



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**France: Camargue & Pyrenees II 2015**

Sep 2, 2015 to Sep 12, 2015  
Jay VanderGaast & Eric Hynes

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



*We enjoyed many wonderful views of Greater Flamingos, which somehow manage to be gangly and gorgeous at the same time. (Photo by guide Eric Hynes)*

Charismatic birds, fabulous food and wine, comfortable accommodations, spectacular scenery, nearly perfect weather, great camaraderie... who could ask for anything more. Thanks so much for choosing Field Guides and for joining Jay and me on an avian adventure in France. We did the Camargue and the Pyrenees up right!

On-time arrivals (with everyone's baggage) expedited our departure from Montpellier and allowed for some leisurely birding as we made our way east to Arles. Our first taste of the vast wetlands of the Camargue region was just south of Aigues-Mortes. Our principal targets there were Mediterranean Gull, Common Shelduck, and a first good look at Greater Flamingo -- check, check, and check. Another birding stop to break up the drive at Mejanès yielded killer looks at Squacco Heron and a few responsive Spectacled Warblers. We settled in at Mas de la Fenière for the next four nights with a wonderful meal.

Our first full day of birding was focused on shorebirds and other waterbirds in the salt pans south of Salin de Giraud. We really did well with good looks at Curlew Sandpipers, Pied Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Kentish Plovers, and a Whimbrel. An immature Purple Heron was noteworthy and pulses quickened when a couple of Eurasian Hobbies flew by. Slender-billed Gulls by the Mediterranean Sea were also standouts. In the afternoon we padded the list with Sardinian Warbler and Purple Swamphen from the raised platform overlooking Marais de Grenouillet. European Rollers, Eurasian Kestrels, and Eurasian Marsh-Harriers kept the commute interesting.

Birding at La Crau steppe was centered around a hike in the Peau de Meau refuge. This stark landscape yielded trip birds including: Lesser Kestrel, Common Cuckoo, Tawny Pipit, Red-legged Partridge, Eurasian Thick-knee, and European Bee-eaters. We enjoyed a picnic lunch at Etang des Aulnes where migrating White Storks were spotted overhead. In the evening we wined and dined in the field before a successful pursuit of an enormous Eurasian Eagle-Owl.

Day three in the field was focused on wetland species once again around the Camargue. The infamous mistral winds were blowing hard, but it did not seem to hinder our birding too much. The marshes of Mas d'Agon yielded Green Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Northern Lapwing, Montagu's Harrier, Glossy Ibis, and a stellar scope look at Common Kingfisher. The area known as La Capelière on the north shore of Etang des Vaccares in the Camargue was a migrant hotspot midday. We had European Honey-buzzards and Eurasian Sparrowhawks tracking into the wind while one drying pan held an incredible array of large shorebirds. We tallied Eurasian Curlew, Common Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Common Redshank, and Black-tailed Godwit. We almost reached the Mediterranean Sea again at Le Fangassier and were treated to Greater Flamingos by the thousands, plovers and sandpipers, and another flyby Eurasian Hobby. We ended the day with another sweep through the Salin de Giraud salt pans and found our only

Sanderling and a Little Gull to pad our list.

Finally catching up to the Little Owl on the property predawn was a wonderful way to start our transfer day. We tracked west across southern France. A soaring Booted Eagle spiced up our picnic lunch stop overlooking Carcassonne. We passed through Toulouse and detoured up into the foothills to sample hardwood forests for the first time in Ausseing. Our side trip was worthwhile as we got looks at Short-toed Treecreeper and Eurasian Nuthatch. We stopped at Pic du Pibeste before continuing up to Gedre where we were welcomed by the gracious staff of the Breche de Roland Hotel for the next four nights.

Our streak of beautiful weather continued so we took the first day in the Pyrenees to head up for the hike to Cirque de Gavarnie. Mistle Thrush, Tree Pipit, Eurasian Griffon, Golden Eagle, Crested Tit, Coal Tit, Firecrest, and Golderest enhanced our hike up. Once in the cirque, we caught up to a Rock Bunting and loads of Black Redstarts. During the descent we were mesmerized by the undulating flight display of a Golden Eagle and several dramatic passes from more than one Black Woodpecker.

