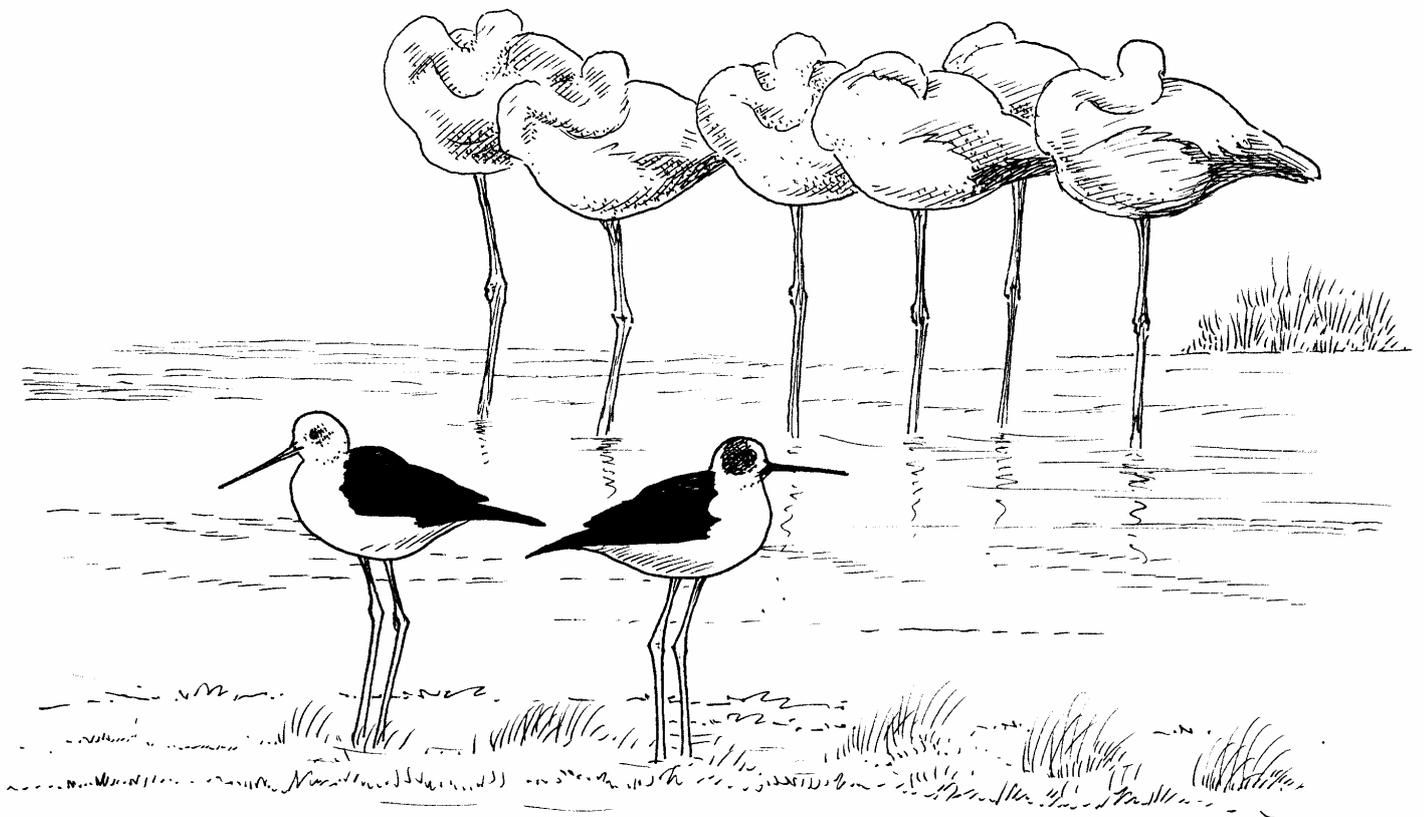


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The Camargue
3 – 10 May 2003

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Participants

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Report compiled by Russell Leavett

Illustrations by Rob Hume, except black-winged stilt flock by Gary Wright. Cover: flamingos and black-winged stilts.

This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. The conservation contribution this year of £25 per person from two groups in the Camargue was supplemented by groups in the Dordogne and French Pyrenees, leading to a total of £1050 given to La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, the French Bird Protection League).

This brings the total given to LPO to £6,925 since 1991, and to various conservation projects in Europe to £29,800. A thank-you letter from LPO is at the end of this report (but not this web version).

The Camargue
3 – 10 May 2003

Itinerary

- Saturday May 3rd Afternoon flight from Gatwick to Marseille, then on to Hotel Des Granges, Arles, via N568, arriving late afternoon.
- Sunday May 4th **Central Camargue.** To Étang de Vaccares via Gageron and Villeneuve, south via east shore of Étang to marshes of Tour du Vallat. Lunch at Domaine de Mejanes. Afternoon walk part way to Le Paty de la Trinite, returning to Arles via the observation post at Pont du Rousty and Mas d'Agon.
- Monday May 5th Full day at Mont Ventoux, lunch at St Serein.
- Tuesday May 6th Pre-breakfast visit to the old airfield on La Crau, later returning to La Crau at Mas d'Icart. Lunch by the Rhone at Mas de'l'Hoste. Afternoon in Arles followed by early dinner and dusk visit to Mt.Valence.
- Wednesday May 7th **Eastern Camargue.** Salt pans at Salin de Giraud, south to Plage d'Arles. Lunch at Le Sambuc. Afternoon at Tour du Vallat, marshes of Fielouse and the E'tang du Fangassier.
- Thursday May 8th Morning at Les Baux including visit to the town, lunch amongst car park pines at start of walk to La Caume, where afternoon spent.
- Friday May 9th **Western Camargue** via Gimeaux and Saliers. South to Parc Ornithologique and St Maries de la Mer. Lunch taken by the Digue a la Mer. Afternoon at Cachereel, returning to Arles via Mas d'Agon.
- Saturday May 10th First light visit to observation platform at Pont du Rousty via the E'tang de Vaccares, returning to Arles via Mas d'Agon and The Marais du Grenouillet.
Leisurely drive to Marseille, for mid-afternoon flight to Gatwick, via Mas Thibert and Port St Louis du Rhone.

