



Field Guides Tour Report

France: Camargue & Pyrenees 2014

Aug 30, 2014 to Sep 9, 2014
Megan Crewe & Jay VanderGaast

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).

This tour successfully combines two of my favorite things into one tidy package: great birding and amazing food. Oh, and there's fine wine, too, so three things. Oops, almost forgot, there's the fascinating history and culture and some spectacular mountain scenery, too, plus... well perhaps I shouldn't put a number on what I enjoy about this tour, except to say, that this is one great trip!

We began things, as usual, in the Camargue region, with a splendid stay in a charming country hotel with a superb restaurant (did I mention the great food?) from which we made daily jaunts out to the Camargue wetlands, the stony Crau steppe, and the scenic Alpilles (small mountains) with their rocky cliffs and well-maintained olive groves. Though the gusty mistral winds made birding quite a challenge over the first couple of days, we persevered and wound up seeing a great assortment of the regions key species.

A gorgeous Red-legged Partridge boldly sat up on a rock surprisingly unconcerned to have us all ogle it for several long minutes. A Black Stork soared over the town of Salin de Giraud, enlivening a necessary rest stop at the public toilets. A Montagu's Harrier coursed low over the stony steppe, perching for a moment on one of the many rock mounds built to prevent Allied planes from landing during WWII. A flock of 36 Little Bustards winged across the agricultural fields, flashing their brilliant white wings, while an even larger flock (~50) of Eurasian Thick-knees crept among the low shrubs below. Alpine Swifts and a single Common Swift wheeled about over the sun-splashed cliffs in the Alpilles. A striking Eurasian Hoopoe evaded the aerial attacks of a trio of kestrels intent on driving it away from their favored hunting area. A large flock of chunky Calandra Larks appeared out of the arid vegetation of the Crau only to drop back down further on and vanish into the surrounds once again. A roost containing 100+ gaudy Eurasian Goldfinches adorned the bare branches of a large shrub alongside an old farmhouse. These are just a few of the many highlights we enjoyed in the Camargue region.



Our group at Lac des Gloriettes in the Pyrenees...quite the scenic spot for some mountain birding, and where Wallcreeper was one of the highlights! (Photo by participant Donna Bray)

Moving into the mountains, we were expecting rain pretty much every day, but consoled ourselves in advance with the thought that it should lead to some good migrant fallouts. Turns out the weather reports were way off, and we enjoyed beautiful, warm, sunny weather for our entire stay, and, though no fallouts, migrant activity was pretty reasonable in a few places, with that wonderful Eurasian Wryneck at the Vallee D'Ossoue arguably being our best find.

Besides the wryneck, montane bright spots included: some smashing looks at Lammergeiers, particularly the one that glided low in front of the hills opposite our hotel one morning; a fantastic Black Woodpecker that spent several long minutes on a dead tree while we ogled him through the scope; several wonderful mixed groups of tits, with Blue, Crested, Great, and Coal tits. plus Goldcrests and Firecrests, Eurasian Treecreepers, and assorted other small Passerines mixed in; great studies of a Wallcreeper doing his stuff on the dam wall at Lac des Gloriettes; Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrushes and Alpine Accentors at the Port de Boucharo; a small party of Citril Finches in the boulder field in the spectacular Cirque de Gavarnie.

Despite all the great birds we saw, the best thing about this trip was the amazingly compatible group of birders with whom we got to share them all. It was a pleasure to have such an enjoyable group that got along so well and enjoyed each other's company, and Megan and I are grateful to have had all of you along to share in the fun. Thanks so much for picking Field Guides to tour with. We both look forward to the next time we see you. Until that time, safe travels and happy birding!

--Jay

PS: Check out some of the great group limericks on the last page!

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 =

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) – A couple of areas of the Camargue- Salin de Giraud and Mesjanès- had good numbers of these graceful birds, and we saw groups of 50-60 of them at each place.

COMMON SHELDUCK (*Tadorna tadorna*) – About a dozen of these large ducks were at the Salin de Giraud, and a single bird flew over at Mesjanès.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – The most numerous duck in the Camargue region, with a few on rivers as we ascended the Pyrenees as well.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Just a couple of female plumaged birds in a large flock of Mallards at the Salin de Giraud.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE (*Alectoris rufa*) – A couple of small coveys were seen on the Crau, but the best was one resting on a rock out in the open which allowed great scope views at the Peau de Meau trail.