Another hike the next day at Port de Boucharo found us working on our Spain lists after close encounters with Alpine Accentors and a Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush. The weather and views were simply spectacular. In the afternoon, we worked our way up the Vallee d'Ossoue to a glorious site for a picnic lunch. Bird highlights there included Short-toed Eagle, Lammergeier, Common Redstart, and White-throated Dipper.

Day three in the Pyrenees started on the wet side but by the time we were ready to start our walk around Lac des Gloriettes, the sky had cleared. We enjoyed fine views of Eurasian Bullfinch, Dunnock, Lammergeier, Eurasian Griffon, White-throated Dipper, Gray Wagtail, and our only Pyrenean Chamois or Isard of the tour.

On our final full day of the tour, we began at the little ski area of Le Lienz. The conifers there were full of finches. We had our best looks at European Serin and Common Chaffinch. Other species showing nicely included Yellowhammer, Firecrest, and another Black Woodpecker. It took some work but we finally tracked down Eurasian Treecreeper and Eurasian Wren. From Le Lienz, we followed the Tour de France route all the way up to Col du Tourmalet, where graceful Red Kites were soaring about. We looped back through the Ausseing forest to clean up Short-toed Treecreeper and added some great views of Middle Spotted Woodpecker. A Peregrine Falcon collapsing into a tremendous stoop was thrilling. Not to be forgotten was the little troop of Long-tailed Tits that Jay managed to find by ear while driving.

In the end we compiled a really fun list of birds. While 21 species received votes, the runaway winner for favorite bird of the tour was Black Woodpecker. Also perched on the medal podium were runners-up: Common Kingfisher and Red Kite. Some the dinners we savored might prove just as memorable with time.

Thanks again for choosing Field Guides, take care, and good birding.

--Eric a.k.a. Golden Eagle

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#### 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

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### BIRDS

#### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**MUTE SWAN** (*Cygnus olor*) – The biggest numbers were around the Camargue but a few others were scattered across the itinerary.

**COMMON SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna tadorna*) – We enjoyed pretty good numbers in the wetlands south of Aigues-Mortes

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Most days during the first half of the tour

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*) – We came across several small flocks during our second pass through the Camargue

#### Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

**RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE** (*Alectoris rufa*) – We kicked up a flock of four as we entered the Crau, which mysteriously disappeared from view in a flat landscape

**RING-NECKED PHEASANT** (*Phasianus colchicus*) – Heard only the first afternoon when we visited Mejanès [\*]

#### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**LITTLE GREBE** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – We had good looks on several occasions in the Camargue

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE** (*Podiceps cristatus*) – Good numbers on the Etang de Vaccares

**EARED GREBE** (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – Great looks close to shore on the Etang de Vaccares as we approached La Capelière

#### Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

**GREATER FLAMINGO** (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) – One of the signature species of the tour; we saw them by the hundreds and thousands around the Camargue

#### Ciconiidae (Storks)

**WHITE STORK** (*Ciconia ciconia*) – Our only sighting was a serendipitous spotting of migrants overhead during our lunch break at Etang des Aulnes.

#### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**GREAT CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Plenty seen around the Camargue

#### Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**GRAY HERON** (*Ardea cinerea*) – This Great Blue Heron look alike was a common sighting in the Rhone River delta

**PURPLE HERON** (*Ardea purpurea*) – We only came across one juvenile at Salin de Giraud

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – Common around the Camargue

**LITTLE EGRET** (*Egretta garzetta*) – Plenty in the Camargue area

**CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*) – The horse herd at Le Mas de la Feniere certainly drew plenty of these guys

**SQUACCO HERON** (*Ardeola ralloides*) – Their structure and behavior reminded me of Green Herons but there was no mistaking their gleaming white wings in flight. That young Montagu's Harrier put up quite a few at Mas d'Agon.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Gregg spotted our first bird in flight and we saw several more immature birds overhead at La Capeliere.

*Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)*

**GLOSSY IBIS** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Our only individual of the tour was blown by us in the mistral winds at Mas d'Agon

*Pandionidae (Osprey)*

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – There were a few around the Camargue

*Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*

**LAMMERGEIER** (*Gypaetus barbatus*) – Our closest bird would have slipped by unnoticed on the hike to Port de Boucharo if it wasn't for Jay. This distinctive vulture was a daily sighting high up on the ridgelines in the Pyrenees.

**EUROPEAN HONEY-BUZZARD** (*Pernis apivorus*) – We were treated to a migrant wave working their way around Etang de Vaccares with over 20 at La Capeliere alone.

**EURASIAN GRIFFON** (*Gyps fulvus*) – There was no challenge in spotting these massive vultures against the peaks in the Pyrenees

**SHORT-TOED EAGLE** (*Circaetus gallicus*) – We were lucky to run into at least one of these raptors more days than not it seemed. To better align with other members of its genus, the common name has recently been shifted to Short-toed Snake-Eagle, indicating one of its favorite meals.

**BOOTED EAGLE** (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) – Birders stop to eat but never stop birding. We picked up this majestic raptor during our lunch stop overlooking Carcassonne. It was only second time this species has been recorded in the last five years of this tour.

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Wow -- I'm not sure what was more dramatic, the undulating flight display of the Golden Eagle on our descent from Cirque de Gavarnie or my gushing over it. We were treated to sightings of two different pairs of these regal beasts. Look out marmots!

**EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER** (*Circus aeruginosus*) – We enjoyed several great looks at this large, relatively broad-winged harrier. Each of the individuals we came across was a juvenile with the dark plumage and the golden head.

**MONTAGU'S HARRIER** (*Circus pygargus*) – Our best look at this particularly slim harrier was of a juvenile with a burnt orange belly struggling against the wind at Mas d'Agon.

**EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK** (*Accipiter nisus*) – This migrant Accipiter rivaled European Honey-buzzard for most numerous raptor, particularly when we were down on the coast.

**RED KITE** (*Milvus milvus*) – One of the last species to make the list, we studied these graceful raptors soaring from the Col du Tourmalet and again down at our pit stop in La Mongie.

**BLACK KITE** (*Milvus migrans*) – We only encountered one distant bird during our second morning on La Crau

**COMMON BUZZARD** (*Buteo buteo*) – The European equivalent of Red-tailed Hawk; we frequently spotted these guys perched along roadways during our travels.

*Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)*

**PURPLE SWAMPHEN** (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) – Our views at Marais de Grenouillet were distant but the shape of this bird is quite distinctive.

**EURASIAN COOT** (*Fulica atra*) – By the thousands on Etang de Vaccares

*Burhinidae (Thick-knees)*

**EURASIAN THICK-KNEE** (*Burhinus oediconemus*) – We had nice scope views of this unusual-looking species in the steppe area approaching La Crau

*Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)*

**BLACK-WINGED STILT** (*Himantopus himantopus*) – Dozens of this elegant shorebird species foraged in the first pool we studied south of Salin de Giraud.

**PIED AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra avocetta*) – This is a missable species on this tour but you would never know it from our experience. We saw hundreds of these stunning shorebirds in the Salin de Giraud area.

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – A flock of eight were among the many new species we teased out of "the" shorebird hotspot. A few were still in stunning breeding plumage.

**NORTHERN LAPWING** (*Vanellus vanellus*) – Their blocky wings and bold plumage pattern make for an easy ID. We found a couple dozen in the Mas d'Agon area.

**KENTISH PLOVER (KENTISH)** (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) – The "ringed" plovers outnumbered this species but we still had plenty of good looks around Salin de Giraud

**COMMON RINGED PLOVER** (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – The most abundant small plover by far in the Camargue

**LITTLE RINGED PLOVER** (*Charadrius dubius*) – We all benefited from direct comparison to separate this species from the previous one. The Little Ringed Plovers showed a slimmer bill, more attenuated profile, and a more jagged border to the auricular patch.

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – This Spotted Sandpiper look alike turned up in quite a few places around the Camargue

**GREEN SANDPIPER** (*Tringa ochropus*) – The lighting and distance made it a challenge to pick out a few individuals in the flooded agricultural field in the Mas d'Agon area. Thankfully we had a nice view of a bird in flight (calling) at La Capeliere.

**SPOTTED REDSHANK** (*Tringa erythropus*) – The more elegantly proportioned redshank; we were thrilled to spot dozens about the shorebird concentration at "the" hotspot pan in the La Capeliere area. Some of them still sported patches of black in their bellies.

**COMMON GREENSHANK** (*Tringa nebularia*) – There were just a few of these at the hotspot; paler than the redshanks and showing a slightly recurved bill

**WOOD SANDPIPER** (*Tringa glareola*) – We had our best looks at the flooded agricultural field at Mas d'Agon

**COMMON REDSHANK** (*Tringa totanus*) – This redshank has a slightly dumper build and shorter, thicker bill than the Spotted Redshank.

**WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – It has been more than five years since this species has been found on this tour so the guides were pretty pumped when Margaret drew our attention to it. The conspicuous white wedge up the back in flight helps separate it from the North American subspecies.

**EURASIAN CURLEW** (*Numenius arquata arquata*) – This is another shorebird species that is not detected every year so we were delighted to come across a flock of 36! We observed the western Palearctic subspecies.

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT** (*Limosa limosa*) – Perhaps the crown jewel of our rare shorebird round-up; we enjoyed four in the scope and saw their striking pattern in flight

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*) – Two fast-flying birds buzzed the group during our first visit to Salin de Giraud, a hard to detect species for this tour

**RUFF** (*Calidris pugnax*) – One of the birds that came and went on the mistral winds before most people could catch up to it at Mas d'Agon but its U-shaped white rump patch was evident.

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** (*Calidris ferruginea*) – Our only sightings of this handsome shorebird were at Salin de Giraud

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*) – One crisp juvenile capped our second run through the Salin de Giraud area

**DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*) – Several patches close to the Mediterranean held small flocks of these dumpy shorebirds.

**LITTLE STINT** (*Calidris minuta*) – The only peep around these parts regularly

**COMMON SNIPE** (*Gallinago gallinago*) – Perseverance was the key to everyone getting on the one bird we saw the whole trip.

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Most tours miss this delicate shorebird but we scored five of them at Salin de Giraud.

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**SLENDER-BILLED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus genei*) – We only caught up to this unusual species in the last pan, closest to the Mediterranean, at Salin de Giraud.

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – The default gull of the tour

**LITTLE GULL** (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) – Folks in Jay's van were treated to a close flyby but eventually we all got looks at Salin de Giraud

**MEDITERRANEAN GULL** (*Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*) – One of the species we successfully targeted at Aigues-Mortes our first afternoon, never to be seen again on the tour

**YELLOW-LEGGED GULL** (*Larus michahellis*) – The default large gull around the Camargue

**LITTLE TERN** (*Sternula albifrons*) – We had some nice looks at Salin de Giraud

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – Just a few flyby sightings around the Camargue

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – We got the impression from the French birder we met out on La Crau that it has been an above average season for this largest tern.

**BLACK TERN (EURASIAN)** (*Chlidonias niger niger*) – It was a treat to catch up to this dark, diminutive tern a couple times in the Camargue.

**WHISKERED TERN** (*Chlidonias hybrida*) – Our best look was at Mas d'Agon

**COMMON TERN** (*Sterna hirundo*) – One of the big differences between our two visits to the Salin de Giraud area was the number of Common Terns. We may have missed them on our first pass but there was a sizable roost in the last pool near the Mediterranean on our second visit.

**SANDWICH TERN (EURASIAN)** (*Thalasseus sandvicensis sandvicensis*) – Numerous in some places around the Camargue; keep your eye on this one for a future split

*Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)*

**PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE** (*Pterocles alchata*) – If you keep looking up, eventually you get lucky. Three of these elusive fowl zipped overhead while we hiked the Peau de Meau section of La Crau

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – A resilient and adaptable beast

**COMMON WOOD-PIGEON** (*Columba palumbus*) – The white wing bars really stood out with a dorsal view

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Plenty

*Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**COMMON CUCKOO** (*Cuculus canorus*) – Jay got us all on one skimming across La Crau, heading for the treeline; our only one of the tour

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**EURASIAN EAGLE-OWL** (*Bubo bubo*) – Another species where perseverance paid off; thanks for searching up the trail Bette!

**LITTLE OWL** (*Athene noctua*) – We finally spotted this guy on one of the fenceposts predawn our last morning at Le Mas de la Feniere

**TAWNY OWL** (*Strix aluco*) – Heard only in Gedre and just a few calls at that [\*]

*Apodidae (Swifts)*

**COMMON SWIFT** (*Apus apus*) – One was fighting the wind at Mas d'Agon

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**COMMON KINGFISHER** (*Alcedo atthis*) – Scope views of this little gem along the canal at Mas d'Agon produced lots of "oohs" and "aahs."

*Meropidae (Bee-eaters)*

**EUROPEAN BEE-EATER** (*Merops apiaster*) – One sizable flock at sunrise at Le Mas de la Feniere was great but the quick scope views at La Crau were an upgrade.

*Coraciidae (Rollers)*

**EUROPEAN ROLLER** (*Coracias garrulus*) – Impressive perched and down right gaudy in flight; their distribution in the Camargue was patchy

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**EURASIAN WRYNECK** (*Jynx torquilla*) – Gregg did a great job of spotting this migrant in the boulders up in Vallee d'Ossoue but it quickly gave us the slip despite considerable effort.

**MIDDLE SPOTTED WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos medius*) – The penultimate addition to the triplist, we had wonderful views of this gorgeous woodpecker at the edge of the forest in Ausseing.

**GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos major*) – Alec and I watched one fly across the road on our way up to the Ausseing forest; then we couldn't quite entice one across the river below Ausseing.

**BLACK WOODPECKER** (*Dryocopus martius*) – Voted the bird of the tour -- we had multiple dramatic flyby sightings on the descent from Cirque de Gavarnie and at Le Leinz.

**EURASIAN GREEN WOODPECKER** (*Picus viridis*) – Getting this bird's attention wasn't hard; getting it to hold still in view proved far more challenging.

#### Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**LESSER KESTREL** (*Falco naumanni*) – Teasing this species apart from the more common and widespread Eurasian Kestrel wasn't easy but we had a great study out on La Crau to really nail down the ID.

**EURASIAN KESTREL** (*Falco tinnunculus*) – An everyday bird

**RED-FOOTED FALCON** (*Falco tinnunculus*) – A first for this tour! According to a local birder, it was an exceptional spring migration for Red-footed Falcons in France so perhaps the surplus led to some lingering birds in the area. Regardless of the reason, we enjoyed not one but two adult males. The first zipped over our group on a morning walk at Le Mas de la Feniere and a second was hunting over La Crau.

**EURASIAN HOBBY** (*Falco subbuteo*) – We observed this lanky falcon several times in the Camargue region.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – Some people got on one working the shore of Etang de Vaccares but our best look was the immature bird that went into a tremendous stoop as we were loading up to leave the Ausseing forest.

#### Laniidae (Shrikes)

**SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE** (*Lanius meridionalis*) – Jay spied one teed up for us as we were departing La Crau.

#### Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**EURASIAN JAY** (*Garrulus glandarius*) – More sightings in the Pyrenees but we did have a pair one morning at Le Mas de la Feniere

**EURASIAN MAGPIE** (*Pica pica*) – More days than not and the last bird we all saw together around the pool during our last dinner at the hotel in Toulouse.

**RED-BILLED CHOUGH** (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) – The more uncommon of the two choughs we encountered up in the Pyrenees

**YELLOW-BILLED CHOUGH** (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) – Large, wheeling mobs of them patrolled the ridgelines in the Pyrenees.

**EURASIAN JACKDAW** (*Corvus monedula*) – These guys sounded like Red-bellied Woodpeckers to my ear. We saw large flocks of them around Arles and out on La Crau.

**CARRION CROW** (*Corvus corone*) – An everyday bird

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – Surprisingly few up in the Pyrenees

#### Alaudidae (Larks)

**GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK** (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) – Twice, we kicked up a flock of five at La Crau

#### Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*) – Lots around the Camargue

**EURASIAN CRAG-MARTIN** (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) – We came upon this species in several places up in the Pyrenees.

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – Almost an everyday bird; they were most numerous in the Camargue region

**COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN** (*Delichon urbicum*) – Lots up in the Pyrenees

#### Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

**MARSH TIT** (*Poecile palustris*) – We only encountered this species a couple of times during the second half of the tour. It is the tit that resembles North American chickadees the most so it is no surprise that they share the same genus.

**COAL TIT** (*Periparus ater*) – We came upon this species pretty regularly once we got up into the Pyrenees. Its white nape is distinctive.

**CRESTED TIT** (*Lophophanes cristatus*) – I couldn't help but think of Bridled Titmouse every time we saw these guys.

**GREAT TIT** (*Parus major*) – The only tit we saw in the Camargue as well as in the Pyrenees.

**EURASIAN BLUE TIT** (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) – Its colors generated "oohs" and "aahs."

#### Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

**LONG-TAILED TIT** (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – Thanks to Jay's sensitive ear, we finally scored this species on our way to Toulouse.

#### Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**EURASIAN NUTHATCH** (*Sitta europaea*) – The forest in Ausseing was our first sighting but we came upon it several more times in the Pyrenees.

#### Certhiidae (Trecreeper)

**EURASIAN TRECREEPER** (*Certhia familiaris*) – We finally picked up this species in the predominately conifer forest up at Le Lienz. Habitat and voice were keys to identification. A subtlety separating it from Short-toed Trecreeper is the elongated hallux, which was detectable in photos.

**SHORT-TOED TRECREEPER** (*Certhia brachydactyla*) – We scored this species in the hardwood forest in the foothills at Ausseing.

#### Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**EURASIAN WREN** (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – We finally caught up to one at Le Lienz. The little skulker was less than obliging but it stuck around long enough for everyone to get a clear view in the end.

#### Cinclidae (Dippers)

**WHITE-THROATED DIPPER** (*Cinclus cinclus*) – From a behavioral perspective, birds don't get much cooler than a dipper. We enjoyed quite a few sightings along rivers and streams up in the Pyrenees.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

**GOLDCREST** (*Regulus regulus*) – The sprite with the more subtle head pattern

**FIRECREST** (*Regulus ignicapilla*) – The sprite with the bolder head pattern; we had some great looks at Le Lienz

Cettiidae (Bush-Warblers and Allies)

**CETTI'S WARBLER** (*Cettia cetti*) – Hearing one around the Camargue was easy. Trying to see one was an exercise in futility. [\*]

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

**COMMON CHIFFCHAFF** (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – Phylloscopus warblers have a well-earned reputation for being difficult to ID. We likely encountered Willow Warbler as well but this species was the only one we confirmed by call.

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

**ZITTING CISTICOLA** (*Cisticola juncidis*) – One of the few conspicuous songbirds we detected regularly in the Camargue; none at high elevation

Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)

**BLACKCAP** (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – We seemed to hit their migration well with multiple sightings on multiple days in the Pyrenees.

**SARDINIAN WARBLER** (*Sylvia melanocephala*) – We got a strong response to playback at Marais de Grenouillet but they refused to come out of thick cover. Movement and glimpses were all we detected visually. [\*]

**SPECTACLED WARBLER** (*Sylvia conspicillata*) – We had wonderful looks at responsive birds at Mejanes the first afternoon.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

**EUROPEAN ROBIN** (*Erithacus rubecula*) – A regular sighting in the Pyrenees

**EUROPEAN PIED FLYCATCHER** (*Ficedula hypoleuca*) – "Pied Fly" was a common reply

**COMMON REDSTART** (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) – We only found one up in Vallee d'Ossoue but it was a beauty.

**BLACK REDSTART** (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) – Nearly a constant companion in the Pyrenees

**RUFOUS-TAILED ROCK-THRUSH** (*Monticola saxatilis*) – What a gorgeous bird! We observed a couple of males in molt showing their salmon-colored belly with pale vermiculations.

**WHINCHAT** (*Saxicola rubetra*) – A frequent sighting in the Camargue and a few at elevation as well

**EUROPEAN STONECHAT** (*Saxicola rubicola rubicola*) – We found more Whinchats but this species was detected on a greater number of days.