Saturday 3 May

Everyone arrived at the airport in good time and found that it wasn't as frantic as expected, especially as it was a bank holiday weekend! BA's 1415hrs flight from Gatwick made good time enabling us to arrive at Marseille a quarter of an hour early, at 1700hrs local time. The minibus was soon secured, baggage loaded and we were on our way to Arles, and in warm sunshine!

En route to the hotel the first of the black kites and a buzzard were spotted along with a multitude of magpies, a perennial feature of this area. Roadside lagoons held a few little egrets and cattle egrets were seen in flight, as were the first of the flamingos.

Our arrival at the hotel was greeted, not only by Simone and Marcel, but also by the song of both nightingales and Cetti's warblers; birds we were to hear so much of over the next week.....after a most excellent meal we set off happily for our beds.

Sunday 4 May

The optional pre-breakfast walk found several of us wandering down the track by the hotel, ticking off tree sparrows, a common bird here among the still numerous house sparrows. Cetti's warblers and nightingales seemed to be everywhere and as we approached the bridge over the canal, two rollers appeared on the wires, just where I left them last year! Before long, two others were spotted and they gave us a wonderful display of 'rolling', from which the species gets its name. Few sights can be more spectacular than rolling rollers, a wonderful mixture of flashing turquoise and chestnut. Several painted lady butterflies accompanied us for much of our walk, a good start to the week and we were now ready for our breakfast!

Leaving Arles behind us, it wasn't long before the first of the rice fields started turning up some interesting birds. The soon to become very familiar sound of Mediterranean gulls filled the air and here and there groups of gull-billed terns were with them. In shallowly flooded fields some wood sandpipers were found along with many mallards, the only common duck in the Camargue in this season. Other rice fields held small groups of black-winged stilts along with cattle egrets and shelduck.

As we progressed south along the east shore of the Étang de Vaccares it became clear that many of the marshes were very dry indeed, sites that normally hold shallow water were often completely dried out. A short stop at Pont Noir, overlooking the Étang, produced a superb full summer plumage black-necked grebe, a species we seldom see on spring visits. Here too we found the first of the great crested grebes and the large flocks of flamingos.

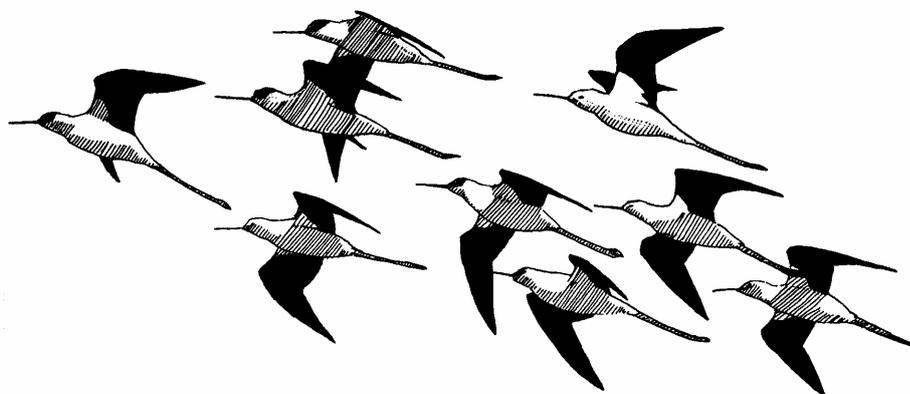
At the marshes of Tour du Vallat, also very dry, we were entertained by some bee-eaters hawking over the canal and by coypus that were swimming in it. Very distant views of some 'marsh terns' confirmed that both black and whiskered terns had arrived in the area but for the time being they kept their distance. But good views were had of a single great white egret along with several grey herons and some mute swans, an introduced species in the Camargue. By now it was nearing lunchtime so we headed to our traditional first day feeding place at the Domaine de Mejanes. Here open air picnic tables, loos and the hubbub of a French lunchtime kept us amused. As always, the picnic provided by Simone was memorable.

After lunch we walked through nearby open woodland to join the track towards Le Paty de la Trinité. Blackcaps were singing in the woodland but little else in the heat of the day. As the track opened up into marshland we began to see the first of the blue-headed yellow wagtails,

including having splendid views of a group perched on top of some heaps of cut reeds, later joined by a single female whinchat.

Heading back eastwards took us to the observation platform at Pont du Rousty, from here we saw a number of marsh harriers, yet more bee-eaters, lots of black-winged stilts, some delightful little gatherings of wood sandpipers and yet more coypus.

For our final stop we opted for the place of the herons, Mas d'Agon; it soon lived up to its reputation with excellent roadside views of a number of squacco herons, some handsome purple herons, the sound of the bittern and many grey herons, not forgetting both cattle and little egret. Walking along the road through the marshes produced singing reed warblers, delighted us with lots of yellow flags and at the end of it a single distant collared pratincole. Two drake red-crested pochards did well to hide from some of us, despite how hard we tried to see them. On our way back to Arles we searched without success for more pratincoles at a known site for them, only to be rewarded by several pairs of breeding lapwings and yet more stilts (*below*), which was bearable!



A fine start to the week then and enjoyed all the more thanks to the warm sunshine – this was what we came to the Mediterranean for.....

Monday 5 May

With fine weather promised the group opted for going for the heights of Mont Ventoux rather than to Pont du Gard, the other choice for today. The two hour drive took in the edge of the limestone hills of Les Alpilles, the wine growing areas around Carpentras and finally the pine forests on the approach to the mountain. As is usual in early May the road to the actual summit remained closed although from a distance there wasn't that much evidence of snow.

On arrival at St Serein, as high (1400metres) as we were going to go, a much needed 'comfort stop' gave a chance for some coffee at the Chalet Liotard before setting off around the edge of the hill in search of birds and plants. Once again the dryness of the place was striking; although masses of cowslips were poking out of the short turf. one felt they needed a good rain on them to get them flowering properly.

Under the pines we had a chance to see a common garden plant, stinking hellebore, growing in its natural habitat. Finding birds, apart from coal tits, among the pines proved difficult at first but eventually we got to grips with some citril finches and a fine gang of crossbills. Colin spotted a lone mistle thrush and not to be out done Marilyn spotted a crested tit, which we all saw in due course, including the cat that accompanied for our entire trip around the hillside; perhaps that was why the birds kept their heads down!

Although a pleasant day for this hill it wasn't overly warm with a cool and quite strong breeze blowing. However further views of citril finches, 'chipping' crossbills and 'churring' crested tits kept everyone's interest up. A lone sparrowhawk soared high above us and ravens 'croaked' as they tumbled across the sky and finally a splendid cock wheatear was seen amongst the cowslips as we made our way back to the vehicle.

After lunch, in the minibus, we set off to walk up as far as we could towards the summit before we ran out of time. Chaffinches were common among the pines and several wrens and the odd robin made their presence known. Common roadside plants included the beautiful blue anemone *Anemone apennina*, often in great patches across the hillside, stunning! Once again we encountered the crested tit, but why won't they stay still? We had just about reached the first of the lying snow when we turned around.

Sadly the star of Mont Ventoux, the black woodpecker, evaded us, nevertheless today proved to be an enjoyable contrast to our first day and clearly everyone found it quite tiring, as only the driver managed to keep awake on the way back!

Tuesday 6 May

An early start today: we left the hotel at 6.30 a.m. to visit La Crau in search of displaying little buzzards, always the best time for activity and avoiding the heat haze that can be such a feature of this area. Our arrival at the old airfield coincided nicely with a flurry of activity and within a matter of minutes we had seen a number of bustards and heard several stone-curlews calling!

By the time we departed for breakfast, at 8.30 a.m., we had had excellent views of around thirty-five little bustards and ten stone-curlews. A couple of short-toed larks did their characteristic display flights for us, and a red-legged partridge paraded on the track in front of us. By now everyone was ready for a much-needed breakfast but what an excellent way to start the day.

After a leisurely breakfast we set off for La Crau once again, this time a different area and lesser kestrels our target species. Through Honeyguide's involvement with the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) in a previous year we had been shown some old goat sheds with lesser kestrels nesting on the roofs, thanks to some encouragement by LPO in the form of piles of large stones.

The long narrow road in to the starting point proved very productive for flowers with masses of lax-flowered orchids growing on the verges, along with clary and several *Geranium* species. Further on the track to the site proved equally enjoyable with a range of *Cistus* species on show and blue hound's tongue, urospermum and evax in more open areas. All this and the smell of herbs coming up from all around your feet as you walked, magical.

The hot trek to the old shed also turned up a range of butterfly species, with Provence hairstreak, common blue, brown argus and painted lady being the most numerous but in places we also saw black-veined white and clouded yellow. By gently approaching the shed we were able to get within a few hundred yards of it without causing undue disturbance to the half a dozen birds that were around during our short stay. By now the heat haze had built up considerably confirming the wisdom of visiting at least some of this area before breakfast. Sardinian warblers sang their scratchy songs from thick scrub and every once in a while showed themselves.

By now lunchtime was rapidly approaching so we set off for a well-tryed place on the banks of the Rhone. Here we sat enjoying the song of the nightingale and watching the river gently drifting by. Bright green frogs were found resting on the leaves of the milk thistle, much to our delight. Lunch ended with a short visit to a nearby bee-eater colony (*right*), where we reckoned about eighteen birds were in residence – these perching on bushes like brightly coloured jewels. The afternoon was spent in the interesting old town of Arles.



Continuing the theme of doing things early in the day, we sat down to dinner at 6 p.m., the aim being to visit a local eagle owl site at dusk. Simone and Marcel produced a very quick meal for us, with the result that we were on our way to Mt Valence before 8 p.m. This attractive low hill has provided us with some excellent sightings of this elusive species over many years and 2003 was to be no exception. Within minutes of our arrival one of the adult eagle owls clambered up on to a rock in full view of us all and spent a good five minutes peering down at us from its lofty perch! Of many years of looking at this species the views have never been longer; usually the best we can hope for is for a bird to fly across the valley. This year we saw no flying birds but really had time to take in the characteristics of this huge owl. Soon afterwards at least two nightjars started ‘churring’ in the distance and although we weren’t to see the owl again what a fine end to a most enjoyable day.

Wednesday 7 May

Today we were to return to the marshes once again and to have our first look at the coastal lagoons, this time down the east side of the Camargue and accompanied by an old friend and ex-colleague, John Walmsley.

With rain threatening we set off for Salin du Giraud (Salt Lake City) and the saline lagoons of the south. Our first stop, overlooking the vast ‘mountain’ of industrial salt resulting from last year’s ‘crop’, gave us our first encounter with avocets and better views of Kentish plovers than previously. Then, moving on to the shallow lagoons nearer the sea saw us among the waders. Here mixed gatherings of curlew sandpipers in full summer plumage, dunlin and little stints delighted us, along with the more familiar redshank, greenshank, ringed plovers and a few sanderlings. Sea terns appeared as well, in the form of both little and Sandwich terns, often with noisy groups of common terns for good measure.

Men, off in search of that elusive but thick ‘chiffchaff bush’ found both a chiffchaff and a melodious warbler! We never did discover what the women found.....

By now the weather had turned decidedly nasty so our planned picnic on the beach at Plage d’Arles was ditched in favour of Plan B – lunch at John’s house in Le Sambuc! By the time lunch was over things were looking considerably better so we went out to play again, starting the afternoon at some disused fish ponds at Le Sambuc but not before watching a night heron fly over John’s house. At the ponds John showed us some ruffs and a single little ringed

plover, all viewed through an irritating wire fence – now if we weren't Honeyguiders.....

The next stop was close to the entrance of Tour du Vallat, where the nest of a white stork, complete with mum on top of an artificial platform, was clearly visible; subsequent searching revealed the other adult feeding in a nearby rice field.

With the weather improving all the time we moved on for a second look at the marshes of Tour du Vallat, this time with rather more water in them we were more successful. A goodly flock of mixed whiskered and black terns held at least one fine white-winged black tern and many common terns. The usual range of heron/egret species included purple heron and night herons and the great white egret was glimpsed again. And, of course, there were the bee-eaters. Apart from waterbirds the sky was full of mixed swifts, house martins and swallows, quite a spectacle.

Next on to the wetlands of Fielouse. Here we had heard rumour of glossy ibises but sadly we couldn't find any; nevertheless a good selection of waterbirds kept us entertained including yet more stilts and half a dozen squacco herons.

Before long we had to move on to our final port of call, the Étang du Fangassier, Flamingo City as John calls it. Driving through the salt pans we often found lots of shelducks to admire, at John's insistence (!) and families of the dreaded yellow-legged herring gull, so abundant here and 'doing' for the terns. By now flamingos were everyday fare, but nothing prepares you for the mass of pink that is the breeding colony. John told us much about the life history of the birds and their distribution within the Mediterranean, adding a good deal to the enjoyment of the visit.

On our way back to Le Sambuc to drop off John we had brief glimpses of two golden orioles flying along the road at tree height but we were unable to track them down. More obvious were the two turtle doves that flew from roadside bushes as we drove by and finally an owl that we flushed that was almost certainly a long-eared owl, although we didn't see it well.

Despite less than ideal weather at times the day had proved most productive and interesting, thanks a good deal to John's efforts. Happily he was able to join us for dinner so ending another good day.

Thursday 8 May

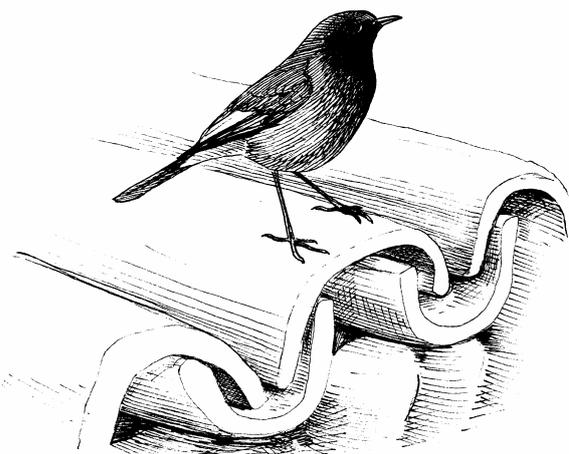
Back to the hills today, with the weather now cleared and sunny again and the prospect of some nice birds and plants, not to mention butterflies.

First stop were the cliff faces below the town of Les Baux – here the quarry being crag martins and blue rock thrushes, both of which we saw quickly and eventually very well, especially the blue rock thrush, with a fine male sitting in the sun on a rock for ages. In all, three separate birds were seen, two males and a female. Small numbers of crag martins were found swooping up under rock overhangs, where they were clearly nesting. While searching for birds we found a splendid scarce swallowtail butterfly hanging in some foliage right by the roadside, the first of several that we saw during the day.

On the cliffs above us black redstarts could be heard singing and occasional birds glimpsed as they hawked out for insects and blackcaps were in song everywhere.

Next we looked in gardens below the road and soon found a lovely cock redstart singing from a television aerial. On wandering through this area we bumped into a very attractive family

party of black redstarts (*below*) with the adults feeding their young up one corner of the formal town garden. Here too we had some good views of serins, not a bird we had seen or heard much of on this trip so far. Colin spotted a lone greenfinch, as it turned out the only one of this trip! As is usual in the Les Baux area we also heard blackbirds and the odd robin.



After a couple hours looking at the interesting old city we set off for our lunch spot at the foot of the road to La Caume. Here, among the pines, we briefly heard a crested tit and lots of chaffinches and several Moroccan orange-tip butterflies were seen.

Lunch was followed by the steady one and a half hour walk to the summit of La Caume. En route we rested to admire the flowers with lots of aphyllanthes on show with both blue and yellow flaxes. Other nice plants included the large Mediterranean spurge, grey-leaved and sage-leaved cistuses and spotted rockrose.

At the first viewpoint we learnt that an Egyptian vulture was nesting nearby and sure enough in a matter of minutes one of the adults arrived from the south and perched on a rocky ledge for some time. We were able to show it to the many French visitors through our telescopes amid lots of oohs and ahs. We later discovered that this is probably the last remaining pair in the whole of Les Alpilles, a sad state of affairs.

Onwards and upwards towards the summit produced the first distant views of alpine swifts, a bird we were to see really well on the top.

Having reached the radio mast we set off across the plateau to the southern viewpoint that has produced Bonelli's eagles in the past. As we sat on the edge watching both alpine and common swifts screaming around we could see the vast marshes of the Camargue laid out before us, with La Crau to their east, such was the visibility on this lovely day. Patient watching finally paid off when an adult Bonelli's eagle left its nest site and flew south-west down the valley below us, the last we were to see of it. This species too is having its problems as we told that the eggs are probably infertile this year. Colin found a couple of Dartford warblers in nearby scrub, his first so he was well pleased.

All that remained now was to retrace our footsteps to the car park and wind our weary way back to the hotel.

Friday 9 May

Our final full day, this to be spent among the coastal lagoons and marshes of the western sector of the Camargue, sometimes referred to as the Petite Camargue.

The road from Gimeaux and Saliers was taken and soon provided us with some good views of yet more bee-eaters, several crested larks and skylarks. By stopping at frequent intervals along the road to peer over distant marshes we were able to track down a flock of in the region of twenty collared pratincoles but sadly we never did see them well.

Time to move south to the Parc Ornithologique, a chance for a comfort stop and a place that often turns up some interesting birds – we saw our first hoopoe (*right*) here, perched on a branch right in front of the visitor centre with what appeared to be a lizard in its bill. Happily it sat there for ages so everyone saw it well. Shortly afterwards a white stork flew by, only the third we had seen. Rina went off for a short walk and come back with tales of a female ciril bunting, the only one of the trip, surprisingly. As we drove off from the centre a second hoopoe was seen flying by the roadside.



Our next stop was at St Maries de la Mer, for coffee. We were able to sit overlooking an Étang on the edge of town with lots of flamingos in view and several gull-billed and Sandwich terns calling not far away. Next on to the Digue, taking in our first oystercatchers as we drove along the dunes between the sea and the lagoons. Some lagoons held groups of curlew sandpipers, avocets in places, some redshanks and plenty of dunlins. Lunch was taken overlooking the southern end of the Étang dit l'Imperial with its various islands, some held breeding colonies of Sandwich terns and at times the air was full of the cries of the Mediterranean gull. Whilst sitting on the bank two adult slender-billed gulls flew over calling, the first for the week, later we were to get good views of this species enabling us to compare them with the more familiar black-headed and yellow-legged herring gulls. This theme continued when a sub-adult (probably a third year bird) little gull was spotted close to the road. We saw all of the Camargue's regular gull species from the Digue.

After lunch we headed north along the western edge of the Étang du Malagroy to the saline lagoons and coastal marshes at Cacheral. The first of the pools produced two very nice full summer plumage spotted redshanks, our first of the week. Reedy pools held purple herons and two gadwalls were flushed from one of them, again a first for the week. As we drove along the dirt track a number of blue-headed yellow wagtails were seen perching on bushes and the occasional small bird was flushed from the *Tamarix* bushes, always disappearing before we could get a look at it. We continued along to the road end, where we left the vehicle in search of 'chiffchaff bushes' during which two female pied flycatchers were tracked down along with a single wood warbler, all three dodging around the bushes and leading us something of a dance, as did the male spectacled warbler that showed itself briefly but at least right on top of a bush.

By now time was running out so we set off for Arles via a brief stop at Mas d'Agon. Here we found yet more whiskered and black terns and the usual range of herons and egrets. A hobby flew over very high but only the leader saw it sadly, and it was the only one of the week! Everyone did have good views of a female Montagu's harrier that flew over the road and as we wound our way back towards Arles Marilyn spotted two small raptors on a bush, one instantly flew off but the other remained and proved to be a lovely adult female red-footed falcon. We were able to watch it for ages and indeed show it to other birders. So ended our last full day but we weren't done yet.....

Saturday 10 May

With our flight not until mid-afternoon, time was available for some early birding so at 6.a.m. most of the group set off for a pre-breakfast visit to the observation platform at Pont du Rousty. It proved to be rather chilly here but two immature little gulls performed well for us

and there were flamingos and stilts to admire, something we wouldn't be able to enjoy tomorrow.

Next we headed north via a final look at Mas d'Agon, a place that had served us so well this week. Almost immediately we heard a bittern and six squacco herons were in full view, better still were the night herons returning to their breeding colonies from the marshes; in all we saw ten and very well. Driving farther on, we turned up three red-crested pochards and a superb male garganey. Mas d'Agon is a good site for both these species. Strident churring coming from a reed bed told us that the first of the great reed warblers had arrived, always a species that we tend to see towards the end of this particular week in the Camargue. Before long a couple of birds were spotted climbing up reed stems and good views obtained. A single little grebe was heard 'trilling' from a distant pool, our first this week. With time rapidly running out we returned to Arles via two potential pratincole sites but failed miserably at both. You have to leave something for next time.

With our final breakfast over and our grateful thanks given to Simone and Marcel for their superb hospitality, we left for Marseilles via Mas Thibert and Port St Louis du Rhone. We took our picnic lunch in a pretty unprepossessing place but one that proved to be interesting for birds at least. Across the road from us a plough was being followed by about a dozen black kites and scanning the heavens for raptors amazingly turned up three migrating honey buzzards.....what a way to end the week!

And so it was, we were back at Gatwick and it was beginning to rain.....

Thank you all for a most enjoyable week.

Russell

P.S. For those who would like a very attractive reminder of the Camargue can I recommend 'La Camargue' by Bruce Pearson, a collection of delightful water colours and sketches that for me captures the real atmosphere of the place. It is published (in French but you buy it for the pictures!) by Gallimard, Conservatoire Du Littoral, 1997. ISBN 2-07-050973-7

Systematic List – Birds

The combined list for all members of the group:

Little Grebe	Only heard at Mas d'Agon, where a single on the last day.
Black-necked Grebe	A single in full summer plumage by the shore of the Étang de Vaccares at Pont Noir on May 4 th .
Great Crested Grebe	Small numbers on larger water bodies on a number of occasions, maximum ten in any one day.
Cormorant	Ones and twos, on larger water bodies only.
Bittern	Much scarcer than in previous visits, with no sightings and only a couple of 'boomers' heard, at Mas d'Agon.
Night Heron	Up to ten on the early morning visit to Mas d'Agon on the last day, otherwise singles at a few other sites.

Squacco Heron	Excellent and close views at Mas d'Agon in particular, involving up to 8 birds. Smaller numbers in rice fields and at other marshes.
Cattle Egret	Abundant where animals occur but also in some rice fields and even on La Crau.
Little Egret	Much less common than the previous species and more often seen in saline situations.
Great White Egret	Singles at Tour du Vallat on two days.
Grey Heron	Common in many marshes, some rice fields and by the coast, maximum in excess of twenty in any one day.
Purple Heron	This handsome heron was recorded in small numbers from several marshes, especially Mas d'Agon, Cacharel and Le Paty de la Trinite.
White Stork	An occupied nest was seen at Tour du Vallat and other birds at the Parc Ornithologique. Apparently the Camargue now holds about ten pairs of breeding birds, a recent colonist, probably resulting from escaped birds from captivity!
Greater Flamingo	Abundant as always in all coastal localities, especially at 'Flamingo City' in the Étang du Fangassier. THE bird of the Camargue.
Mute Swan	Scattered in small numbers throughout the Camargue.
Shelduck	A characteristic bird of the saline pans and in other coastal localities. It is extraordinary to think that these birds move all the way to the German Bight to join their northern cousins on their moulting grounds.
Garganey	A single drake at Mas d'Agon on the last morning was the only sighting of this scarce (in the Camargue) duck.
Gadwall	Two in marshes near Cacharel were the only sightings.
Mallard	The abundant duck of marshes, rice fields and the coastal lagoons.
Red-crested Pochard	Only seen at Mas d'Agon, where three birds were seen on two occasions.
Common Pochard	A single drake on the Étang de Vaccares was the only sighting.
Honey Buzzard	Three migrating birds were seen high above our heads, just north of Port St Louis du Rhone, on the last day.
Black Kite	The common raptor of drier areas, in particular the farmland and in the hills. A dozen or so were seen following a plough near Port St Louis du Rhone!
Egyptian Vulture	A single adult was seen while we were en route to the summit of La Caume. We were told that Les Alpilles only supports a single pair of breeding birds today, so we were lucky to see this bird close to its breeding site.
Marsh Harrier	The common raptor of the marshes and rice fields, often five or more could be seen in the air together.

Montagu's Harrier	Never common, we had to be content with single sightings of females on two days, both in the Mas d'Agon to Gimeaux area.
Sparrowhawk	One or two birds on two days only.
Common Buzzard	Occasional in farmland and in the hills, never more than two or three birds in a single day.
Bonelli's Eagle	A single adult bird was seen leaving its nest site at La Caume, affording brief but excellent views.
Lesser Kestrel	Up to six birds seen on La Crau where artificial nest sites have been set up on disused goat sheds by LPO, a project supported by Honeyguide in the past.
Common Kestrel	Daily, recorded from most localities.
Red-footed Falcon	Excellent views of an adult female close to Gimeaux, not a species we see every year so a real treat.
Hobby	A single bird, very high overhead at Mas d'Agon, was the only sighting.
Red-legged Partridge	Only seen on the old airfield at La Crau where 1-2 birds.
Pheasant	Scarce, occasionally heard or seen only.
Moorhen	Probably present in all marshes but never thought common.
Coot	Very common on all larger water bodies, 'hundreds' recorded some days.
Little Bustard	Excellent views obtained of up to 35 birds on the old airfield at La Crau.
Oystercatcher	A few in saline lagoons in the western sector of the Camargue.
Black-winged Stilt	Often numerous in shallow wet marshes or rice fields throughout the Camargue. Upwards of a hundred birds on the best days.
Avocet	Small numbers in saline lagoons in both the eastern and western sectors of the Camargue.
Stone-curlew	Only recorded from the old airfield on La Crau where up to ten noisy and at times very obvious birds.
Collared Pratincole	Up to twenty birds recorded from dried out marshes to the north of Mas d'Agon and between Gimeaux and Saliers.
Little Ringed Plover	A single at the disused fish ponds at Le Sambuc was the only sighting.
Ringed Plover	Up to ten in coastal lagoons in the eastern sector of the Camargue, less common in western parts.
Kentish Plover	Frequent in saline lagoons on the coast and occasional in dried out marshes elsewhere.

Lapwing	A few breeding pairs north of Mas d'Agon and between Gimeaux and Saliers.
Sanderling	Small numbers in coastal lagoons near Salin de Giraud and St Maries de la Mer.
Little Stint	Upward of a hundred in coastal lagoons near Salin de Giraud, a few in rice fields.
Curlew Sandpiper	75 – 100 in coastal lagoons near to Salin de Giraud, many in splendid summer plumage, others at St Maries de la Mer.
Dunlin	Hundreds in coastal lagoons in both the east and west sectors of the Camargue.
Ruff	Forty seen briefly at the old fish ponds at Le Sambuc.
Curlew	A single bird only, flying over near Cacheral.
Redshank	Common in coastal lagoons to the south of Salin de Giraud and by the Digue.
Spotted Redshank	Two fine summer plumage adults near Cacheral.
Greenshank	Eight in coastal lagoons near Salin de Giraud.
Wood Sandpiper	Scattered small groups in flooded rice fields and shallow marshes in a few locations.
Mediterranean Gull	The calls of this bird are a characteristic sound of the Camargue these days; not always so. Many hundreds on occasions, especially in the rice fields.
Little Gull	A sub-adult bird by La Digue and two immatures flying by at Pont du Rousty made useful comparisons with the commoner species.
Black-headed Gull	Widespread and abundant.
Slender-billed Gull	Recorded in small numbers close to La Digue and in other coastal places in the western sector of the Camargue.
Yellow-legged Herring Gull	Widespread and super abundant.
Gull-billed Tern	The delightful tern of the rice fields, marshes and coastal lagoons. Upwards of a hundred on good days.
Sandwich Tern	Not uncommon in coastal lagoons, especially close to St Maries de la Mer.
Common Tern	Frequent everywhere in coastal lagoons and over the larger marshes, such as at Tour du Vallat.
Little Tern	Many by the Digue and in the saline lagoons close to the sea, widespread.
Black Tern	Frequent at both Tour du Vallat and Mas d'Agon with other 'marsh terns'.
White-winged Black Tern	A single at Tour du Vallat.

Whiskered Tern	The commonest 'marsh tern' with up to 50 at Mas d'Agon and similar numbers at Tour du Vallat.
Rock dove/feral pigeon	Widespread and abundant.
Woodpigeon	Occasional in small numbers only.
Collared Dove	Widespread and common, especially around habitation.
Turtle Dove	Two on one day, the only sighting.
Cuckoo	Seen, or more likely heard, on most days in small numbers.
Eagle Owl	Splendid sightings of an adult at Mt Valence, voted by some as the 'bird of the trip'!
Short/long-eared owl	A single owl close to Salin de Giraud was most likely a long-eared owl although some short-eared owls do 'winter' here.
Nightjar	Two heard 'churring' at Mt Valence.
Swift	Widespread and abundant, doubtless involving many passage birds, thousands recorded some days.
Alpine Swift	Not uncommon at the summit of La Caume and close to Les Baux.
Bee-eater	Always a popular species to see, 2003 did not let us down with frequent flocks of up to 20 birds including the beginnings of a breeding colony at Mas de l'Hoste. For some 'the bird of the trip'.
Roller	Four by the hotel and occasional singles elsewhere.
Hoopoe	A single seen by RL only on La Crau and two others, seen by everyone at the Parc Ornithologique, were the only sightings.
Green Woodpecker	A single bird crossed the road in front of the minibus south of Mas Thibert.
Great spotted woodpecker	A single bird flew over near Salin de Giraud.
Short-toed Lark	Two were seen doing their characteristic song displays over the old airfield at La Crau.
Crested Lark	Not uncommon in coastal habitats, dried out marshes and by roadsides.
Skylark	Widespread but not common except between Gimeaux and Saliers.
Sand Martin	Occasional in small numbers over coastal marshes.
Crag Martin	Only recorded from Les Baux and La Caume where frequent.
Swallow	Widespread and often abundant.
House Martin	Ditto
Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail	Not uncommon in coastal <i>Salicornia</i> scrub and dried out marshes.
Wren	Heard at Mont Ventoux only.

Robin	Heard at Mont Ventoux and around Les Baux, La Caume.
Nightingale	Amazingly widespread and noisy, a characteristic bird of roadside verges etc.
Black Redstart	Frequent at Les Baux, where a delightful family party. Also among rocks by the Rhone in Arles.
Common Redstart	Two singing males at Les Baux.
Whinchat	A single female from the track to Paty de la Trinite.
Stonechat	A single male on one day only.
Northern Wheatear	A single male in grassland at Mont Ventoux.
Blue Rock Thrush	Three at Les Baux, including a superb male in full view. Also heard at Mt Valence.
Blackbird	Occasionally heard, rarely seen, especially Mont Ventoux and Les Baux.
Mistle Thrush	A single at Mont Ventoux the only sighting.
Cetti's Warbler	A very characteristic bird of roadside ditches throughout the Camargue. Common elsewhere too.
Fan-tailed Warbler	Yet another common roadside bird, especially in rice fields and wetter marshes.
Reed Warbler	Frequently heard from roadside marshes.
Great Reed Warbler	Only heard on the last day, when two in reedbeds at Mas d' Agon. This bird only just arriving from its winter quarters at this time.
Melodious Warbler	A single bird in coastal scrub close to Salin de Giraud.
Dartford Warbler	Only recorded in scrub at the summit of La Caume where two birds showed themselves well.
Spectacled Warbler	A single male hid well behind vegetation along a coastal track at Cacheral!
Sardinian Warbler	The common scrub warbler of the area but much more often heard than seen.
Blackcap	The beautiful song of this bird was often heard, especially at Les Baux and Mont Ventoux.
Chiffchaff	Occasional singletons.
Wood Warbler	One hid well in coastal scrub near Cacheral.
Pied Flycatcher	Two females, again in coastal scrub near Cacheral.
Crested Tit	Good views of two birds at Mont Ventoux and another heard amongst the pines at the start of the road to La Caume.
Coal Tit	Frequent at Mont Ventoux and occasional at La Caume.

Great Tit	Occasional in small numbers, especially wooded places such as Les Baux and Mont Ventoux.
Golden Oriole	Two seen poorly by a roadside close to Le Sambuc.
Jay	A single sighting in the Les Baux area only.
Magpie	Widespread and abundant.
Jackdaw	Ditto
Carrion Crow	Widespread and frequent.
Raven	Only recorded from Mont Ventoux and Les Baux, where a dozen birds.
Starling	Widespread and common.
House Sparrow	Ditto
Tree Sparrow	Common, especially around habitation and animals.
Chaffinch	Common at Mont Ventoux and Les Baux, rarely recorded elsewhere.
Serin	Not common, apart from at Les Baux where frequent in gardens.
Citril Finch	Up to ten amongst the pines at Mont Ventoux.
Greenfinch	A single male at Les Baux the only record.
Goldfinch	Common and widespread, the only common finch of the area.
Linnet	A few on a few days.
Crossbill	Up to ten amongst the pines at Mont Ventoux.
Cirl Bunting	A single female at Parc Ornithologique, the only sighting.
Corn Bunting	Very scarce this year, with only a very few sightings.

135 species

Butterflies

The following 18 species were recorded:

Swallowtail	Scarce Swallowtail	Black-veined White
Small white	Green-veined White	Orange-tip
Moroccan Orange-tip	Clouded Yellow	Lesser Purple Emperor
Small Tortoiseshell	Red Admiral	Painted Lady
Marbled White	Small Heath	Wall Brown
Provence Hairstreak	Common Blue	Brown Argus

Plants

Some common plants of the week:

Fig	<i>Ficus carica</i>
Birthwort	<i>Aristolochia clematitis</i>
Shrubby Seablite	<i>Suaeda vera</i>
Sea Purslane	<i>Halimione portulacoides</i>
Prickly Saltwort	<i>Salsola kali</i>
White Champion	<i>Silene alba</i>
Common Poppy	<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>
White Mignonette	<i>Reseda alba</i>
Spanish Broom	<i>Spartium junceum</i>
Bush Vetch	<i>Vicia sepium</i>
Common Vetch	<i>Vicia sativa</i>
Black Medick	<i>Medicago lupulina</i>
Star Clover	<i>Trifolium stellatum</i>
Dovesfoot Cranesbill	<i>Geranium molle</i>
Round-leaved Cranesbill	<i>Geranium rotundifolium</i>
Herb Robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>
Common Storksbill	<i>Erodium cicutarium</i>
Beautiful Blue Flax	<i>Linum narbonense</i>
Yellow Flax	<i>Linum maritimum</i>
Large Mediterranean Spurge	<i>Euphorbia characias</i>
Turpentine Tree	<i>Pistacia terebinthus?</i>
Common Mallow	<i>Malva sylvestris</i>
Grey-leaved Cistus	<i>Cistus albidus</i>
Sage-leaved Cistus	<i>Cistus salvifolius</i>
Rockrose	<i>Cistus populifolius</i>
Spotted Rockrose	<i>Tuberaria guttata</i>
Dogwood	<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>
Scarlet Pimpernel	<i>Anagallis arvensis</i>
Pink Convolvulus	<i>Convolvulus cantabrica</i>
Blue Hound's Tongue	<i>Cynoglossum creticum</i>
Bugloss	<i>Anchusa arvensis</i>
Thyme	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>
Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>
Lavender	<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>
Clary	<i>Salvia verbeneca</i>
Mullein	<i>Verbascum sinuatum</i>
Broomrape sp	<i>Orobanche sp</i>
Danewort	<i>Sambucus ebulus</i>
Valerian	<i>Centranthus ruber</i>
Milk Thistle	<i>Silybum marianum</i>
Urospermum	<i>Urospermum dalechampii</i>
Aphyllanthes	<i>Aphyllanthes monspeliensis</i>
Flag (Yellow) Iris	<i>Iris pseudocorus</i>
Lax-flowered Orchid	<i>Orchis laxiflora</i>