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) – Carole spotted one from the van during a drive near St. Martin de Crau, but she was the only one to see it.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – Quite a few birds on the marsh at Mas D'Agon, and a few also at Le Capelière.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*) – Fair numbers of these elegant birds were seen in the Camargue region, first at Aigues-Mortes, then again at the Salin de Giraud. We also saw one on a river as we returned to Toulouse from the Pyrenees.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

GREATER FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) – A true symbol of the Camargue region, and we saw plenty there, including a couple of nice flocks of young of the year, indicating a successful breeding season!

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (*Ciconia nigra*) – A stop at the public toilets in the town of Salin de Giraud paid off when we spotted one of these scarce storks soaring overhead in perfect light. Another was seen by the folks in the second van a couple of days later. This bird was Leslie's choice as bird of the trip.

WHITE STORK (*Ciconia ciconia*) – Dave M. was on a roll on our morning at Mas D'Agon, spotting not only our first kingfisher and the only Squacco Heron of the trip, but also spotting these storks soaring high over the marsh! They proved to be the only ones of the tour.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Quite common in a few places in the Camargue.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

LITTLE BITTERN (*Ixobrychus minutus*) – Nice spotting by John who picked up this elusive little heron from the hide at Le Capelière, just as we were about to leave. It was fun watching it swaying back and forth to mimic the movement of the reeds.

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*) – Seen daily in the Camargue region.

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea*) – One flew over the road as we were driving to Mas D'Agon, and another flew by in the distance at Mas D'Agon, but neither gave that lengthy soul satisfying view that we all like to get.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Small numbers around the Camargue area.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*) – Fairly common in the Camargue.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Fairly numerous with cattle and in freshly cut pastures in the Camargue, with some fair numbers in the fields around our hotel.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – As mentioned above, Dave M. spotted our only one, way in the back of a flooded field at Mas D'Agon.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – About a dozen birds in the flooded field at Mas D'Agon, the second year in a row we've found this species there.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – The folks in Megan's van saw one at Salin de Giraud while the folks in my van had our attention elsewhere.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

LAMMERGEIER (*Gypaetus barbatus*) – Our initial views during the walk up to the Cirque de Gavarnie were pretty good, but not exceptional, and I remarked upon our return to the hotel one day how we could really use a fantastic view of one. No sooner were the words out of my mouth than one appeared in front of the mountain opposite us, and proceeded to soar around quite low overhead, offering stunning views for several minutes! Always one of the big favorites on this tour, and this year was no exception, with Bob, John, and Margaret all choosing it as their bird of the trip, and making it the 2nd favorite trip bird over all.

EUROPEAN HONEY-BUZZARD (*Pernis apivorus*) – Small numbers of migrants were present in the Camargue region, and we had several nice looks, including about 20 at the Peau de Meau trail on the Crau.

EURASIAN GRIFFON (*Gyps fulvus*) – Numerous in the mountains. Our best view was along the Port de Bouchard trail, where a close perched bird appeared to be waiting for a sheep in distress to die. Sadly for it, we spoiled the day by alerting the shepherd to the sheep's plight, after which the shepherd gave an incredible performance as he practically skied down the steep slopes to rescue the animal.

SHORT-TOED EAGLE (*Circaetus gallicus*) – Very nice looks at our first one soaring over our lunch spot near the Crau, and again of one or two birds at Lac des Gloriettes.

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – A couple of birds each on the Cirque de Gavarnie hike and at the Vallée D'Ossoue certainly got the marmots sounding the alarms! We had good views of both adults and juveniles.

EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*) – Seen regularly in the Camargue region, with nice views of one sitting on the ground near the road at one spot. This one is quite broad-winged and lacks the white rump band of other harriers in the region.

MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus pygargus*) – Our second visit to the Crau netted us superb studies of an apparent subadult male that glided low over the stony ground, then perched briefly on a rock pile before continuing its hunting. Another bird was seen high in the mountains, leaving French air space as it winged across the pass into Spain at the Port de Boucharo. This lovely raptor was Sam's favorite bird of the trip.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*) – A few scattered sightings in both the Camargue and the mountains, always of birds in flight. The folks in my van watched one dart out of the roadside scrub to almost collide with Megan's van, then nearly hit our van on its second attempt to fly across the highway!

RED KITE (*Milvus milvus*) – A distant soaring bird high up at the Col du Tourmalet was followed by a closer bird near the village of Mauvezin during our return trip to Toulouse.

