



Field Guides Tour Report

France: Camargue & Pyrenees 2013

Aug 31, 2013 to Sep 10, 2013
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A Gray Heron stalks prey in one of the lagoons near Aigues-Mortes. Local breeders are joined by scores of migrants headed to Africa for the winter. (Photo by guide Megan Crewe)

Birding is not among the first ideas that come to mind when one considers a tour to France. Culture, history, cuisine, wine-tasting: these are among the things most people would visit France for, yet, as we found, the birding is pretty fantastic, too. And with a little of all those other things thrown into the mix, a birding tour to France is a wonderful experience indeed!

We started off our French sojourn in the sunny city of Montpellier, from where we set off into the Camargue, part of the vast Rhone delta, and home to a great variety of birds. The Camargue is probably most famous for its flamingos, and we saw plenty of those, but there were a lot of other great wetland birds, too. Elegant Great Crested Grebes floated across many of the larger bodies of water. Dapper Black-winged Stilts and Pied Avocets strode across the mudflats at the Salin de Giraud, dwarfing the swarms of smaller waders around them - Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, and Ringed and Little Ringed plovers among them. Slender-billed Gulls did their best to remain anonymous among a flock of Black-headed Gulls, and gorgeous Whiskered Terns were kept busy catching fish for their hungry full-grown fledglings. Brilliant European Kingfishers perched over a shady canal at Mas D'Agon were another highlight for many.

Away from the water, there was plenty to see, too, with an assortment of migrants passing through, and some wonderful dry country specialties in and around the stony Crau steppe.

Crippling looks at a couple of rare Egyptian Vultures, one adult, one juvenile, feeding among a herd of cattle were much appreciated, as were the sleek Montagu's Harriers on the Crau. Also on the Crau, we had decent views of googly-eyed Eurasian Thick-knees, a surprise flock of confiding Eurasian Dotterels, white-winged Little Bustards, a scurrying covey of Red-legged Partridge, and a completely unexpected flock of 100+ Calandra Larks! Elsewhere we were delighted with views of a responsive Green Woodpecker, flocks of European Bee-eaters winging overhead, beautiful European Rollers perching on the roadside wires, and plenty of Passerines, from Zitting Cisticolas to Spectacled and Sardinian warblers to Whinchats and Northern Wheatears. Our evening foray into les Alpilles, with a picnic in the olive grove followed by a last-minute Eurasian Eagle-Owl was memorable, too. And returning to our charming country hotel, with its scrumptious food (I'm still drooling over the garlic rabbit and the Provencal gâteau à l'orange!) and fine selection of wines was not too hard to take after a day's birding!

Moving into to Pyrenees was quite a dramatic change. From the dry heat of the flat lowlands to the dramatic mountain scenery and cooler temperatures of the Gedre region, it was like moving into a completely different world, except that the birds, food, and wine were equally impressive! We had a spectacular first morning in the mountains, with perfect weather for our walk up to the stunning Cirque de Gavarnie. Lammergeiers and Eurasian Griffons rode the thermals above the ridge tops, parties of tits (Coal, Crested, Great, and Blue) and Goldcrests roved the forests, a Black Woodpecker gave a fantastic flyby, and the boulder fields in the cirque itself were alive with Black Redstarts, Water Pipits, Citril Finches, and a little family group of

Rock Buntings. But the stars of the show, and the overwhelming favorite bird of the trip, were the two Wallcreepers Caroline spotted just as we arrived at the entrance to the cirque! Most of us were riveted to these flashy little birds for the full 20 minutes they were in sight!

Our luck with the weather unfortunately didn't hold, and the ensuing rains made birding a bit of a challenge for the next couple of days, but the occasional break in the weather allowed us to tally a number of other wonderful species: White-throated Dippers feeding along the swollen river, Red-billed and Yellow-billed crows foraging in the alpine grasslands, a pair of fast-moving Firecrests showing well over our heads, and a number of migrants that were likely forced down by the weather. Among these migrants were two separate Eurasian Wrynecks hopping about on the ground, several Greater Whitethroats and Garden Warblers, numerous Dunnocks, and a handful of Yellowhammers, including at least one fine yellow male. A final highlight came on our stroll into Spain at the Port de Boucharo, when we encountered a couple of very cooperative Alpine Accentors next to the trail, a bird that took second place to the Wallcreepers in bird of the trip voting, surprisingly beating out Lammergeier, a perennial contender for the top bird on this trip!

All in all, France proved itself to be a wonderful place to run a birding tour, and it's easy to understand how this trip has become a fast-filling favorite from year to year! Megan and I had a great time guiding you all through France's scenic south, and hope you all had as much fun as we did, and that you all had wonderful extensions to your tour, whether you continued on in France, or carried on to Spain, Morocco, or Scandinavia and the Atlantic crossing. Here's hoping we'll cross paths again on another tour soon (lift glass of fine French wine -- clink clink!).

--Jay

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*) – For some, a lifer was gotten, then lost, then recovered, all in the space of a minute, when an initial Graylag Goose at Marais de Grenouillet turned out to be a juvenile flamingo. But shortly afterward, we found a flock of about 20 real geese grazing on the far shore of the wetland!

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) – Swans seemed to favor one spot at the Salin de Giraud; we saw about 20 there, with just a few birds scattered elsewhere.

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Anas penelope*) – Four birds at the marsh near the end of the Salin de Giraud roadway were early migrants, and a first for our fall France tour.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – The commonly seen duck, with small numbers at wetlands and reservoirs throughout.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Just a couple of birds at the Salin de Giraud and Marais de Grenouillet.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Three eclipse plumage birds at the Marais de Grenouillet were another first for our fall tour.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN) (*Anas crecca crecca*) – Small numbers in the Etang de Vaccarres.

RED-CRESTED POCHARD (*Netta rufina*) – An eclipse plumage male Megan found at the Salin de Giraud was a nice surprise. More surprising was another three at the Marais de Grenouillet!

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE (*Alectoris rufa*) – A group of 20+ birds was spotted sheltering from the blazing sun under one of the only shrubs on the Crau. They took off running when we stopped, but kept popping up on the numerous rock piles, allowing excellent scope views for all.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – A trio on the water at Aigues-Mortes, followed by 10+, some still in breeding plumage, on the Etang de Vaccarres.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*) – Great views of these beautiful large grebes in several sites in the Camargue.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – A big raft of winter plumaged birds on the Etang de Vaccarres.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

GREATER FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) – A real symbol of the Camargue; flamingos draw the attention of birders and non birders alike. We had super views of these all over the Camargue.

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (*Ciconia nigra*) – Our lone sighting was of one flying past our roadside lunch stop on our first full day of exploring the Camargue, but not everyone saw it before it drifted out of sight.

WHITE STORK (*Ciconia ciconia*) – Shortly after our lone Black Stork disappeared, one of these birds glided past, this one seen by everyone. A couple of other birds were seen during our drives around the Camargue.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Fair numbers at a number of sites.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*) – More numerous in the Camargue than in the mountains, but we saw this common species on all but one day.

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea*) – Just one sighting of a flying bird that stayed in sight all too briefly at Mesjanes.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Small numbers at the Salin de Giraud.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*) – Quite numerous in the Camargue.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Numerous throughout the Camargue region, with a few seen also on the drive from Gedre to Toulouse.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – The tall reeds along the road at Mas D'Agon made it a bit tricky to see these small herons, but standing on the van's running boards and some creative manipulation of the scopes got everyone a look.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Just one bird during a brief stop along the river at Couladere, en route to the Pyrenees.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Not regularly seen on the tour, so a group of about 10 birds was a nice find at Mas D'Agon.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – A couple of birds on our first visit to Salin de Giraud were our only ones.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

LAMMERGEIER (*Gypaetus barbatus*) – Now a very rare species in France, the Lammergeier is always one of the big target birds in the Pyrenees. We started with some fine looks at a couple during our walk up to the Cirque de Gavarnie, then improved on these with scope views of a perched bird in the Vallee D'Ossoue, and a close flyover at the France/Spain border at the Port de Boucharo.