**NORTHERN WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – Almost an everyday bird and in some places we saw quite a few

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**EURASIAN BLACKBIRD** (*Turdus merula*) – An everyday bird once we got up to the Pyrenees

**MISTLE THRUSH** (*Turdus viscivorus*) – We watched a small flock of these guys fly up the slope at the start of our hike to Cirque de Gavarnie

Sturnidae (Starlings)

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Lots in the low country

Prunellidae (Accentors)

**ALPINE ACCENTOR** (*Prunella collaris*) – We couldn't ask for better looks on our hike at Port de Boucharo.

**DUNNOCK** (*Prunella modularis*) – There seemed to be a bit of a migrant fallout below the dam at Lac des Gloriettes.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

**WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla flava*) – A first half of the tour bird

**GRAY WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla cinerea*) – Their remarkably long tails stood out as well as their affinity for riverbanks and other shorelines.

**WHITE WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla alba*) – We enjoyed our best looks on the drive up to Port de Boucharo.

**TAWNY PIPIT** (*Anthus campestris*) – We found a cooperative bird shortly after turning around in La Crau, which allowed for careful study.

**TREE PIPIT** (*Anthus trivialis*) – On our hike to Cirque de Gavarnie we flushed one up to a tree perch, which was a good sign, but the bold, crisp streaking on the yellowish-buff breast with a clean white belly helped to clinch the ID. We saw one again the next day.

**WATER PIPIT** (*Anthus spinoletta*) – This guys were all over the alpine meadows in the Pyrenees.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

**YELLOWHAMMER** (*Emberiza citrinella*) – We spotted a few bright males up at Le Lienz.

**ROCK BUNTING** (*Emberiza cia*) – Just the one up in the Cirque de Gavarnie

**CORN BUNTING** (*Emberiza calandra*) – Two popped up out of roadside vegetation as we departed La Crau

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

**COMMON CHAFFINCH** (*Fringilla coelebs*) – Our best looks were definitely at Le Lienz

**EURASIAN BULLFINCH** (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) – A small flock below the dam at Lac des Gloriettes posed for our best view.

**EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH** (*Carduelis carduelis*) – Observed on multiple occasions in the Pyrenees

**EURASIAN LINNET** (*Carduelis cannabina*) – We watched a sizable flock come up out of Spain and fly into France.

**EUROPEAN SERIN** (*Serinus serinus*) – Le Lienz was the place to be for good looks at finches

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Large flocks in the Camargue region

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## MAMMALS

**COMMON PIPISTRELLE** (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) – These were likely the guys making the high-pitched squeeks behind the sign at the entrance to the nature center at La Capeliere and possibly the bats we saw flying around during our evening outing at the beginning of the tour.

**EUROPEAN BROWN HARE** (*Lepus europaeus*) – We flushed one around the corner of the old barn on our walk through La Crau

**ALPINE MARMOT** (*Marmota marmota*) – These guys were brought in from the Alps and seem to be thriving

**EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – A few people in Jay's van saw one cross the road

**PYRENEAN CHAMOIS (ISARD)** (*Rupicapra pyrenaica*) – Great spotting Jay! One generated a distinctive silhouette way up on a ridgeline above Lac des Gloriettes.

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## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

For those interested in Herps, there were three species we noted during the tour:

Common Wall Gecko (*Tarentola mauritanica*) - this was the heavy-bodied, spiky gecko we saw clinging to the cement wall of the bridge we walked under at our first birding stop near Aigues-Mortes.

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*) - this was the species we encountered in two locations. Surprising given the elevation, we saw a large (likely female) individual acting sluggish in the cool morning up at the parking area for Port de Boucharo. During our hike up into Vallee d'Estaubé, above Lac des Gloriettes, we saw many small individuals, which were likely just emerging to their terrestrial life having recently completed their metamorphosis.

The small lizards we were seeing on our hike at Port de Boucharo are likely one of the wall lizards in the genus *Podarcis*. I am not certain which one but Common Wall Lizard seems likely.

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**Totals for the tour: 154 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa**