Cirque de Gavarnie, proving surprisingly tough to spot among the similarly colored fruits.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*)

MAMMALS

EUROPEAN BROWN HARE (*Lepus europaeus*) – A couple rocketed away across the Crau steppe; their black-tipped ears definitely made them easier to spot!

ALPINE MARMOT (*Marmota marmota*) – Abundant in the mountains, with dozens waddling across hillsides and whistling from rocky outcrops. This species was introduced centuries ago from the Alps, to provide a (non-sheep) food source for the local shepherds.

EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – A couple, showing very dark tails, scrambled in trees around the lake at Couladère, seen on our long drive to the mountains.

PYRENEAN CHAMOIS (ISARD) (*Rupicapra pyrenaica*) – Fine views of one poised on a hillside in Spain, seen as we crossed the border on our walk through the Port de Boucharo, with another seen nibbling grass high on the slopes of the Cirque de Gavarnie. This goat is the iconic animal on the Pyrenees national park signs.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 151 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa