

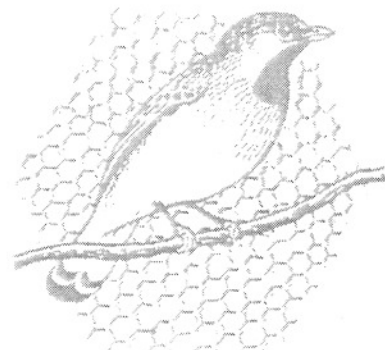
Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

36 Thunder Lane Thorpe St Andrew Norwich NR7 0PX
Telephone and Fax 0603 300552 Evenings and weekends

FLOWERS AND BIRDS IN THE LOT

21-28 May 1994 and
28 May - 4 June 1994



Helping you enjoy wildlife



Helping to protect wildlife

Flowers and Birds in the Lot 1994

List of participants

21-28 May 1994

Ron & Rosemary Thwaites
John & Joan Rowell
Anne Riddoch
David & Ruth Atkins
John & Francis Barker
George & Valerie Osmond

Leaders: David Brewster

28 May - 4 June 1994

Ron & Rosemary Thwaites
Phyllis Peskett
June Wade
Bill & Anne Adams
Peggy Tuffs
Denys Cook
Winifred & Mundi Smith
Sally Fleming

Chris Durdin
& Caroline Still

A few thoughts from Chris

I became aware a few years ago that anyone who had been to the Painting School at Berdún in the Spanish Pyrenees would instinctively talk to others who had been there as if they both belong to a special club. It was the same combination of people, place and wildlife on the doorstep that I had in my mind as I first visited Maison Meulet in September 1990. It was then a bit of a wreck; for instance, the old earth closet in the orchid field by the back door was actually in use. But a little imagination suggested a base for a special wildlife holiday.

The vision was right. Renovated and now a home again, permanent for Lynn and Doreen Todd, our hosts, or just for a week or two for us as guests, like many of Lynn's fine wines the place improves with age.

Galoubet's magic now means it also has its own exclusive membership club, the simple entry requirement being a happy holiday and long lasting memories. Several *Honeyguiders*, like myself, are proud to belong to both the Galoubet and Berdún 'Friendly Societies'.

If you were on this holiday, we hope this report acts as a souvenir to bring back those memories. If you are thinking of going to this lovely area of France we hope it gives something of the flavour of the wildlife to be seen and the fun to be had.

By combining our holiday reports it helps to give a complete picture of the similarities and differences of what was seen by the two groups. Differences occasionally pop out in the text; which bellflower was it at Pech Merle (or two species?); are there 12 or 13 stations of the cross at Rocamadour? There was, inevitably, much in common, especially in the lists of orchids, butterflies and birds. For a bit of fun, and a reminder of the quality of the Maison Meulet hospitality, a cheese list has been added to these. But we start with our daily diaries, David's first, until the different holiday stories merge at Toulouse airport and Caroline and I take up the story.

Lastly, it is worth remembering that these holidays also put something into protecting French wildlife. In 1994, £500 was sent to La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) towards its 'Refuge LPO' campaign, bringing *Honeyguide's* contribution to LPO to £1,550 over four years of holidays to France. At the end of this report is a letter from the LPO's Jackie Chevallier which tells us more about this campaign that we have helped.

Illustrations by Rob Hume. Front cover: Maison Meulet, Galoubet

Week 1 with David Brewster

Saturday 21 May - Gatwick to Galoubet

It was wonderful to feel some real warmth as we pushed our baggage to Guy's coach at Toulouse airport. The temperature at Gatwick had been a miserly 11 degrees centigrade; it was at least double that in the late afternoon sunshine. With only ten of us on the coach we were able to relax in comfort after the flight and try a little light bird and plant identification as we sped through the fertile farmland to the north of Toulouse. The black kites and buzzards were easy, corn buntings a little more difficult. When it came to plants, outright scepticism was expressed about the lesser butterfly orchid at 60mph, but it was I assure you - it's easy when you remember to look for the parallel pollinia on the lesser.

Orchid numbers increased by the roadside as we drove into the limestone Causse. The valleys became steeper and more tempting until after a couple of hours we were looking down on Maison Meulet in the hamlet of Galoubet. Lynn and Doreen were there to greet us and settle us in and we met the remaining members of the group, David and Ruth, who had driven up from Spain.

The cares of the day melted away as the magic of Galoubet took over, aided by a delicious meal from Rose and Doreen, two very presentable wines from Lynn's cellar and the song of the ever present nightingale.

Sunday 22 May - Local walks

The hoopoe alarm clock went off at 5.30 and went on for over an hour. Those who saw it had some compensation for being woken up; however the rest of us, too lazy to get up, had to put up with its incessant call as we lay in bed. Still, it had the effect of ensuring that eight of us set off on the early walk despite the threatening sky.

The rain held off allowing us to get in the two scheduled walks. The first was up the hill to La Croix Blanche and along the route both Bonelli's and melodious warblers performed well. The latter species, normally so skulking, sang lustily if not particularly melodiously in full view allowing everyone to see the more rounded head and less blue legs than found on the icterine warbler (who am I kidding?). Silaging was in full swing in the fields close to the village and the chance of a fleeing vole attracted a small gathering of black kites.

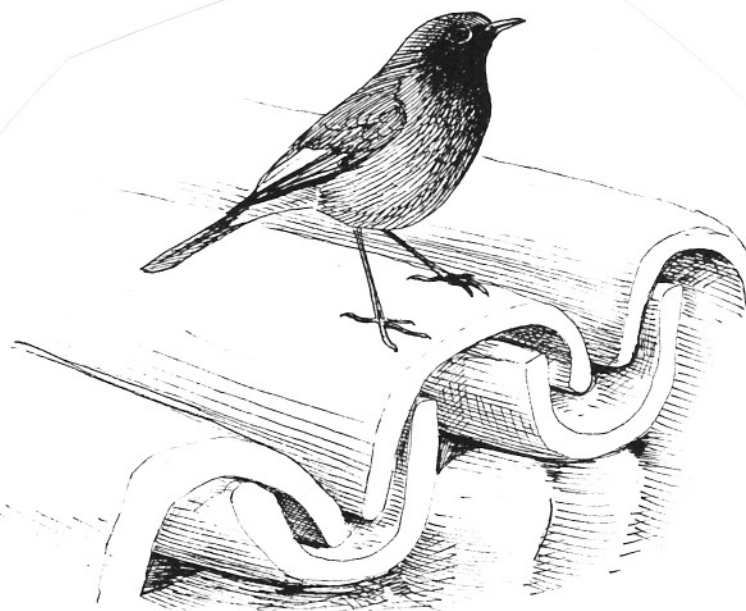
On the way down the hill, the front markers, John and Frances, flushed a vivid green lizard with blue cheeks and then a striking, black and yellow whip snake. A second snake reared briefly in defiance as the rest of the group arrived, before rapidly going to ground. We may have only walked a couple of miles but everyone pitched into lunch with gusto and were only reluctantly tempted off down the shady lanes and flower-filled meadows that line the valley as it runs down to Frayssinet. Here meadow clary, bee and burnt-tip orchids and the proliferation of members of the pea family gave rise to a similar proliferation of blue butterflies.

Despite the heat an energetic George, armed with nothing more than a small plastic box, managed to identify meadow and spotted fritillary, small and adonis blues, brown argus and green hairstreak. The highlight was a green underside blue, a first for Galoubet, plus a new orchid, the green-veined. The heat had raised the temperature of the pool past the 23°C mark, just enough to enter without embarrassing oneself with cries of agony. The third western whip snake of the day manifested itself by the pool, presumably after the wall lizards that Ron and Rosemary had seen earlier in the day. It took exception to Anne's

orange towel and proceeded to hiss violently from a strike position. Fortunately the reference book indicated that it was not poisonous. We hope we got the identification right.

Monday 23 May - St Cirq Lapopie and Pech Merle

The overnight rain left standing water in the meadows and the unusual sound of running water in the valley. The Célé river was swollen as we traced its course through a limestone gorge until it joined the muddy brown River Lot. We turned east along the fertile valley with its tobacco and asparagus until the spectacular, hilltop village of St Cirq Lapopie was sighted. The narrow access road proved to be as difficult to negotiate in the coach as it must have been for Pepin the Short when he tried to take the castle in the 8th century. The remains of that castle proved to be a good vantage point to look down on the houses, not so much to admire the superb restoration work but for excellent views of serin, black redstart and a nuthatch that preferred masonry to trees.



Black redstart

The shade of the oak trees was much appreciated at Pech Merle as we lunched in climbing temperatures. Afterwards the thought of ice creams beckoned; however the Yorkshire contingent cleared them out of Magnums and Mars, perhaps not a bad thing as they cost nearly two pounds each. Then underground to view the natural and stone age man made wonders of the caves, where the stalactites and cave pearls competed for your attention with the charcoal and ochre drawings of long dead animals. Try as we could, however, none of us could see the female form drawn with a finger on the ceiling along with a maze of other daubings.

The descent from the caves to Cabrerets produced rock soapwort, bastard balm, narrow-leaved bellflower and the delightful umbellifer, ivory-fruited hartwort. Dipper and grey wagtail were added to the bird list before boarding the coach for the return trip to Galoubet.

After a superb meal with the duck outstanding, we staggered from the table in search of the endlessly chirring nightjar. It would have to be up the hill of course and numbers on the walk dwindled until, there it was, on the dead branch of an oak. Not a brilliant view but a sighting nonetheless, so we went to bed satisfied.

Tuesday 24 May - Labastide-Murat

A wet start to the day so it was waterproofs on as we scurried round the stalls at the market and an extended elevenses at the Hotel Climat. The rain eased off in the late morning so we assembled beneath the *Mayorie* before setting off for the walk back to Galoubet. The smell from the nearby pizza van proved to be too tantalising so departure had to await the demolition of Sicilia and Royale. No one dared to partake of the Stromboli.

Dylis, Val's sister, joined us on the walk through the damp lanes as she had arrived from Paris just before our departure. Two new birds for the list were recorded before lunch, firstly a short-toed teecreeper and then, great excitement, a moorhen was spotted at the bottom of a flooded field. A fourth western whip snake briefly challenged our rights to a picnic spot so everyone sat down with more care than usual, which was sensible as the spiked leaves of field eryngo were much in evidence.

Then down into the intricate network of tracks in the valley bottom past a rich array of orchids including lesser butterfly, bee, fly and violet birdsnest. Occasionally we would find the large dead spike of a lady orchid, the showiest of all in this part of the Lot; hopefully we would find one in full flower in some shady spot. Not even a dead flower spike marked the spot where monkey orchid had been seen last year. It would have been nice to confirm the clump seen from the speeding coach on the previous day which many doubters refused to believe.

It was only a five mile walk but it was obvious from the way that everyone staggered stiffly from the table to have coffee outside that there would be few takers for the nightjar walk. This was a pity for the male went through his whole crepuscular repertoire to an audience of one, including clapping wings about 20 feet above your leader's head. Later that night a barn owl drifted past the motion sensor, triggering the outside light and casting a shadow that John saw from his window. Does a shadow count as a sighting?

Wednesday 25 May - local walks

A small but select band braved the cool early morning and were rewarded by a red-backed shrike, ably spotted by George at distance of over a quarter of a mile. After breakfast it was up the road past Cayres and onto another of the myriad of tracks that run up past the limestone spur above Combe de Cayres. Normally these grassy tracks are devoid of traffic; however twice we had to scuttle to the side to avoid the speeding AI man - no wonder the much admired Charolais suckler cows had seemed so skittish. A honey-buzzard watched his passage, low enough to see all its distinguishing features including a head more like a pigeon than a bird of prey.

Up by the main road we lolled on a grassy bank studded with pyramidal orchids and elusive fritillaries while a forage harvester droned nearby. Where were the black kites? Well the backmarkers managed to see at least five at close quarters and so intent were we on excellent views that we were almost caught by an errant stream of wet grass that shot over the hedge as the tractor turned. Was it done on purpose, one wonders?

An excellent lunch and soaring temperatures cut the numbers on the optional afternoon walk to two. The rest sensibly remained poolside with occasional forays to see the elusive golden oriole. George and I descended into Combe de Font-Neuve in an attempt to add more butterflies to a rapidly growing list. Three hot sticky hours later, small copper and small tortoiseshell had been added, questionable recompense for the effort. But the pool felt good.

The talk and laughter went on well after dusk as we dined outside and candles were brought out as the shadows deepened. The scops owl, nightingale and nightjar serenaded us and for those who walked the few yards to the barn there was the ghostly sight of a barn owl drifting out.

Thursday 26 May - Rocamadour

Although only three ventured out on the early morning walk, 'Pluto', the neighbour's big gangling hunting dog, trailed guiltily along behind us. However a slap on the thighs and a 'Here boy' transformed him into a capering extrovert whose antics threatened to topple you off the road and down the scree slope. Needless to say, with his company little was seen.

Then off to Rocamadour, but first a stop and walk into a typical Causse meadow coloured purple with thyme, yellow with vetches and pink with convolvulus, in a low growing carpet overtopped by St Bernard's lily and waist high-lizard orchids. As you stopped to photograph the latter, the distinct smell of billy goat mingled with the aromatic smell of wormwood and thyme. Among these floristic delights flitted numerous fritillaries and blues, including the first baton blue. Reluctantly we left these natural splendours for the architectural ones of Rocamadour.

The rain held off as we picnicked above the stunning limestone gorge of the River Alzou, but descended in torrents as we ventured down into the precipitous village clamped to the rockface. This curtailed site-seeing and we congregated in bedraggled groups in various cafés. We then used the rain as an excuse for not climbing the famous steps and the path past the 12 stations of the cross and were whisked at great expense to the car park by the *ascenseur*. As we assembled by Guy's coach, we found that collectively we had added spotted flycatcher and peregrine to the bird list and there was that rather obliging nightingale that Ron and Rosemary spotted singing from the top of a bush by the car park.

Time allowed for a quick trip to Loubressac on the edge of the Dordogne valley and while Guy disappeared off to a café we walked gently down the road into the surrounding farmland. While the views were exceptional, as a site for birds it did not look promising. We were forgetting that we had that ace spotter Ruth with us and in quick succession she found red-backed shrike and wryneck. In addition, good views were obtained of middle spotted woodpecker, melodious warbler, ciril bunting, stonechat and black kite. A site worthy of another visit next year.

Friday 27 May - local walk

A surprising crowd greeted your leader as he blundered bleary-eyed and sneezing from his room. Clearly everyone wanted to make the most of the last full day. A brisk walk through dew-soaked lanes uncovered the first white helleborine and a retreating green woodpecker. The most enjoyable sight, however, was Lynn returning with the croissants, although the start of breakfast was delayed by the call of a lesser spotted woodpecker emanating from a dead elm.

Some concern was expressed at the thought of an all day walk, though one and a half miles in the first three hours could hardly be described as taxing. What had delayed us so? There was George's grayling, new to the butterfly list, the staccato belching of a pool frog, more red-backed shrikes. A descent through orchid-strewn woods into Combe de Font Neuve was the greatest distraction; twelve species were recorded, including the first fully out lady orchids. As temperatures soared, lunch was taken gratefully on some convenient felled oak.

Only half a mile was covered before we were again resting, this time in a hay meadow. A convenient heath fritillary, caught by Frances in her hands, took 20 minutes to identify and such was the interest in this find that at least three people managed to keep their eyes open. By the time we reached Murat a mutiny was brewing and eventually only three of us took the long route back to Galoubet with its 300 foot climb, as the rest hightailed it for the pool. The trio had the satisfaction of another first, a violet helleborine. Keith and Joan, leading the charge for the pool, saw a tree sparrow.

We dined outside for the last time, savouring the delights of Rose and Doreen's cooking and Lynn's cellar. Most of the party - Ron and Rosemary excepting, as they were able to look forward to another week - were thinking that on the morrow they would be cooking their own food in a damp and cold England. But the need to finish John and Frances's whisky and brandy dispelled any depression that might have settled on the group.

Saturday 28 May

David and Ruth set off towards La Brenne on the last leg of their tour of Spain and France and with them the chance of spotting any more rarities. For the rest a short walk up to Merle and then the descent to Galoubet. It would have been fairly uneventful had not a group of Limousin cattle been in one of those meadows. As we entered the field, Rosemary expressed some concern that they might be inquisitive - some chance - 200 yards was as close as we got and they were off, charging round the edge of the field. The thundering of hooves diminished as they went over the brow of the hill and they then reappeared along the bottom fenceline.

By this time they were really enjoying themselves and the thought of having their fun constrained by the approaching electric fence did not appeal. Without a check in their stride they were through it and an audible twang reached the by now rather worried group above. As attempts were made to get them out of the neighbouring hay crop, the herd continued their romp and took the next hedge and barbed wire fence like a group of horses in the Grand National. With tails in the air they disappeared out of sight. Thoughts of compensation claims were entering your leader's mind as he marshalled his resources. With John and Keith as eager volunteers we set off in pursuit while Keith led the group back for lunch as the coach was due in an hour. The sweating trio located the equally sweaty herd as they thrashed around in a scrubby corner of the field and as we stealthily approached they were off again at a gallop, mud flying from their heels. Luck was with us, however, and with consummate ease we chased them through the gate and back into their original field. Whether the boundaries of that field checked their charge we never ascertained for we were off at similar speed for much needed refreshment. [All was calm when the next group arrived - Chris.]

Then lunch, fond farewells to everyone at Maison Meulet and forty winks for the cattle herders as Guy sped to Toulouse. At the airport there were hurried instructions to Chris and his group and we boarded the 'plane secure in the knowledge that our total for birds and orchids was secure. However given the number of butterfly nets in the party and the fact that Winifred was with them made me less confident that our tally of butterflies would not be surpassed,...

Week 2 with Chris Durdin and Caroline Still

Saturday 28 May - Gatwick to Galoubet

The lively conversation that quickly developed at Gatwick resembled a reunion of old friends, rather than a gathering of 11 strangers.

David Brewster and most of his group greeted us at Toulouse airport, the laughter, enviable tans and excitement over new species confirming the success of the previous trip.

Appetites whetted, we eagerly joined Guy, our driver for the week. The coach headed north towards the limestone plateau of the 'Gramat Causse'. Black kites and common buzzards circled above and the only red kite of the trip was seen.

Excitement mounted as cerise pyramidal orchids and purple meadow clary heralded our route like flags for important visitors. The meadows, like impressionist paintings, were alive with colour, their intensity increasing as we approached the verdant valley of the Lot. Waved onwards by the elegant plumes of feather grass, we were soon greeted at Maison Meulet, Galoubet, by our hosts Lynn and Doreen Todd, Rose, Louise and of course Ron and Rosemary who had stayed on for their second week.

We settled so quickly into the relaxed, friendly atmosphere; dining alfresco on a superb four-course extravaganza, refreshed by the light Gamay grape of the *Coteaux du Quercy*, accompanied by singing nightingales. Who could ask for more?

During an after dinner stroll, along glow-worm spangled lanes, a nightjar swooped over our heads.

Sunday 29 May - Walks around Galoubet

The morning began in the back garden meadows of Maison Meulet. Doorstep clusters of military, bee, burnt-tip, lady, pyramidal and lizard orchids were interspersed with meadow clary, yellow rattle and field scabious. Dogwood, field and Montpellier maples were identified together with the unusual Mediterranean coriara. This last species has a dimorphic growth habit - large leaved young shoots contrasting with the older woody growth bearing small leaves.

Walking towards Cayres (the farm with the barking dogs) we encountered orange-skirted brown slugs and numerous large Roman snails. With so much to divert the attention, avoiding that characteristic underfoot crunch became quite a challenge. A rather unmelodious melodious warbler marked its presence along with a short-toed treecreeper, buzzard and black kite.

On what became known as 'Winifred's rock garden' beyond the farm, there were birdsnest orchids and impressive red helleborines close to yellow and white rockroses. Butterflies were abundant; Peggy, Sally and Winifred performed what might be described by giggling observers as an enthusiastic attempt at modern ballet as they netted and impressively identified common blues, heath and glanville fritillaries, false and pearly heaths and the beautiful pale clouded yellows.

Refreshed by local cheeses, pâtés and wines, we ambled along 'Meg's walk'. The sun beamed onto the superb meadows of tassel hyacinths, meadow clary, pink sainfoin, pyramidal orchids and towering stands of lizard orchids. These provoked a rush of camera clicking and the whirring of Mundi's video. Tension mounted within the film crew as 'Pluto', the local dog,

understanding not French, English, Spanish or Japanese, flopped in front of the mating black-veined whites, unsettling the southern white admirals and swallowtails. Oh the pressures of wildlife photography!

Fly and early purple orchids were located and military, burnt-tip, lady and bee orchids were again admired. Sally found stands of beautiful wild gladioli and Anne was satisfied that she had finally seen the elegant spiked star-of-Bethlehem.

A wet meadow with loose-flowered and fragrant orchids was found, but it was the ever observant Mundi that discovered the stunning robust marsh orchid, identified later during another four-course gastronomic masterpiece.

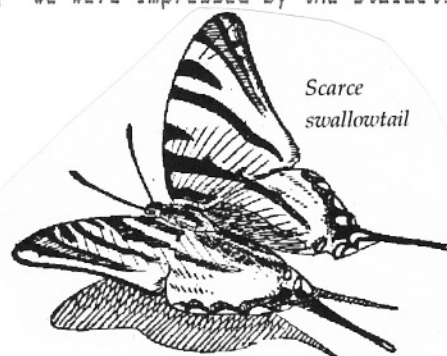
Monday 30 May - St Cirq Lapopie and Pech Merle

Early morning walkers were rewarded with good views of golden oriole, thanks to June's keen eye, also black redstart, green woodpecker and ciril bunting.

After breakfast we set off for St Cirq Lapopie, through the meandering Lot valley and spectacular limestone cliffs. Sally spotted Moroccan orange-tip from the coach and Peggy and Winifred were quick to note blue lettuce on rocky ledges.

The famous, picturesque village of St Cirq perched impressively on the imposing cliff tops. The party was eager to walk through the alleyways of medieval and Renaissance houses to reach the 13th century castle. There we marvelled at the spectacular view of the Lot valley and searched for sometimes elusive alpine swifts circling below us and new butterflies around the rocky outcrops.

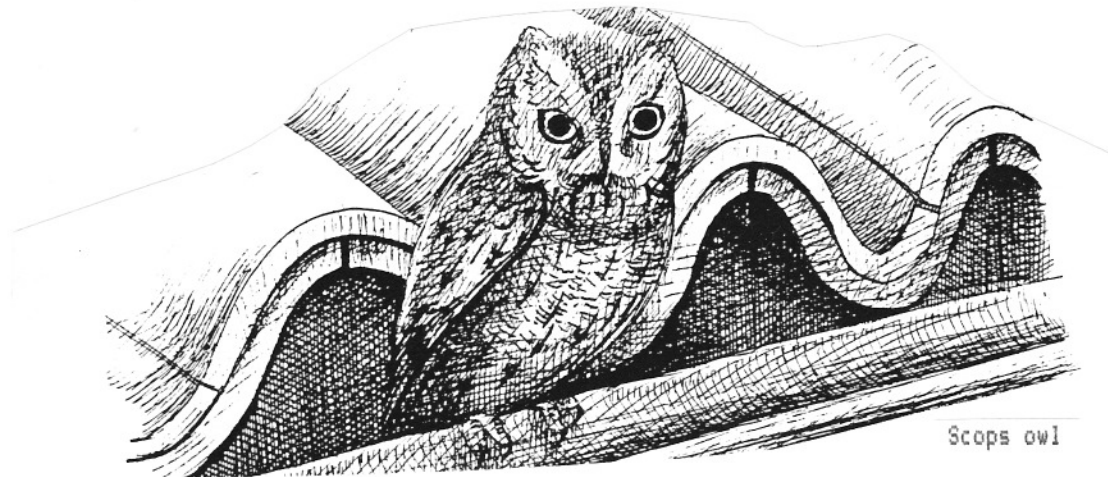
A picnic lunch in the oak-wooded environs of Pech Merle proved most fruitful. Pale clouded yellows, cleopatras, fritillaries and small blues were everywhere. Peggy, Winifred and Chris took a well-earned siesta. Rosemary and Ron kept watch over the magnificent limestone flora and had both scarce swallowtails and swallowtails landing 'in front of their noses'. The rest of us explored the fascinating prehistoric cave paintings of bison, elephants and horses and footprints of a 12-year old girl from 10,000 BC. We were impressed by the stalactites and stalagmites and Denys's competence at French.



Strolling towards Cabrerets and the coach we passed spectacular displays of bloody cranesbill, bastard balm and spreading bellflowers. We were soon familiar with the unusual umbellifer ivory-fruited hartwort and the vibrant peacock blue of the beautiful demoiselle damselfly.

On the drive home we followed a wonderful valley floor route, taking in beautiful meadows studded with loose-flowered, early marsh and robust marsh orchids. Winifred nearly exploded with excitement when we came across banks of greater butterfly orchids. Guy, mystified by the commotion, left the coach to pick flowers for his wife.

Phyllis put the lethargic to shame as she took her regular pre-dinner swim. Later, Chris whistled up two scops owls, the first of which flew directly at him, assuming him to be a potential mate, perhaps (or rival male)? This was the only time the usually unflappable Chris wasn't.



Scops owl

Tuesday 31 May - Walks around Galoubet

The pre-breakfast walk took us up to the farm with the barking dogs. A woodlark was singing overhead showing its distinctive short-tail and bat-like flight; a pair of ciril buntings showed well while melodious warbler, golden orioles and a hoopoe were all heard.

A staggering 28 different butterflies were found today around what was christened 'the butterfly meadow' beyond the Mayor's house. The small pool attracted emperor dragonfly, four-spotted and broad-bodied chaser. Good views were had of honey-buzzard and a stonechat performed perfectly on a nearby bush.

The afternoon walk was postponed until 5pm in favour of a long siesta in the heat of the day. Bill fell asleep under the shade of the ash tree. Rosemary and Ron retreated to their room, which proved to be an excellent viewing post for barn owls, red squirrels and a jay's nest. Phyllis, Denys and Mundi lounged in the pool. Anne, Chris and Caroline updated the flora log. Twenty orchids in four days didn't seem bad! However all was far from calm with the butterfly team. Butterflies were released from bug boxes, identified, photographed and video'd, a hive of activity and lively debate.

The heat subsided and along the wooded 'runners track' by the ruined house, cleopatra butterflies, wood whites and speckled woods darted in and out of the dappled sunlight. A revision of plants seen earlier in the week seemed useful. Bill was keen to have the hop trefoil confirmed which led to an intense discussion between your leaders. A leaf point or not a leaf point, that was the question! Most of the group, including Bill, whether they liked it or not, were soon well acquainted with the subtle anatomical differences of hop trefoil, lesser trefoil and black medick. A revision of bird calls followed, as we walked back along the winding wooded road past Bonelli's and melodious warblers. The finale was a pale phase honey-buzzard.

The sun set as we enjoyed a wonderful carrot, orange and coriander soup followed by salmon, cheeses, strawberries, crème fraîche and local wines. Afterwards, Chris and Caroline again called scops owls into the pool area and later Anne, Caroline and Mundi had stunning views of a nightjar as it circled round their heads and perched on a nearby tree. Round the pool, we gazed through the telescope at Jupiter and three of its moons.

Wednesday 1 June - Rocamadour

First stop was the limestone plateau south of Rocamadour. Pink convolvulus is the most striking flower at first sight, but there are many super plants among the thin, rocky limestone soil, including cut-leaved self-heal, basil thyme, blue lettuce, bastard toadflax (well done Peggy for finding this indistinct flower), Montpellier milk-vetch and both the lilac-coloured, stemless flowers of cone knapweed and its cone-like seedheads. At the top of the slope there was a bank of St Bernard's lily. It was while some of the group were there that a short-toed eagle came overhead and ravens were heard by many and seen by one or two. And yet more butterflies; Glanville fritillary and Berger's clouded yellow, for example.

The visit to Rocamadour is, unashamedly, to see one of the sights of France: houses, shops and churches somehow part attached to, part hewn from a colossal cliff. We lunched at the top of the village in the gardens near the chateau. Approaching from the top is less tiring but contrary to the pilgrimage role of Rocamadour as we had to follow the 13 stations of the cross in reverse. Further down there is the shrine of *La Vierge Noire* - the black virgin - where most visitors call and many light a candle. Then there are the shops and cafés for a drink before walking, or taking the *ascenseur*, back to the top. Caution is needed when birdwatching here; the alpine swift, black redstarts and countless jackdaws were real enough, but the griffon vulture was from the bird of prey collection.

After Rocamadour we travelled a short distance north-east to the pretty village of Loubressac. Wandering past walls yellow and white with biting and white stonecrops, we overlooked the sweep of the Dordogne valley towards the castle at Castelnau. A bright yellow serin sang below the viewpoint.

Thursday 3 June - Local walks

Five were undeterred by this morning's rain to come out and an early reward was a female roe deer in the field between the D22 and Meg's walk. Past the man orchids and Pisserate we turned up the chalk scarp through the wood, turning east through the hamlet of Le Plégat. A tree pipit performed its ascending then descending display flight for us south of the road. To the north, the view opens and the hills roll gently away and with the tree pipit still singing behind us there was a cuckoo, a green woodpecker and another roe deer all in the middle distance.

It brightened for the afternoon walk. It was a good year for seeing honey-buzzards well and here was another, or perhaps the same local bird again. Past Merle, Mundi caught the rest of the group - just - and we continued to Beaumat. The church had been renovated over the course of the last year - the sign said the work had been completed in April 1994. We puzzled over a strange plant in the square which turned out to be large Venus's looking-glass. The return journey took us through La Croix Blanche and we were not far from the Galoubet turn when a strange orchid was seen on a flattish area above the road. In the end we found several wasp orchids, a distinct subspecies of bee orchid.

Back at Maison Meulet we celebrated Mundi's birthday with cake and champagne.

Maurice, the Mayor of the Beaumat commune, and Brigitte, his wife, joined us for supper that evening. As the local farmers, the quality of the local wildlife depends on the continuity of their traditional agricultural methods. This is what brings visitors to Galoubet as they know well, but this must have been reinforced during the course of a lovely evening with a delightful couple.

Friday 3 June - the Dordogne Valley

We discovered last night that Maurice had never seen a golden oriole and he joined several of us on this morning's bird walk. This is a bird you can never guarantee but see them we did, with no less than 12 sightings including two flying high overhead.

Domme was the first stop on our excursion into our neighbouring *département*. A stroll round this charming village led us all to the viewpoint north, where we enjoyed striking views of both the Dordogne river below us and two goldfinches closer to hand. How is it that everywhere round here is so stunningly beautiful? The bell in the village church struck as we chose between the competing attractions of pretty streets, glorious views and ice cream. All reassembled beyond the town arch, we moved to a brief stop at the castle of Castelnaud, then down to the river for lunch. The picnic had to be brief as the boat was due to leave soon, along the Dordogne river from which no less than four castles could be seen. The third stop (and our final meander) was around La Roque-Gageac, a village built into the steep slope away from the river. Here a little effort is needed to put aside the intrusive cars and car parks for the English visitors to then admire what again is remarkable vernacular architecture.

The return trip took us via Gourdon back to Galoubet. A Pimms by the pool, courtesy of yesterday's birthday girl, was followed by our last supper, inside Maison Meulet this evening.

Saturday 4 June - Galoubet-Toulouse-Gatwick

The best golden oriole views of the week had been saved for our last morning - two males in bold, open view on the walk towards Cayres.

After packing and pottering, we went up to the Mayor's house to buy the honey and honeycomb we had heard about the evening before last. Raisin wine supped and negotiations in French complete, it was time for lunch and then in Guy's safe hands to Toulouse for the flight back to Gatwick.



Golden oriole

PLANTS

The Lot region has a mosaic of small fields, scrub, scree, woodland, rocky outcrops and valley meadow and therefore with this rich diversity of habitats a rich flora could be expected. An impressive total of some 300 species were recorded, including several new to the *Honeyguide* list for the area.

Highlights were many, and a few that come to mind include meadows of sainfoin and meadow clary, showy field gladioli, tassel hyacinths with their top-knot of purple flowers, and ivy broomrape on the ivy at St Cirq.

Most of the flowers in The Lot are in the northern Europe field guides, but the following are not:

Cone knapweed <i>Centaurea</i> (= <i>Leuzia/Leuzea</i>) <i>conifera</i>	
Pink convolvulus <i>Convolvulus cantabrica</i>	Rock soapwort
Robust marsh orchid	Mediterranean buckthorn
Ivory-fruited hartwort	Spanish broom <i>Spartium junceum</i>
Pitch trefoil	Brown vetch <i>Lathyrus setifolius</i>
Montpellier milk-vetch (= false vetch) <i>Astragalus monspellianus</i>	

But the orchids, as always, stole the show. The previous year, 23 orchid species were found, this year a total of 25, or 25½ if you count the wasp orchids, a distinct variety of bee orchid. Surprisingly perhaps, there were several orchids seen by only one group, though this in part reflects flowering times of different species.

The following 16 orchid species were seen by both groups:

Loose-flowered orchid	Birdsnest orchid
Early purple orchid	Violet birdsnest orchid (limador)
Bee orchid	Lizard orchid
Fly orchid	Twayblade
Lady orchid	Red helleborine
Military orchid	Narrow-leaved helleborine
Burnt-tip orchid	Broad-leaved helleborine
Man orchid	Pyramidal orchid

The first group also saw the following, the helleborines being of particular note:

Lesser butterfly orchid	White helleborine
Monkey orchid	Violet helleborine
Green-winged orchid	

The second group added the following foursome, plus the wasp orchids, and were especially pleased with the robust marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza eleta*, an essentially southern European species, but photographed in The Lot in one orchid book.

Early marsh orchid	Greater butterfly orchid
Fragrant orchid	Robust marsh orchid

No-one found the early spider orchid, common spotted orchid or dark red helleborine from previous years.

BUTTERFLIES

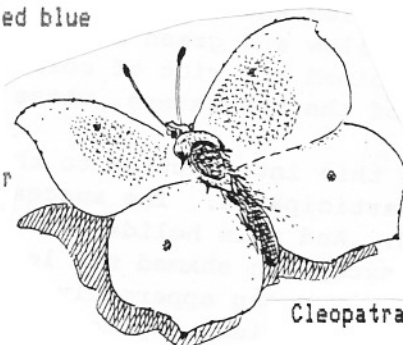
We knew this was a good area for butterflies, but a concentrated effort by four of the week two group - Sally, Peggy, Winifred and Mundi - increased the butterfly list for *Honeyguide* holidays here to an astonishing 55.

With advice from Winifred and Martin Smith the following can be added to the list in the 1993 report; Large white, Green underside blue, Chequered blue, Heath fritillary and Large grizzled skipper; week 1 also saw Knapweed fritillary and Meadow brown. The Niobe fritillary may have been a particularly greenish example of the very similar High brown fritillary. Mundi and Winifred continue to work on the photographs so the list below is the latest state of knowledge.

With extra species on the wing later in the year (Woodland graylings, for example), the wealth of this area for butterflies continues to amaze *Honeyguide* regulars and leaders alike.

Swallowtail
Scarce swallowtail
Large white (week 1)
Small white
Green-veined white
Wood white
Black-veined white
Orange tip
Moroccan orange-tip
Clouded yellow
Pale clouded yellow
Berger's clouded yellow
Brimstone
Cleopatra
Southern white admiral
White admiral
Red admiral
Painted lady
Small tortoiseshell
Comma
High brown fritillary
Meadow fritillary
Glanville fritillary
Spotted fritillary
Knapweed fritillary
Heath fritillary
Provençale fritillary ?
Duke of Burgundy fritillary
Grayling (week 1)
Small heath
Dusky heath
Pearly heath
Speckled wood
Meadow brown
Wall brown
Large wall brown
Green hairstreak
Blue spot hairstreak

Small blue
Adonis blue
Common blue
Holly blue
Idas or Silver-studded blue
Baton blue
Escher's blue
Provençale short-tailed blue
Green underside blue
Grizzled skipper
Dingy skipper
Small skipper
Large grizzled skipper
Red-underwing skipper
Olive skipper
Small copper
Sooty copper



Cleopatra

Other insects

No systematic attempt was made to identify the myriad of other insects, but several of the more distinctive ones were named. Pride of place, perhaps, goes to the many glow-worms. There were Great green and Roesel's bush crickets, while in the air it was the graceful black and yellow ant lions *Ascalaphus libelluloides* that attracted great interest.

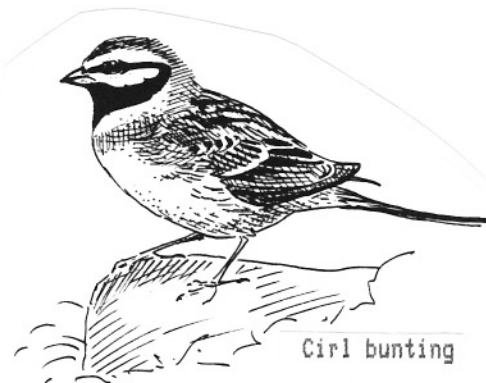
Day flying moths included 6-spot burnet, Cinnabar moth, Latticed-heath moth and Hummingbird hawkmoth. Other moths included Cream tiger, Small bloodvein, Clouded buff, Common forester, Burnet companion, Mother shipton and Silver ground carpet.

Dragonflies noted were Broad-bodied chaser, Common blue damselfly and Emperor dragonfly, all at the pool frog pond.

BIRDS

A total of 83 species of birds was seen or heard on the two holidays combined (higher than last year's total of 78); the first week's total was 74 and the second 72. The more interesting of the fairly modest differences include the group in week 1 scoring with wryneck and peregrine, with those on week 2 seeing short-toed eagle and wood warbler. Species marked with a 1 or 2 were seen only on the first or second week respectively, otherwise they were seen on both weeks.

Grey heron	2	Dunnock	
Mute swan	2	Robin	
Mallard		Nightingale	
Honey-buzzard		Black redstart	
Black kite		Redstart	1
Red kite	2	Stonechat	
Short-toed eagle	2	Blackbird	
Sparrowhawk	2	Song thrush	
Buzzard		Mistle thrush	
Kestrel		Melodious warbler	
Peregrine	1	Whitethroat	
Red-legged partridge	1	Blackcap	
Moorhen		Bonelli's warbler	
Black-headed gull	2	Wood warbler	2
Common tern	2	Chiffchaff	
Rock dove/feral pigeon		Goldcrest (heard)	1
Stock dove	1	Spotted flycatcher	
Woodpigeon		Long-tailed tit	
Collared dove		Willow tit	2
Turtle dove		Blue tit	
Cuckoo		Great tit	
Barn owl		Nuthatch	
Scops owl		Short-toed tree creeper	
Tawny owl		Golden oriole	
Nightjar		Red-backed shrike	
Swift			
Alpine swift		Jay	
Hoopoe		Magpie	
Wryneck	1	Jackdaw	
Green woodpecker		Carriion crow	
Great spotted woodpecker		Raven	
Middle spotted woodpecker	1	Starling	
Lesser spotted woodpecker		House sparrow	
Woodlark		Tree sparrow	1
Skylark		Chaffinch	
Crag martin	1	Serin	
Swallow		Greenfinch	
House martin		Goldfinch	
Tree pipit		Linnet	
Grey wagtail		Cirl bunting	
White wagtail		Corn bunting	
Dipper	1		
Wren			



CHEESES

It probably seems daft to list the cheeses we enjoyed, but they were such a feature of meal times so here they are. Thank you to Lynn Todd for writing the list, and apologies for any mistakes in transcription of his handwriting. May this wet your taste buds ...

Cantal	from the Auvergne
Tomme de Savay	from the high Alps
Brebis	from the Basque country
Emmenthal	
Brie	
Cabicon	goats cheese from the Rocamadour <i>Causse</i>
St Nectaine fermier	
St Paulin	
Chaume	
Reblochon	
Chamais d'Or	
Port Salut	
Appenzell	mature 'hard' from the Swiss Alps
Camembert	
St Aubray	

And the blues:

Roquefort société
 Roquefort papillon
 St Agur
 Gorgonzola
 Crème de blue
 Blue de Causse
 Blue d'Auvergne

* * * * *

And finally, an extract from L'Oiseau, the magazine of La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO).

Monsieur Toubon is the French culture minister who objects to English words creeping into French, hence the tongue-in-cheek apology for the few words of English ...

Droit de non chasse : oh my God !

Chris Durdin, membre de la Royal Society for the Protection of Birds - Grande Bretagne -, organise chaque année des séjours naturalistes dans un de nos plus beaux départements : le Lot.

Chris et son agence *Honey Guide - Wildlife Holidays* - ont souhaité soutenir l'action de la LPO, en faveur des REFUGES et de la reconnaissance du droit de non chasse.

Depuis 1991, 13 000 F ont été versés à notre association, pour le service REFUGE LPO. Un bel exemple de solidarité européenne. *Thank you** Chris.
 (* pardon M. Toubon...) ■



Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux

Association reconnue d'utilité publique

July, 1994

Dear friends,

In 1990 Honeyguide began helping the LPO through one of its actions - the creation of LPO *refuges*, which are to raise the awareness of the French public to the need for nature conservation. When you spend your holiday in France with Honeyguide, you are participating in this activity.

By creating a network of *refuges*, the LPO aims to ensure the protection of the fauna, flora and landscapes all over France. Another objective is to modify the hunting laws, to allow people to prevent hunters shooting over their land, which at the moment is not possible over about half of France and if one has less than 20 ha.

In 1993, 57 new *refuges* were created, and 30 more at the beginning of 1994, representing 265 ha on which our members undertake to protect their immediate environment to encourage birds, both common and rare species.

So as to have closer contact with its members, and thus spread more widely its message, 4 years ago LPO initiated a policy of regional and local groups. We now have sections in Lorraine (East of France), Auvergne (Centre), Champagne-Ardenne (North), Loire-Atlantique and Vienne (West), Aude (South). 1995 will see 5 new delegations, among which Alsace and Aquitaine, two important regions on a geographical as well as on a strategic point of view. The south-east part of France does not yet belong to the "LPO family" but we hope it will soon : the value of this region comes from its natural environment which naturalists, especially from abroad, greatly appreciate and merits protection.

LPO holds the conviction that nature conservation is an individual concern and that it goes beyond our frontiers ; your help illustrates this process in a very pleasant way, tourism and nature being linked together.

Have a fine birdwatching stay in France and thank you for joining with us in our work.

Jackie CHEVALLIER
Refuges department



La LPO est le représentant officiel de BirdLife International en France