EGYPTIAN VULTURE (*Neophron percnopterus*) – Another declining vulture species in Europe. An adult and a juvenile surprised us by upstaging our distant bustards near St. Martin de Crau, and we all had smashing views as they strolled around amidst a large herd of cattle. Deb picked this as her top bird of the tour.

EUROPEAN HONEY-BUZZARD (*Pernis apivorus*) – Raptor migration was a little underwhelming in the Camargue region, but we did manage some decent looks at several of the 50+ honey-buzzards we saw moving through on our first full day. That was it for the tour, though.

EURASIAN GRIFFON (*Gyps fulvus*) – Easily the most numerous of France's vultures. We saw them daily, sometimes in large numbers, once we arrived in the Pyrenees. Best looks were of a close perched bird just upslope from the road as we drove up to the Gavarnie/Gedre ski area.

BOOTED EAGLE (*Hieraetus pennatus*) – Cynthia was the only one to see one, a perched bird near Ausseing during the drive to Gedre. Sorry I didn't stop :-(

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Great views of a couple of adults and a subadult that set the marmot alarm calls off as they glided low overhead in the Vallee D'Ossoue.

EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*) – This broad-winged harrier was a common and daily sight in the Camargue region.

MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus pygargus*) – A much narrower-winged bird than the preceding species. We had excellent views of a perched female and a fairly close flyby from a male on the Crau steppe.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*) – This Accipiter is commonly seen out in the open, and is much less a true forest bird than our similar Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks. We saw them on most days of the trip.

RED KITE (*Milvus milvus*) – A single bird near Ausseing gave great views during our drive to the Pyrenees. Several others were sighted during the drive to Toulouse.

COMMON BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*) – We missed this species on just one day, but most days saw them in fair numbers. There is a reason it's called "Common".

Otididae (Bustards)

LITTLE BUSTARD (*Tetrax tetrax*) – Megan did an amazing job of picking out at least half a dozen distant birds poking their heads out of the tall grass near St. Martin de Crau, though these birds were upstaged when the two Egyptian Vultures arrived on the scene. We had better views on the Crau the next day, when we flushed a group of 6 birds that showed well as they winged across the stony steppe, white wings flashing in the bright sunlight.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus chloropus*) – Small numbers in the Camargue and at Couladere.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*) – Quite a few at the Salin de Giraud and Etang de Vaccarres.

Burhinidae (Thick-knees)

EURASIAN THICK-KNEE (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) – If these birds hadn't called, we might not have picked them out during our early morning visit to the Crau steppe. But they did, and we got some good scope views of them. Later that morning, Kathy D. also spotted one where we stopped to watch a Southern Gray Shrike.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

NORTHERN LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*) – Cynthia spotted our only ones, about 4 birds beyond the Glossy Ibis at Mas D'Agon.

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – A flock of about 20 winged by overhead as we searched for Spectacled Warblers along the track to the lighthouse at Fangassier. Jay noted a pair of smaller, darker birds with them that may have been golden-plovers.

KENTISH PLOVER (KENTISH) (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) – Small numbers on the Salin de Giraud mudflats. Until recently, these pale plovers were considered conspecific with the Snowy Plover of the Americas.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – The lookalike of our Semipalmated Plover. In good numbers at the Salin de Giraud.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius dubius*) – Good comparison studies between these birds and the preceding species, with Megan teaching us the way to separate the two even if the diagnostic yellow eye ring of this species isn't visible.

EURASIAN DOTTEREL (*Charadrius morinellus*) – A flock of 17 birds was an unexpected surprise on the Crau! We first saw them flying in the distance, then noted where they landed and approached the area. We were almost on top of them before we saw them, but fortunately they were very confiding, and allowed us to study them at length from a short distance away giving us superb views!

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*) – Fair numbers of these elegant waders at the Salin de Giraud.

PIED AVOCET (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) – About a hundred of these lovely birds were present at Salin de Giraud.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Small numbers in the Camargue.

GREEN SANDPIPER (*Tringa ochropus*) – A couple of sightings at the Etang de Vaccarres.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – About half a dozen of these yellowlegs-like birds at the Etang de Vaccarres.

COMMON REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*) – A couple of these red-legged birds were among the many shorebirds at the Etang de Vaccarres.

EURASIAN CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*) – Four or five at the Etang de Vaccarres gave great views.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – A group of 4 of these pale sandpipers stood out among the other peeps at the Salin de Giraud.

LITTLE STINT (*Calidris minuta*) – Numerous at Salin de Giraud.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – Fair numbers at the Salin de Giraud, some still with some black in their bellies.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferruginea*) – Good comparative views with Dunlin at the Salin. These birds' bills are more evenly curved throughout their length than those of Dunlins. A few birds still retained some rusty feathering in their underparts.

RUFF (*Philomachus pugnax*) – Megan picked out a single bird at the Etang de Vaccarres, but it vanished before most of us saw it.

COMMON SNIPE (*Gallinago gallinago*) – A number of these birds lurked at the base of the reeds on the far side of the Etang de Vaccarres, where they were tough to pick out even with the scope.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SLENDER-BILLED GULL (*Chroicocephalus genei*) – A second visit to the Salin de Giraud finally netted us 5 of these rather local gulls among a mob of Black-headed Gulls. A couple of them appeared quite rosy, and overall they were much more attractive and distinctive than some of us were expecting.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Numerous in the Camargue region.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL (*Ichthyophaga melanocephala*) – About 50+ seen the first day at Aigues-Mortes were the only ones we recorded.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL (*Larus michahellis*) – The Herring Gull equivalent here. Numerous in the Camargue region.

LITTLE TERN (*Sternula albifrons*) – A single at Aigues-Mortes our first day, and a handful at Salin de Giraud.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A couple of birds at the Salin de Giraud.

BLACK TERN (EURASIAN) (*Chlidonias niger niger*) – A pair of birds in winter plumage were seen in one particular area of the marsh along the Salin de Giraud road on each of our visits.

WHISKERED TERN (*Chlidonias hybrida*) – Excellent views of several courting over the marsh at Mas D'Agon, with several birds still in beautiful breeding plumage.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – Quite numerous around the Camargue region.

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – After Common tern, the most numerous tern species in the Camargue.

Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)

PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles alchata*) – Heard calling out on the Crau on our early morning visit, but we just couldn't track these scarce birds down. [*]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Seen regularly throughout, though all were undoubtedly feral birds rather than true, wild Rock Pigeons.

COMMON WOOD-PIGEON (*Columba palumbus*) – Seen daily around the Camargue region, with a few also seen in the lower valleys of the Pyrenees.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Numerous and widespread, save for in the higher parts of the mountains.

Strigidae (Owls)

EURASIAN EAGLE-OWL (*Bubo bubo*) – After a very pleasant light supper and wine in an olive grove at the base of Les Alpilles, we watched the nearby cliffs as dusk fell, hoping for one of these large owls to put in an appearance. We were pretty close to giving up before Kathy D. picked out the cat-like silhouette of one perched on the ridge line, where it sat calling while we watched through the scopes. Nicely spotted, Kathy!

LITTLE OWL (*Athene noctua*) – The first was pretty tough to make out in the heat haze on the Crau, but folks in the first van got good views of a second bird that exited a sheep barn as they drove up later that morning. We returned to the Crau a couple of days later, and relocated the initial owl, and were early enough that the haze wasn't a problem.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*) – A bit slippery, but most folks got excellent looks at a pair at Mas D'Agon, though several of us were still lingering over the Glossy Ibis and Northern Lapwings. We did connect with another the next day at Couladere, en route to the mountains, though it didn't stick around for too long. Still, this little beauty made quite an impression, and Bev chose it as her favorite bird of the trip.

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

EUROPEAN BEE-EATER (*Merops apiaster*) – Do these things ever perch? You wouldn't think so from our experiences... we saw them pretty much daily in the Camargue region, and though we had some pretty good views, we only ever saw them in flight.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

EUROPEAN ROLLER (*Coracias garrulus*) – Seen daily in the Camargue region, with some great scope views of several of these colorful birds, which, unlike the bee-eaters, were often perched!

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

EURASIAN HOOPOE (*Upupa epops*) – Megan spotted our only one, a fairly distant bird on the Crau that showed pretty well once or twice, but then evaporated, or so it seemed.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

EURASIAN WRYNECK (*Jynx torquilla*) – Not often encountered on this tour, so the two birds we saw in the mountains on two consecutive days, one in the Gavarnie/Gedre ski area, the other in the Vallee D'Ossoue, were a real treat, especially given the great views we had of them hopping about on

the ground. A highlight for many of us, especially Jane, who picked it as her favorite bird of the trip.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dendrocopos major*) – One was seen during a stop for migrants just before we arrived at the Crau the first time, though it didn't stick around for long. Another "spotted" woodpecker behind our Gedre hotel was either this or a female Middle Spotted, but again, it disappeared before we saw enough to put a name to it.

BLACK WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus martius*) – This awesome woodpecker gave a fantastic long flyby view as it responded to tape during the descent from the Cirque de Gavarnie. Another responded at Le Lienz, but only Andy, who had returned to the van for something, got a look at it as he walked back to where the rest of us were watching a mixed flock of migrants. Andy chose this as his top bird of the trip, as did Kathy R. It was my favorite, too, and a long-wanted target of mine for Europe!

GREEN WOODPECKER (*Picus viridis*) – Our first was also our most cooperative. Megan called it in from a long way off near our Arles hotel, and we got some good scope views of it before it flew in and very briefly landed right next to us before heading back the way it came.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

LESSER KESTREL (*Falco naumanni*) – These colonial nesting kestrels were super common on the Crau.

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Small numbers seen almost daily throughout, though missing on the Crau where they were replaced by the Lesser Kestrels.

EURASIAN HOBBY (*Falco subbuteo*) – Our morning departure from our Gedre hotel was delayed by the sighting of a possible Middle Spotted Woodpecker that unfortunately disappeared before it could be confirmed, but the delay paid off when one of these small falcons blasted in and landed in a nearby dead tree. We also saw a couple of others soaring over the forest at Ausseing on our way back to Toulouse.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – Good looks at a perched bird in the Camargue region.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

RED-BACKED SHRIKE (*Lanius collurio*) – Great studies of a heavily barred juvenile perched in a dead tree along the roadside in the St. Martin de Crau region.

SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE (*Lanius meridionalis*) – A second stop at a reliable site for this species near the Crau paid dividends when we spotted one of these uncommon shrikes perched atop a distant shrub. Scopes were definitely appreciated for this one! This species is a recent split from Northern (aka Great Gray) Shrike.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

EURASIAN JAY (*Garrulus glandarius*) – A single bird joined us for wine and snacks in the olive grove before our owling session in Les Alpilles, but we saw these gaudy jays far better in the Pyrenees, where we had several nearly daily.

EURASIAN MAGPIE (*Pica pica*) – Now treated as a separate species from our Black-billed Magpie. A common bird which we saw most days.

RED-BILLED CHOUGH (*Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*) – A group of four or five were seen on two consecutive days in the Gavarnie/Gedre ski area. Their feeding strategy seemed to consist mainly of picking through the numerous cow pies strewn across the landscape, which led some to bestow an alternate moniker: Brown-billed Chough.

YELLOW-BILLED CHOUGH (*Pyrrhonorax graculus*) – Seemed more social than the Red-billed Chough, and some very large parties were seen in the high parts of the Pyrenees, including some that allowed direct comparison between the two species.

EURASIAN JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*) – Abundant in the Camargue region, particularly around our hotel where a large flock was pretty much a fixture.

CARRION CROW (*Corvus corone*) – Outnumbered by the jackdaws in the Camargue region, but still seen daily there, as well as in the Pyrenees, where the jackdaws were absent.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Just a couple of birds in the Gavarnie/Gedre ski area.

Alaudidae (Larks)

CALANDRA LARK (*Melanocorypha calandra*) – We stopped to check out a couple of interesting larks on the Crau, and were pleased to see that they were this species, which we often miss on this tour. The massive bill and black "bow tie" make them quite distinctive for a lark. Surprisingly, when they flew up, we realized that they were part of a flock of roughly 100 Calandra Larks, by far the largest number we've ever had on this tour before!

CRESTED LARK (*Galerida cristata*) – Just a couple on the Crau, and they weren't very well behaved, only allowing themselves to be seen by several folks.

SKY LARK (*Alauda arvensis*) – Fair numbers on the Crau, with the first one being the best. It walked along the road just ahead of our vans, keeping a wary eye skyward, watching some unseen (by us at least) aerial predator that apparently was a greater threat than we were.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – Just a small number seen among the more numerous Barn Swallows in the Camargue.

EURASIAN CRAG-MARTIN (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) – Seen daily in the Pyrenees, with the best views coming on our way up the Col du Tourmalet when we found a nest with 5 very large, and very hungry, nestlings that one pair was doing their best to feed. [N]

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Numerous throughout.

COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (*Delichon urbicum*) – Fairly numerous in the mountains, with good views of one big flock flying up the pass at Port de Boucharo trying to get to Spain and better weather!

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

COAL TIT (*Parus ater*) – A regular part of the mixed Passerine flocks in the montane forests.

CRESTED TIT (*Lophophanes cristatus*) – Just a few birds in the Pyrenees, with Caroline picking out our first, a cooperative bird perched atop a conifer during our walk up the Cirque de Gavarnie.

GREAT TIT (*Parus major*) – The most regularly seen tit, and the only one we saw in the Camargue region, though it was more common in the mountains.

EURASIAN BLUE TIT (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) – Our first of these little beauties was seen in the village of Mauran on our way up to Gedre. This is the species famous in the UK for pulling the caps off of milk bottles to get at the cream.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

LONG-TAILED TIT (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – A fast moving flock of about 15 birds at the Ausseing forest didn't stick around long, but most folks got reasonable views in our brief encounter.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

EURASIAN NUTHATCH (*Sitta europaea*) – Heard a couple of times, then finally seen well at our picnic lunch spot on the last day.

Tichodromidae (Wallcreeper)

WALLCREEPER (*Tichodroma muraria*) – This was the runaway winner of bird of the trip, with 7 people choosing it as their favorite bird overall: Kathy D, Jerry, Cynthia, Caroline, Randy, Joan, and Megan. No sooner had we arrived at the Wallcreeper spot at the Cirque de Gavarnie than Caroline spotted some movement and we soon had two of these fabulous little birds in sight as they crept along the rock face opposite us, probing in every niche and crevasse in search of food. These birds were very active, and were constantly flashing their brilliant crimson wings, so that they almost looked like a pair of butterflies. We don't always get this one, but when we do... wow!

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

EURASIAN TREECREEPER (*Certhia familiaris*) – This treecreeper generally occurs at higher elevations than Short-toed, and has very different calls, which can be the best way to distinguish between these two look-alikes. We saw just one, a bird that flew across in front of us as we hiked up the Cirque de Gavarnie.

SHORT-TOED TREECREEPER (*Certhia brachydactyla*) – Seen only on the days we drove to/from the Pyrenees. First Kathy D. spotted one high in a tall tree at the Ausseing forest, then we had arguably better views at our picnic lunch spot at Bagneres de Bigorre en route to Toulouse.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

WHITE-THROATED DIPPER (*Cinclus cinclus*) – The heavy rains and swollen, silted rivers made it a little trickier to find these birds than usual, but we still had fine studies of one along the river below Gedre one morning, and a second the next day above the town.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*) – Seen regularly with mixed Passerine flocks in the mountains, and we had some nice views of several.

FIRECREST (*Regulus ignicapilla*) – Scarcer and tougher to find than the Goldcrest, but we had super views of a pair of these gorgeous little birds just over our heads, with a mixed tit flock at Le Lienz.

Cettiidae (Bush-Warblers and Allies)

CETTI'S WARBLER (*Cettia cetti*) – A commonly heard bird in the Camargue, and we had pretty decent views of this skulker, too, at Mas D'Agon, though the simultaneous presence of a pair of Eurasian Reed-Warblers, which are similarly drab, did cause more than a little confusion.

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

WILLOW WARBLER (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) – Seen a few times among mixed flocks of migrants. Separated from the next species by its pale legs.

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – The dark-legged look-alike of Willow Warbler; this one also often flicks its tail downwards, which Willow doesn't do. We saw them several times among groups of migrants, and also heard their characteristic "chiff-chaff" song at Le Lienz.

WESTERN BONELLI'S WARBLER (*Phylloscopus bonelli*) – This very pale warbler was a good find one early morning near our Arles hotel, but it unfortunately eluded everyone but the leaders and one or two participants.

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

MELODIOUS WARBLER (*Hippolais polyglotta*) – Another good find at our picnic lunch spot on our first morning near St. Martin de Crau. Again, only a few of us saw this very yellow warbler with the large orange-pink bill before it vanished.

EURASIAN REED-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) – Good looks at a responsive pair at Mas D'Agon, where they caused confusion with the similar Cetti's Warbler that was also popping in and out of the reeds there.

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

ZITTING CISTICOLA (*Cisticola juncidis*) – We worked pretty hard to see these the first couple of mornings around our Arles hotel but then stumbled on a big flock of them on our third morning there. This is the most widespread of cisticolas, ranging all the way from southern Europe to northern Australia.

Sylviidae (Sylviids, Parrotbills and Allies)

BLACKCAP (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – Seen a number of times in the mountains, though Megan remarked on how much scarcer they were than usual. Plus, nearly all the birds we saw were rusty-capped females or juveniles. Did anyone ever see an adult male?

GARDEN WARBLER (*Sylvia borin*) – Pretty nondescript, even as European warblers go! We saw one feeding on blackberries during a roadside stop near the Crau, and a couple of others at Le Lienz.

GREATER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia communis*) – Kathy R. picked out our first one in the same tree as our Red-backed Shrike, but this bird eluded most of the group. Later we had some great looks at this rusty-winged bird among some parties of migrants in the montane scrub above Gedre.

SPECTACLED WARBLER (*Sylvia conspicillata*) – Some pretty good looks at a couple in the Salicornia scrub at Mesjanes one morning, but they weren't super responsive, and the female seemed a little more bold and cooperative than the male.

SARDINIAN WARBLER (*Sylvia melanocephala*) – This attractive, black-capped warbler gave pretty nice views across from the viewing tower at Marais de Grenouillet.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa striata*) – Good views of one of these in a mixed flock of migrants during a roadside stop en route to the Crau.

EUROPEAN ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*) – Seen a few times in the Pyrenees, with some great point-blank views of some on our walk up to the Cirque de Gavarnie.

EUROPEAN PIED FLYCATCHER (*Ficedula hypoleuca*) – Easily the most common migrant throughout. It seemed these birds were pretty much everywhere, though surprisingly we actually missed them on one day in the mountains. Must have been the rain.

COMMON REDSTART (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) – One was seen fleetingly on one of our early morning walks at Mas de la Feniere, then a few more in the mountains, including a fine adult male on our final day at Ausseing.

BLACK REDSTART (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) – Numerous in the boulder-strewn meadows in the mountains, particularly in the Cirque de Gavarnie and the Vallee D'Ossoue.

WHINCHAT (*Saxicola rubetra*) – Perhaps the third most numerous migrant Passerine after Pied Flycatcher and wheatear, these charming little birds were seen in good numbers in the Camargue, and in smaller numbers daily in the Pyrenees.

EUROPEAN STONECHAT (*Saxicola rubicola rubicola*) – Surprisingly scarce, with just one at our bustard site in the Camargue region, and a couple more in the Vallee D'Ossoue.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – Another numerous migrant seen in good numbers throughout.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*) – This is such a common species in northern Europe that I was surprised at how scarce they seemed here. We saw a single bird at Couladere, a couple with some other migrants above Gavarnie, and another single at Bagneres de Bigorre on our final day.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Very common in the Camargue region, but absent from the Pyrenees.

Prunellidae (Accentors)

ALPINE ACCENTOR (*Prunella collaris*) – This bird came a distant second to the Wallcreeper in the bird of the trip voting, but it still beat out such species as Lammergeier and Wryneck, which wasn't expected! We did have amazing close views of a couple, including one singing softly right next to the trail, on the walk to Spain along the Port de Boucharo. Earl chose this as his favorite of the trip.

DUNNOCK (*Prunella modularis*) – For those that ventured out on the first rainy afternoon in the mountains, we had good views at a bunch of these in a big flock of migrants above Gavarnie. They were the only ones we encountered.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flava*) – Just a few birds on the mudflats at Salin de Giraud.

GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*) – These very long-tailed wagtails were seen regularly in the mountains, flying by usually.

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*) – One of our first birds of the trip, as several of us saw one fly past the vans in the parking lot of the Montpellier airport. Elsewhere we saw them only in the mountains.

TAWNY PIPIT (*Anthus campestris*) – These large, pale pipits performed well on the Crau, where first we called in a couple that chased each other around, then perched atop a little hillock, allowing some excellent scope views. We saw about 8 in total the first visit, then several more on the early morning return visit.

TREE PIPIT (*Anthus trivialis*) – A bit frustrating our first morning as we heard a bunch flying over but never found one on the ground. We fared better the next morning with some more cooperative birds, and we also saw some in the Pyrenees, where we had direct comparisons with the next species.

WATER PIPIT (*Anthus spinoletta*) – Fairly common in the higher parts of the Pyrenees, where they occurred alongside migrant Tree Pipits. These birds had much less well-defined streaking below than the sharply-marked Tree Pipits.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

YELLOWHAMMER (*Emberiza citrinella*) – Those of us who went birding above Gavarnie on our first rainy afternoon had a bunch of these along with a flock of other migrant Passerines (Dunnock, Tree Pipit, various warblers). Other folks got caught up the next day in the Vallee D'Ossoue, when we spotted a couple, including a fine yellow male, in some bare branches along the road.

ROCK BUNTING (*Emberiza cia*) – An adult with two attendant fledglings was a nice find in the Cirque de Gavarnie, where we've only seen them once or twice before.

CORN BUNTING (*Emberiza calandra*) – Our only encounter was with a flock of 25+ birds perched on some roadside wires in the Camargue.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

COMMON CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*) – Fairly common in the Pyrenees, and seen regularly after our first meeting with a female at the Pic de Pibeste.

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis*) – The original goldfinch; these gorgeous little birds were a common sight in the farmland around Mas de la Feniere.

EURASIAN LINNET (*Carduelis cannabina*) – A group of 10 flying past near the lighthouse at Fangassier were a bit of a surprise. We had expected them only in the Pyrenees, where we saw them several times higher up, including a nice adult male in the Vallee D'Ossoue.

CITRIL FINCH (*Serinus citrinella*) – Nice looks at 10+ birds among the boulders in the gorgeous Cirque de Gavarnie, where it was one of our prime targets.

EUROPEAN SERIN (*Serinus serinus*) – Our only encounter with these little finches was at Le Lienz, during our picnic lunch in the brief respite from the rain.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Common everywhere but the high mountains.

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*) – Fairly common in the Camargue, but generally outnumbered by the House Sparrows.

MAMMALS

COMMON PIPISTRELLE (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) – I believe this was the species of pipistrelle bat that was roosting behind the sign on the visitor center in the Camargue.

OLD WORLD RABBIT (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) – A couple darted across the road as we approached the Crau.

EUROPEAN BROWN HARE (*Lepus europaeus*) – One of these large rabbits was seen on the Crau by the folks that walked back to the vans after the dotterel hike.

ALPINE MARMOT (*Marmota marmota*) – The first in the Cirque de Gavarnie was a bit shy and hard to get everyone on, but they were numerous in

other parts of the high mountains, especially in the ski area where several were hanging out right near the road.

EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – A couple seen in the town of St Martin de Crau, and one or two in the Pyrenees.

NUTRIA (*Myocastor coypus*) – The folks in the lead van saw a trio of these large muskrat-like rodents scurry across the road ahead in the Camargue.

PYRENEAN CHAMOIS (ISARD) (*Rupicapra pyrenaica*) – Nice scope views of 5 of these attractive "goat-antelopes" feeding in a steep meadow high above the Cirque de Gavarnie.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 155 bird taxa and 7 mammal taxa