BLACK KITE (*Milvus migrans*) – Rarely encountered on this tour in recent years, but Megan and I saw a group of 5 migrants just before the tour started so we thought there was a chance. Sure enough, we had excellent looks at a bird sailing low over the ground and perched briefly on our first visit to the Crau.

COMMON BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*) – An aptly named species, as we saw plenty, particularly at a couple of spots during the drive to the mountains, where it seemed there was one on every second fencepost!

Otididae (Bustards)

LITTLE BUSTARD (*Tetrax tetrax*) – We missed this at our usually reliable spot near St Martin de Crau, but not to worry, as the next day we spotted a flock of 36 birds flying over the fields near the Crau. Their flashing white wings were obvious in the early morning light. As if that weren't enough, a lone (and unexpected!) bird flew over the group the next morning at Mesjanes. A declining species that is never a guarantee on this trip.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus chloropus*) – A few, mostly young birds, seen from the hides at Le Capeliere.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*) – A few big groups in the Camargue, with an estimated 2000 in one big raft at Mesjanes.

Burhinidae (Thick-knees)

EURASIAN THICK-KNEE (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) – Another rare Crau specialty that we always hope to find on the trip. Just before we spotted our big flock of bustards near the Crau, we had picked out about a dozen of these skulking among the shrubs. When some of the birds flushed, we realized that the dozen was actually closer to 50, a truly impressive number among the larger groups we've ever seen here!

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*) – Scarce this trip, with just three birds hunkered down out of the gale force winds at Salin de Giraud, and a few others at Mas D'Agon.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

NORTHERN LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*) – A pretty good showing of these lovely shorebirds, with one at Mesjanes, followed by a half dozen or so at Mas D'Agon, and then an estimated 40 in some flooded fields near Le Sambuc.

KENTISH PLOVER (KENTISH) (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) – Seen only on the drive out towards the lighthouse at Fangassier, but there we saw a couple of hundred of these small pale plovers, which until recently were considered as conspecific with the Snowy Plover of North America.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – Fair numbers at a couple of sites in the Camargue, almost always alongside the slightly smaller Little Ringed Plover, allowing good comparisons of these two similar birds.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius dubius*) – In addition to its smaller size, these birds have yellowish (rather than orange) legs, a yellow eye-ring (on breeding plumaged birds at least) and appear longer winged than the Common Ringed, all features we could compare during our observations of the two.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Very like a nonbreeding Spotted Sandpiper. We saw small numbers throughout the Camargue region.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – A few birds at Mas D'Agon, Le Capeliere, and in the flooded fields near Le Sambuc. This is the one that is reminiscent of our Greater Yellowlegs.

WOOD SANDPIPER (*Tringa glareola*) – Though hard to see, there appeared to be plenty of these among the slightly too tall grass at Mas D'Agon. The 20 or so at Le Sambuc were much easier to make out.

EURASIAN CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*) – Three of these long billed birds were scoped on the mudflats at Le Capeliere.

RUFF (*Calidris pugnax*) – Megan picked out about a dozen of these birds at Le Sambuc, some showing some nicely colored neck ruffs.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Donna spotted our only one, among a flock of gulls right out near the Mediterranean at the end of the Salin de Giraud road.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – Small shorebirds were in short supply at Salin de Giraud, where we usually expect some good flocks. The extreme winds and resultant surge of water covering most of the mudflats must be at least partly to blame. As a result, we missed this species (and others) there, and saw just a single bird, still with a black belly patch, among the plovers at Fangassier.

LITTLE STINT (*Calidris minuta*) – One was picked out among the many Kentish Plovers (and the Dunlin) at Fangassier, and another single was in the flooded fields at Le Sambuc.

COMMON SNIPE (*Gallinago gallinago*) – A single was found among the many other shorebirds at the flooded fields near Le Sambuc.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – The default gull through most of the Camargue, with large numbers seen daily.

LITTLE GULL (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) – At least three of these tiny gulls were a nice surprise among some Black-headed Gulls at the Salin de Giraud. They were easily picked out by size as they sat on the water near the road, and we could make out the dark underwing too when they took to the air.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL (*Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*) – On the tour route, only regular at Aigues-Mortes, but quite numerous there, with an estimated 200+ birds seen beautifully there on our first afternoon.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL (*Larus michahellis*) – The default large white-headed gull in the Camargue, with good numbers daily.

LITTLE TERN (*Sternula albifrons*) – A trio of these tiny terns showed nicely at the Salin de Giraud.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A trio of these large terns were spotted at Fangassier.

BLACK TERN (EURASIAN) (*Chlidonias niger niger*) – Roughly 300 of these, all in nonbreeding plumage, were roosting out of the wind in the marsh at the Salin de Giraud.

WHISKERED TERN (*Chlidonias hybrida*) – Several at Mas D'Agon included one or two that were still in breeding plumage.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – One or two were picked out among the Black terns at Salin de Giraud, and at least three birds were at the water's edge at Mesjanes.

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – A few birds at Aigues-Mortes, followed by about 100 at the tern roost at the Salin de Giraud.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Lots seen, but primarily, if not exclusively of the "Feral Pigeon" type.

COMMON WOOD-PIGEON (*Columba palumbus*) – Quite a few seen daily in the Camargue, with smaller numbers also noted in the mountains.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – A common bird pretty much everywhere but in the higher parts of the Pyrenees.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

COMMON CUCKOO (*Cuculus canorus*) – Cuckoos were on the move on the day we visited the Crau. We don't expect to see them, as they have usually already moved on by now, but we saw at least three different birds flying across, and sometimes landing, in the middle of the stony grassland, not what you would normally consider prime cuckoo habitat!

Strigidae (Owls)

LITTLE OWL (*Athene noctua*) – Though distant, and a bit hazy, it was clear that it was an owl sitting on that dilapidated building on the Crau.

TAWNY OWL (*Strix aluco*) – Calling almost nightly behind our hotel in Gedre, but, though tantalizingly close a few times, it remained out of sight.

We probably heard at least 3 different birds there one night. [*]

LONG-EARED OWL (*Asio otus*) – On one of our Tawny Owl attempts, we were surprised to hear this species calling from nearby. Sadly, it also remained out of view. [*]

Apodidae (Swifts)

ALPINE SWIFT (*Apus melba*) – Five or six of these large swifts glided around over the hills as we enjoyed our picnic supper at Les Baux.

COMMON SWIFT (*Apus apus*) – Much smaller and darker than the preceding species. We had one with the Alpine Swifts at Les Baux, and another a couple of days later over the Cirque de Gavarnie.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*) – Mas D'Agon was the place for these flashy birds, as three or four of them chased each other around along the canal, perching often enough for some lengthy scope views. They certainly won Donna's approval, as she voted them her favorite of the trip!

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

EUROPEAN BEE-EATER (*Merops apiaster*) – Some years these are an almost constant presence in the skies over the Camargue, but this year they were incredibly scarce. Our only encounter was of a flock of 8 during an optional afternoon excursion near Arles.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

EUROPEAN ROLLER (*Coracias garrulus*) – A fairly common sight in the Camargue, perched up on roadside wires or in dead trees. One stretch of busy road had one on almost every section of power line.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

EURASIAN HOOPOE (*Upupa epops*) – Two sightings on the Crau. First, we flushed three out of some tall grass near the Lesser Kestrel nesting wall. Most folks saw them fly off, though the views varied as some were a little behind reading a sign. On our second visit to the Crau, we saw a lone bird being harassed by kestrels as it tried to land on one of the buildings. The hoopoe stood its ground quite well against the attacks and stuck around for a while before finally having enough. These wonderful birds were voted the third favorite of the trip, and Dave M.'s top pick.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

EURASIAN WRYNECK (*Jynx torquilla*) – For the second year in a row the rock slide at the Vallee D'Ossoue came through with one of these odd woodpeckers, which are still not often encountered on this tour. Megan picked up this bird sitting in a dense bit of shrubbery, and there it remained for a long time, giving us all long, lingering views. Phyllis chose this wonderful bird as her overall favorite for the tour.

MIDDLE SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dendrocopos medius*) – We thought we were hearing Great Spotted Woodpecker at the Ausseing forest, but were pleasantly surprised when one of these much scarcer woodpeckers popped up in a nearby dead tree, where it showed off beautifully for several minutes.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dendrocopos major*) – The folks in my van had a probable Great Spotted flying by near the Crau one morning, but other than that, this bird was a heard only species at our Gedre hotel. [*]

BLACK WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus martius*) – The few of us who were bringing up the rear as we hiked down from Gavarnie had pretty nice views of one on an avalanche-cleared slope. Fortunately for the rest of the group, we had another, much better one, at Le Lienz on our way back to Toulouse. That bird sat on a distant dead tree for a long time, allowing everyone multiple scope views of it and garnering it a couple of nods in the bird of the trip voting.

GREEN WOODPECKER (*Picus viridis*) – The most commonly recorded woodpecker on the tour. We had pretty good views of one near our hotel in the Arles region, heard them a few times around the Crau area, then heard this bird regularly behind our hotel in Gedre, where some folks also saw one early one morning.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

LESSER KESTREL (*Falco naumanni*) – Recorded only on the Crau, where they were present alongside the next species. Most of the birds we saw were near the nesting wall that had been specially constructed for these colonial birds, and we had good views of several there, with an estimate of at least 20 in the area.

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Much more widespread and common than the Lesser Kestrel, and we recorded these birds daily.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – Megan and a handful of others saw one soaring briefly over the cliffs in the Vallee D'Ossoue.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE (*Lanius meridionalis*) – We had okay scope views of a distant one at our usual spot just before arriving on the Crau

steppe, then much closer looks at another bird on the Crau itself near the Peau de Meau, where we've not had this bird before. It was present again on our second visit, and showed pretty well again then.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

- EURASIAN JAY** (*Garrulus glandarius*) – These flashy jays were quite common in the mountains, and eventually seen well by all, with good looks at some on the road on our way up to Lac des Gloriettes, and some bold birds on the picnic tables for those that returned early from the Cirque de Gavarnie hike.
- EURASIAN MAGPIE** (*Pica pica*) – Numerous in the Camargue region, and also present in the mountains, though absent in the higher areas we visited. Note that this bird is now split from the North American Black-billed Magpie.
- RED-BILLED CHOUGH** (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) – Not as numerous, and rarely in as big of flocks as the next species, but we saw a fair few in the mountains, including one flock of 20+ birds in the Vallee D'Ossoue.
- YELLOW-BILLED CHOUGH** (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) – Daily in the mountains, with some big flocks of 100+ birds soaring over the cliffs at times. Best seen at the Port de Boucharo, where several birds were feeding on the ground nearby.
- EURASIAN JACKDAW** (*Corvus monedula*) – Abundant in the Camargue, including some big numbers right around our hotel, but absent in the mountains.
- CARRION CROW** (*Corvus corone*) – Though not as numerous as the Jackdaws, these were more widespread, and we saw them daily.
- COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – We can't even count these on our France list, as the only ones we saw were a pair on the Spanish side of the Port de Boucharo, and they never invaded French airspace during the time we were watching!

Alaudidae (Larks)

- CALANDRA LARK** (*Melanocorypha calandra*) – Though not a species we generally expect to see on this tour, this was the second consecutive year that we had a large flock (roughly 100 birds) on the Crau. Easily told even in flight by their large, chunky size, dark underwings, and white trailing edge to the wings.
- GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK** (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) – A pair flushed from near the trail at the Peau de Meau was our only sighting.
- CRESTED LARK** (*Galerida cristata*) – The most commonly encountered lark, with good numbers on the Crau, and several excellent sightings along the dikes at Fangassier.
- SKY LARK** (*Alauda arvensis*) – Only one bird was seen at Fangassier, where the gray underwings and white outer tail helped to distinguish this species from the much more common Crested Larks.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

- BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*) – Small numbers were mixed in with the numerous Barn Swallows in the Camargue region.
- EURASIAN CRAG-MARTIN** (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) – We struggled a bit for good views of these, finally catching everyone up with looks at one perched on a window sill in the lovely (not!) mountain town of La Mongie.
- BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – Large numbers of these were seen pretty much daily, with big migrating flocks both in the Camargue region and high up in the mountains.
- COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN** (*Delichon urbicum*) – Second in abundance to Barn Swallow, and missed on just a couple of days in the Camargue. Overall more numerous in the mountains.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

- MARSH TIT** (*Poecile palustris*) – Our final new species of the tour, though I think only Carole and I got on this uncooperative bird in some roadside forest near Mauvezin.
- COAL TIT** (*Periparus ater*) – Numerous in the mountains, where we had regular wonderful encounters with them in pretty much every mixed tit flock we encountered.
- CRESTED TIT** (*Lophophanes cristatus*) – We saw only a handful of these birds with a mixed tit flock on our walk up to the Cirque, but at least they were cooperative, and allowed scope views for all!
- GREAT TIT** (*Parus major*) – The only tit seen in the Camargue region. A few were also encountered with the various mixed tit flocks in the mountains.
- EURASIAN BLUE TIT** (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) – Arguably the most numerous tit (and one of the prettiest) we encountered in the Pyrenees, where we had fair numbers of them daily.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

- LONG-TAILED TIT** (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – A couple of fast-moving birds at Gavarnie eluded most everybody, but a small flock moving through the oaks above our picnic tables at Bagnères de Bigorre were much friendlier, feeding in some low branches long enough for all to enjoy.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

- EURASIAN NUTHATCH** (*Sitta europaea*) – Our first views were easily the best, as an inquisitive pair in the forest near Ausseing posed for scope views for a considerable amount of time.

Tichodromidae (Wallcreeper)

- WALLCREEPER** (*Tichodroma muraria*) – This is one of those highly sought-after birds, that, when seen well, usually runs away with the bird of the trip title. It wasn't quite a runaway this year, but it still edged out the Lammergeier, thanks to a couple of good encounters at Lac des Gloriettes. The first was seen as it flew away from us while we were on the dam, and while not the crippling view everyone was hoping for, it was pretty good, and we could make out the salient features, including the red wing flashes, quite well. Later that morning, we spotted another one feeding on the dam wall, and had super scope views as this bird showed off its characteristic behavior. Carole and David chose this as their favorite, (as did Megan) and we all have Bev to thank for spotting it (both times). Nicely done Bev!

Certhiidae (Trecreepers)

- EURASIAN TRECREEPER** (*Certhia familiaris*) – The two trecreepers look very similar, and would be hard to tell apart were it not for different vocalizations and a different habitat preference. This one prefers coniferous forest at higher elevations than the Short-toed, and we had excellent looks at a couple during the hike to the Cirque de Gavarnie.
- SHORT-TOED TRECREEPER** (*Certhia brachydactyla*) – Generally at lower elevations, and more likely in deciduous forest, than the preceding species. We had nice views of a cooperative one at our roadside picnic area overlooking Carcassone, then another in the forest near Mauvezin on our final day.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

EURASIAN WREN (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – Formerly treated as conspecific with our Winter Wren, but now considered a separate species. We had 5 or 6 of these in the scrub below Lac des Gloriettes, some of which actually showed themselves.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

WHITE-THROATED DIPPER (*Cinclus cinclus*) – At least 4 of these striking dippers were enjoyed along the rushing mountain stream between Gedre and Gavarnie.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*) – Heard more often than seen, though we had some good sightings of these at several sites in the mountains, where they are quite common in coniferous forests.

FIRECREST (*Regulus ignicapilla*) – Carole spotted our first, which showed beautifully, along the trail to the hide at Le Capeliere. We ended up with several more nice views of these in the mountains, and probably saw them more often than Goldcrests this trip.

Cettiidae (Bush-Warblers and Allies)

CETTI'S WARBLER (*Cettia cetti*) – A commonly heard voice in the Camargue, but as ever, a very skulking, hard to see species. A few folks did manage brief views at Le Capeliere, however.

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

WILLOW WARBLER (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) – Migrant warblers were not very numerous this trip, and we saw just a few of these in the Camargue region, and a couple of others mixed in with the more common Chiffchaffs in the mountains.

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – Most easily distinguished from the similar Willow Warbler by the dark legs and habit of tail wagging. We had a few small parties of these in the mountains.

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

ZITTING CISTICOLA (*Cisticola juncidis*) – Quite common in the Camargue (including right outside of our hotel), with a few flocks of apparent migrants noted at a couple of sites.

Sylviidae (Sylvids)

BLACKCAP (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – Small numbers were noted in the mountains, and I think everyone got on a nice black-capped male at some point.

SARDINIAN WARBLER (*Sylvia melanocephala*) – While searching for Spectacled Warblers at Mesjanes, a few folks got on one of these black-capped warblers. We also heard several as we waited for eagle-owls at Les Baux.

SPECTACLED WARBLER (*Sylvia conspicillata*) – Quite nice looks at a couple of these birds in the Salicornia scrub along the coast at Mesjanes.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa striata*) – A lone bird perched overhead in the midst of a group of Pied Flycatchers at le Capeliere.

EUROPEAN ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*) – Common and seen daily in the mountains, with lots of youngsters, but also plenty of fine-plumaged adults about.

EUROPEAN PIED FLYCATCHER (*Ficedula hypoleuca*) – Though perhaps not in the large numbers we noted last year, this was still easily the most numerous migrant Passerine encountered, and was seen daily.

COMMON REDSTART (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) – Far less common here than the Black Redstart, but we had good looks at a couple at the Vallee D'Ossoue rock slide, and another at Lac des Gloriettes.

BLACK REDSTART (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) – One bird was a bit unexpected in the fields near our Arles area hotel, but the big numbers in the mountains were certainly not. Among the many rather drab looking ones were a few nice males in rather smart plumage.

RUFOUS-TAILED ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola saxatilis*) – Wonderful views of one perched on a boulder below the trail at the Port de Boucharo, and another above the trail a little further along. This was my favorite bird of the trip, as it was one of only two new species for me, and one I'd hoped to see on last year's tour.

WHINCHAT (*Saxicola rubetra*) – Lots of these were present in the Camargue region, with some great looks at several that perched on the electric fences out front of our hotel. A smaller number were also recorded among the more numerous migrants in the mountains.

EUROPEAN STONECHAT (*Saxicola rubicola rubicola*) – A few sightings in the mountains, with the best being a group of at least 11 in various plumages, in the Vallee D'Ossoue.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – A pretty common bird pretty much throughout. One bird on the Crau pretty much lacked a distinctive eyebrow and had us briefly hoping it was a Black-eared Wheatear, but all other traits pointed to this species.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*) – Small numbers in the mountains, including a couple of regulars on the hotel grounds.

SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelos*) – One was teed up on a spruce during the hike down from the Cirque de Gavarnie, seen only by those of us in the last group to make it down.

MISTLE THRUSH (*Turdus viscivorus*) – About 10 of these large thrushes were seen during the descent from the cirque (in company with the Song Thrush), a single was at Lac des Gloriettes, and half a dozen perched on the chair lift cables below the Col du Tourmalet.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Common in the Camargue, absent from the higher mountains.

Prunellidae (Accentors)

ALPINE ACCENTOR (*Prunella collaris*) – It took us some time to track down this high elevation specialist, but we finally spied a couple of them on the rocky slope below us at the Port de Boucharo and wound up with some great scope views.

DUNNOCK (*Prunella modularis*) – A single bird showed well feeding on a grate on the walkway across the dam at Lac des Gloriettes, and a couple were seen the next day at the Vallee D'Ossoue, one of which was hiding out under an immense boulder at our lunch spot.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flava*) – The most commonly seen wagtail in the Camargue region, with some nice views of several

along the edges of marshes at various spots.

GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*) – This long-tailed species was especially common in the mountains, particularly along fast-flowing streams, though we also had a few mixed in with the Yellow Wagtails in the freshly cut fields at Mesjanes.

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*) – One bird was among the other wagtails at Mesjanes, and small numbers were seen in the mountains, with a couple that showed well in a parking area in front of some shops at Gedre.

TAWNY PIPIT (*Anthus campestris*) – This large, pale pipit with rather indistinct markings was seen nicely on the stony steppe of the Crau.

TREE PIPIT (*Anthus trivialis*) – This is the expected pipit with the most distinctive streaking. We had a couple in the Camargue, but saw them best in the mountains, where we had nice looks at a pair on a grassy hillside as we started the hike to the cirque, and another pair on the slopes across the dam at Lac des Gloriettes.

WATER PIPIT (*Anthus spinoletta*) – Fairly common in the higher mountains, especially on the bare slopes on the way up to the Col du Tourmalet. This pipit shows rather blurry streaking on the breast, never as crisp or clear as on Tree Pipit.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

ROCK BUNTING (*Emberiza cia*) – A couple of juvenile birds in the boulder-strewn meadows in the Cirque de Gavarnie were our only ones for the tour.

CORN BUNTING (*Emberiza calandra*) – We were pretty certain we were going to miss this species when we didn't connect with it in the Camargue, but Megan pulled one out of her hat when she spotted a pair feeding under the trees at our lunch spot overlooking Carcassone! Nice save, Meegs!

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

COMMON CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*) – We heard and glimpsed several over the first couple of days in the mountains before finally catching up with this species at Le Lienz, where we had 20+ birds, including several fine males, feeding in the roadway and bathing in the rain puddles.

EURASIAN BULLFINCH (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) – A lone male feeding low in some fruiting shrubs along the track to the Cirque de Gavarnie showed well for all. Bev was particularly pleased, as this was a target species for her, and consequently she chose it as her favorite of the trip.

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – A flock of 8 birds flew overhead calling as we descended from the cirque, but all we saw was just 8 dark shapes that sounded like Red Crossbills.

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis*) – Quite common in the Camargue area, especially near our hotel, where we found a group of 100+ birds, including some gorgeous adults at a roost next to a nearby farmhouse. Lani was especially taken with these birds, and voted it her number one bird of the trip.

EURASIAN LINNET (*Carduelis cannabina*) – Our best encounter was with that close male that was singing softly from an open perch at the rock slide in the Vallee D'Ossoue, though we had several other sightings in the high mountains as well.

CITRIL FINCH (*Serinus citrinella*) – Those that made the final push into the boulder field in the Cirque de Gavarnie were rewarded with great looks at 5 of these beautiful, and local, little finches.

EUROPEAN SERIN (*Serinus serinus*) – Our first was unusual, as we found it sleeping in a tree behind our hotel at Gedre at the end of our owling session. Later we caught the rest of the group up with some nice views of several among the bathing Chaffinches at Le Lienz.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Pretty common everywhere but in the high mountains.

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*) – Much less numerous than the preceding species, though we saw several groups, including a bunch with the big goldfinch roost near our Arles hotel.

MAMMALS

COMMON PIPISTRELLE (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) – The bats roosting behind the shutters of the visitor center at Le Capeliere were likely this species.

OLD WORLD RABBIT (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) – A single rabbit was seen by some on the Crau.

EUROPEAN BROWN HARE (*Lepus europaeus*) – Also seen on the Crau, where we had a couple of different ones speeding away from us, no doubt having been shot at before.

ALPINE MARMOT (*Marmota marmota*) – Introduced into the Pyrenees in 1948, apparently to give the Golden Eagles something to hunt besides Chamois! They seem to be doing pretty well, too, though they do pose a hazard to bikers, as we witnessed on our descent from the Port de Boucharo. Man that guy was lucky to not have been more seriously hurt.

EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – A handful of these lovely squirrels were seen, including one next to the roadside near Mesjanes, our only one away from the Pyrenees.

EDIBLE DORMOUSE (*Glis glis*) – We could hear these guys squeaking in the trees behind our hotel, but we never could spot one. [*]

NUTRIA (*Myocastor coypus*) – One at the picnic site at Le Capeliere seemed unconcerned as it fed a few feet away, that is, until it suddenly noticed our presence and bolted for its life! Native to South America, nutrias are somewhat of a pest in many areas these days. [!]

SHORT-TAILED WEASEL (STOAT) (*Mustela erminea*) – Boy these things are fast! David W. spotted the first as we walked down the road from Lac des Gloriettes, and a second was seen in the same area. Views ranged from excellent to a brief flash of brown fur scurrying over the rocks.

WILD BOAR (*Sus scrofa*) – We came up empty on the eagle-owl hunt, but Megan did spot one of these feeding on the opposite slope, allowing us time to watch it through the scope for several minutes. This was a lifer mammal for both of your guides!

ROE DEER (*Capreolus capreolus*) – David W. saw one from the vans as we drove up to Lac des Gloriettes.

PYRENEAN CHAMOIS (ISARD) (*Rupicapra pyrenaica*) – A group of 9 distant animals showed pretty well on the slopes well above the trail to the cirque, but a single one above Lac des Gloriettes was significantly closer and showed even better.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

In conclusion, here is a small selection of the limericks composed for the "bird limerick" competition that helped pass the time on the drive to the Pyrenees. Sorry I did not receive all of the great entries to reprint here.

Upupa epops did flee,

From a bullying kestrel or three.
As it sat on the roof,
its raised crest was proof,
There were places that he'd rather be.

We have a fine leader named Jay,
Who would frequently be heard to say:
"Look quick to the right,
Cos it's still in sight!
On that branch is a Eurasian Jay!"

While boarding a flight at Heathrow,
The gate agent said to me, "No!
You can't board with that bird!"
I said, "Haven't you heard?
It's okay. It's a Carrion Crow!"

A gaggle of bustards did fly,
Cross a pearly gray new morning sky.
And their flashing white wings,
A great flutter of things,
With relief caused your two guides to sigh!

The birding was slow as molasses,
As I walked around on Mt. Parnassus.
I saw only two birds,
Plus some donkeys, in herds.
Just a pair of Great Tits, and asses.

A Wallcreeper one day did dance,
Cross a dam in a corner of France.
He did give a thrill
To some birders who will
Want another, whenever there's chance.

One morning a flycatcher (Pied),
Flew in a pit toilet and died.
The next day its mate
Met a similar fate,
And now they're interred side by side!

Totals for the tour: 150 bird taxa and 11 mammal taxa