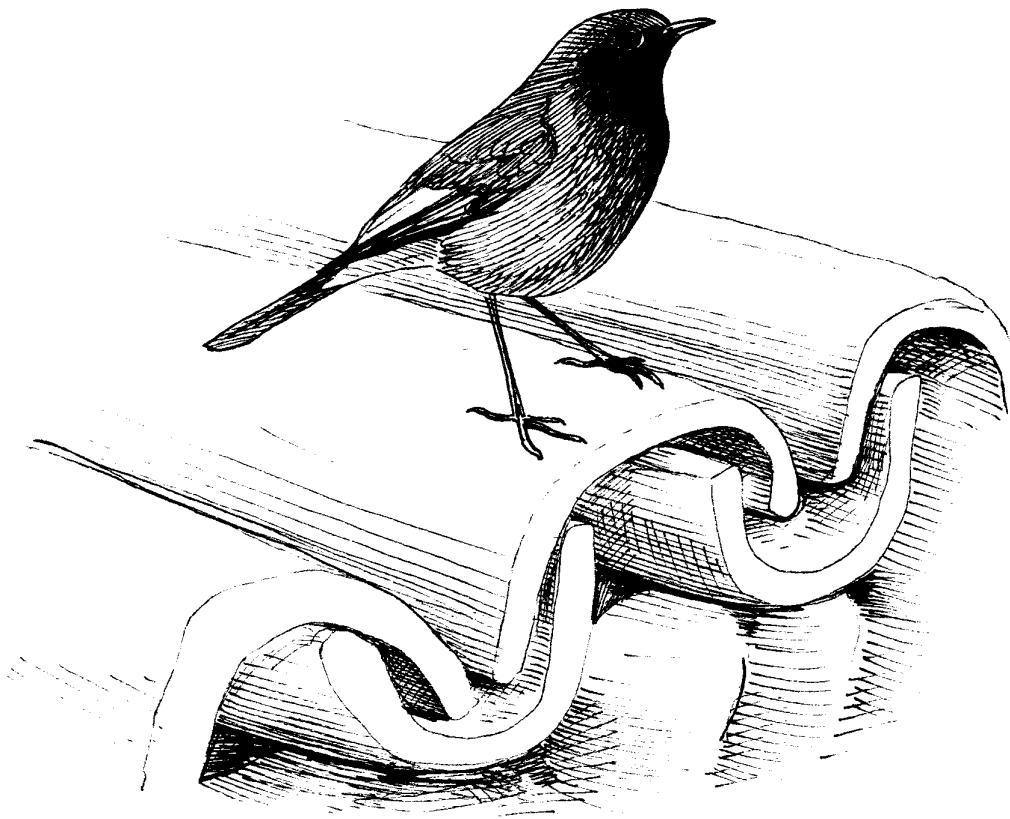


Honeyguide

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Flowers and birds in the Dordogne
13 – 20 May 2005

**Flowers and birds in the Dordogne
13 – 20 May 2005**

Participants from the Cambridge U3A Cambridge Bird Club

Graham Garrett Jill Garrett	Cambridge
Liz Wetton Thea Cockcroft	Cambridge
Norah Romer	Cambridge
Jane Bett	Cambridge
Peter Chamberlain Jill Chamberlain	Cambridge
Ann Knight Sally Head	Cambridge
Andrew Goodhart Gill Goodhart	Cambridge/London

and not from Cambridge U3A

Mike Price Mary Price	Suffolk
Margaret Joiner Thelma Humber	Dorset

Leaders

Robin and Rachel Hamilton	Norfolk
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Illustrations: field cricket by Maureen Gibson and fire salamander by Brenda Dowsett. All others by Rob Hume. Front cover: black redstart

Report written by Robin & Rachel Hamilton.

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 towards 'Refuge LPO' project was supplemented by gift aid through the new Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust and combined with the contribution the group in French Pyrenees for lammergeier protection, leading to a total of €1220 (£872) given to La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, the French Bird Protection League).

This brings the total given to LPO to £8,472 since 1991, and to various conservation projects, until this year entirely in Europe, to £38,645. A thank-you letter from LPO is usually included but this hadn't been received when the report was printed.

Note for web version of this report: the printed report includes a six pages plant list that can be emailed as an excel file or posted on request to the Honeyguide office.

Flowers and birds in the Dordogne

13 – 20 May 2005

Friday May 13: Arrival at Bergerac and the Journey to Castang

A group of 16 of us set off from Stansted on the afternoon flight to Bergerac. It was bright and clear as we came in to land and even from the air we could see that the woods were white with the blossom of the false acacia trees, flowering a little later than usual this year. Even with some gloomy predictions about the weather in France we were still taken by surprise by the torrential rain that began as we came out of the airport, and increased in ferocity as we drove along the Dordogne valley to Castang. Gilles, our bus driver for the week and constant source of local knowledge, did not have his good humour dampened though and he was optimistic about the weather that lay ahead. We had a comfortable drive and the hour passed quickly, the rain letting up occasionally for us to see something of the countryside and the villages along the way.

Cathy and Keith, and their daughter Olivia were ready with the warmest of welcomes and greeted us with umbrellas to show us quickly to our rooms, just as a spectacular thunderstorm extinguished the power. Undaunted, we assembled in the dining room and, to complete the party, we were joined by Gill and Andrew, who had driven down from England on their way to another holiday farther south. Drinks were served and everything was ready for a delightful dinner - by candlelight. Cathy is French, (though Keith is English) and her cooking lives up to every expectation of French cuisine. Everything is homemade and nearly everything is home grown (at least, grown by a neighbour along the lane) and every meal is a feast. On our first evening, we had homemade tomato soup followed by smoked salmon. Then we had braised pork steaks – beautifully tender and served in a creamy mustard sauce with new carrots. This was followed by a cheese board – a display of cheeses worthy of a banquet, all individually served by Cathy, whose knowledge of cheeses is encyclopaedic. Finally we had a Basque apple flan and a choice of teas and tisanes, or coffee. And there was, of course, a limitless supply of local wine.

Everyone quickly got to know one another. Most were from the Cambridge U3A Bird Club and the four who were not, themselves a group of friends, soon mingled and exchanged introductions. Keith, Cathy and Olivia came and joined us and gave us a brief introduction to Castang and the area around, and Robin and Rachel spread out the local maps and outlined our plans for the week. The storm had passed and everyone was glad of a fairly early night.

Saturday May 14: Around Castang

We woke to the song of a black redstart singing from the rooftop above us and we had a good view of him as we gathered under the lime tree for our early walk. We headed off towards the wood with cuckoos calling and swallows dipping and feeding around us. We watched a blackcap singing, unusually, from a telegraph wire and a melodious warbler singing from a vantage point high on a dead elm branch in the hedge. Song thrushes and chaffinches were feeding in the walnut grove and a black redstart was good to watch as he forayed between the hedgerow trees and the newly turned plough. As we reached the wood we just caught the cackle of a red squirrel but it resisted our endeavours to find it and we realised that we were in danger of being extremely late for breakfast.

After an excellent breakfast of fruit juices and yoghurt, cereals and deliciously fresh eggs, fresh breads from the village and Cathy's marvellous jams – and particularly welcome tea and coffee, we prepared to set off in the opposite direction, northwards along the track towards the tiny hamlet of Lagrave. Because it was Saturday, Olivia was able to join us and we began by presenting her with an 'official' Honeyguide name badge in recognition of her excellent skills as a guide and hunter-out of natural history finds. She was delighted, and everyone applauded! We could hear a nightingale singing from the valley below us and a distant hoopoe was calling. We watched a male stonechat showing off on a rooftop; he gave us an unusually prolonged opportunity to observe his antics closely. Goldfinches and white wagtails were feeding under the walnut trees and corn buntings were singing from the telegraph wires. We had good views, first of a black kite and then of a cuckoo as they flew across the valley that opens up below the village and we stopped and looked at the smart black and red striped bugs (*Graphosoma italicum* - known to Honeyguiders as Milwall bugs) on the hogweed flowers. The bramble and hazel bushes were decorated with delicate southern speckled wood butterflies – brighter and more jewel-like than our northern form. We stopped at the *laverie*, an ancient stone structure

designed for communal washing and stock watering. The chiffchaffs were singing and we peered into the clear water for palmate newts, marsh frogs and water boatmen. There were some fine specimens of tassel hyacinths (*right*) in the grass verges and a beautiful, if a little past-its-best, lady orchid standing proudly on the edge of the wood. There was still a little time before lunch so we walked swiftly up the drive, past the meadow (saving that for the afternoon) and followed the upper lane to the vineyard. We watched a woodlark using one of the vine poles as a song post and had a lovely view of a hoopoe flying in an arc around us. A striking beetle, which occurred in profusion on some sawn logs, attracted our attention. It was not only hairy but also had spots as well as stripes, and turned out to be *Clerus mutillarius*, feeding on the grubs of other wood-infesting beetles. There were small heaths on the bank in the sunshine too and the little, slightly furry flower chafer, *Oxythyrea funesta* was lurking among the dog daisies. We were very taken with the diminutive yellow relative of the bugle, called ground pine, growing beneath the vines.



Lunch was waiting for us when we got back to Castang: cold roast beef and ham, quiches and salads, apple purée and Madeira cake. Afterwards, we headed for the much-anticipated Castang meadow. There was so much going on in the warm afternoon sunshine. It was bright with meadow clary, lady's bedstraw, knapweed and dog daisies and there were orchids everywhere: early spider, burnt tip, a delicate and striking bee orchid with white petals, lax-flowered, early purple and small-flowered tongue orchids. There was a constant chorus of field crickets and the sunshine had brought out the butterflies: gatekeepers, scarce swallowtails and adonis blues and we watched a freshly emerged common swallowtail as it dried its wings and prepared for its first flight. We found several of the tiny and beautifully formed nests of the paper wasp *Pollistes gallicus*. A lattice heath moth was providing a crab spider with a late lunch and we found both the aptly named ladybird spider *Eresus cinnaberinus* and a remarkably fine shiny black spider, a female *Steatodes paykulliana*. Low down in the meadow where the soil is softer and damp, an area of dung pits had been excavated by badgers. All the time, we could hear cuckoos calling, the occasional black kite flew over and we had a good view of a solitary honey buzzard taking a leisurely route along the valley as we made our way back to the terrace for tea.

After drinks in the sitting room, during which we reviewed and recorded the highlights of the day, another wonderful dinner awaited us: fresh home made vegetable soup followed by melon, then roast guinea fowl with green beans, cheeses and a wonderful ice cream bomb with raspberry coulis. A chorus of crickets, mole crickets and midwife toads accompanied us to bed.

Sunday May 15: Woodland Walk and Limeuil

It was very misty as we gathered for a walk before breakfast, with the distant hills completely obscured. We walked up past the vineyard to Lagrave and found the woodlark again singing from the vine posts. Two cream spot tiger moths *Arctia villica*, strikingly bright in the dull light, were struggling through some damp leaves but there was no sign of the beetles of yesterday. We were pleased to find a solitary flower of a pink just beginning to open in the verge. As we turned for home, and breakfast, the mist was lifting and we began to feel the promise of a warm day ahead.

We took the coach today and after breakfast Gilles drove us a few kilometres down the valley of the Dordogne, through the village of Bigaroque and up onto the hillside behind. The mist was quickly burning off and as we climbed out of the coach we were greeted by the sight of three honey buzzards rising above us on the warm breeze. A couple of jays flew noisily over the lane and we could hear distant golden orioles calling. Beside the lane, a dry, limestone scree has formed and fly orchids, globularia, milkwort, crosswort and Pyrenean flax were all in flower. In the shady areas, overhung with alder and hornbeam, we found ragged robin, lady orchids and narrow-leaved helleborine. There was wild columbine on the bank and even a military orchid.

As the morning wore on, the insects became more noticeable: pearly heath, small heath, pale clouded yellow and orange tip butterflies, cream wave, brimstone and yellow shell moths and violet carpenter bees. Across, in the top of a bush, we had an excellent view of a melodious warbler (is this an ironical name?) and above us, in the scrubby scree, a Bonelli's warbler was singing, though it took a considerable amount of determination to get a good view. We were treated to another sighting of honey buzzards: first one was joined by two more, soaring up in a thermal and they in turn were joined by a fourth – a wonderful spectacle.

We turned off the lane onto a track beside two fine specimens of woodcock orchid and soon stopped to watch a Bonelli's warbler, out in the open this time, and a short-toed treecreeper obligingly scurrying up a nearby tree and out onto an overhanging branch close by. As we trudged up the track towards the picnic spot, we passed a spectacular display of lady orchids and some marvellous specimens of violet limodore.

Gilles had laid lunch out for us in the sheltered and shady corner of a very flower-rich field, full of arable weeds. There were field crickets calling in the open and easy to look at, many more butterflies and ladybirds of very confusing combinations of colours and spots. In the corner of the field we found an astonishingly densely packed population of orchids, in particular burnt tip and small-flowered tongue orchid. We crossed the lane into a damp meadow and found masses of twayblades and of the tiny delicate adder's tongue fern and Gilles disappeared for a moment to return triumphantly with the lifeless but still spectacular body of a fire salamander which he had seen as he drove past.

After lunch we returned to the coach and Gilles drove us the few miles to the village of Limeuil, high on the hill above the confluence of the Dordogne and its sister river, the Vézère. On the way we noticed buzzards in the fields in unusual numbers, perched on posts or simply standing about on the turned earth; perhaps they were grounded by the still humid air. Driving up the lane onto the ridge above the village, one was flying heavily above the trees but it was soon mobbed by a pair of crows and brought unceremoniously down to the ground. Gilles dropped us all at the top of the village to make our own way down to a rendezvous beside the river and everyone was able to pursue their own particular interests. We stopped at various points to look out over the valley: swifts, house martins and swallows, greenfinches and goldfinches. The chateau in the village centre has grounds that are open to the public and give wonderful views downstream of the confluence. Tiny lanes between the houses invite exploration and open out into beautiful views or charming secluded courtyards and terraces. Near the bottom of the narrow village street, one becomes aware of the twitter of sand martins manoeuvring with unbelievable speed and accuracy in and out of breeding holes in the high stone walls and the public loos provide nesting sites for a colony of tree sparrows.

By the time we reached the bottom of the village we were ready for refreshment and though there was a dampness in the air we stayed beside the river with our beers and ice creams. Scanning downstream, beyond the feeding sand martins and swallows, we realised we were watching the remarkable spectacle of a least seven hobbies all feeding on insects flying low over the turbulent river. They swooped back and forth, sometimes in groups and sometimes on their own, elegantly twisting a banking over the water – an unforgettable sight and a dramatic end to the day's bird watching. We were soon home and ready for a cup of tea on the terrace. Then, after a little break we reconvened for a drink, a review of the day, and then supper. Tonight, Cathy's homemade leek soup was followed by her homemade pâté. Fresh baked salmon with Hollandaise sauce came next and then, after the cheese selection, the first of the new season's Garriguettes strawberries, with cream of course!

Monday May 16: Berbiguières, the Two Views Walk and Montalier Haut

It was another misty start to the day, with some light drizzle, and before breakfast we took the track northwards and clockwise round through the village of Lagrave. The marsh frogs were much in evidence in the village pond, their bulging eyes showing at the end of tracks in the otherwise complete cover of green duckweed. The village was full of swallows, black redstarts and goldfinches and several white wagtails were bobbing on the rooftops. As we walked back through the vineyard, the faithful woodlark flew up from his vine pole and we heard a distant hoopoe. We headed for home and breakfast and on the way had a lovely view of the hoopoe flying ahead of us down the hill and into the catalpa trees at Castang.

After breakfast, with the weather improving all the time, Gilles drove us south, across the river, to the little hilltop village of Berbiguières. We left the coach in the village square and made our way, in bright sunshine, down steep lanes between the houses and then looked back to watch swifts, a common buzzard and a honey buzzard over the roof of the fine chateau. There is a steep, shady track up the hillside, flanked by an assortment of ferns and woodland plants and then, on the ridge, the panorama opens out to reveal the 'two views', along the two arms of a great meander in the Dordogne. There was yet another honey buzzard soaring along the hillside and we could hear chiffchaffs and woodlarks singing from the scattered trees and turtle doves purring in the sunshine. Beside the track and in the meadow the butterflies were spectacular: speckled wood, black-veined white, pale clouded yellow, common and scarce swallowtail, green hairstreak and red admiral. The profusion of butterflies was clearly very attractive to their dramatic predator, the deceptively delicate looking, but ferocious



Ascalaphids that were hawking over the meadows. There were new orchids for us here among the grasses: a fine display of man orchids and spectacular numbers of the less subtly coloured pyramidal orchids. Gilles drove the coach up to meet us for lunch and we sat in the shade between the wood and the meadow, watching a hobby flying backwards and forwards in front of us catching insects in its feet and eating them in flight.

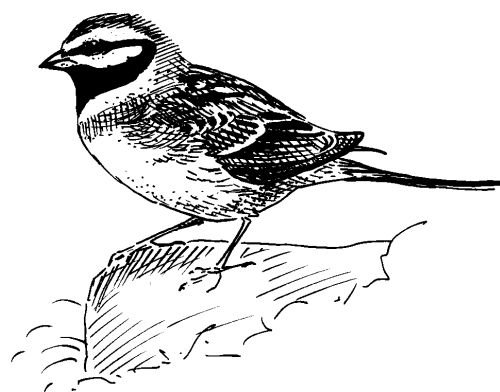
The heavens opened as we arrived at our next destination a few miles farther south in the valley of the Céou. Montalier Haut is a farmstead and nature reserve high on the limestone plateau and here we can find something akin to the extensive 'cause' vegetation formerly much more widespread in the region in the days when sheep grazing was more prevalent. We waited a few minutes for the worst of the thunder and hail to pass and then set off down the hill to explore a very damp area of 'dry' cause grassland. It was fragrant with wild thyme and rosemary and all our familiar orchids were there in profusion: pyramidal, burnt-tip, bee, lady, early spider (*left*) and woodcock. The butterflies were recovering from the storm; bedraggled adonis blues, small heaths and a dingy skipper were clinging to grass stems and cockroaches were scuttling about among the damp leaves. A skylark sang over our heads and as we set off down the hill, past narrow-leaved helleborine, blue columbine, long-leaved lungwort, stinking hellebore and bastard balm, the track flanked with Montpellier maple, downy oak, juniper and fly honeysuckle. Several Bonelli's warblers and chiffchaffs sang from the low trees around us and we could hear nightingales, great spotted woodpecker and a couple of woodlarks. Gilles met us with the coach at the bottom of the hill where a large patch of the startlingly blue purple gromwell dominates the verge alongside the stream.

Our next stop was back on the bank of the Dordogne, the village of Beynac and a welcome stop for refreshments in a terrace café beside the river. From our comfortable vantage point we could watch the comings and goings of birds on the cliff above. We saw the first jackdaws of the week, and were able to pick out not only swallows and house martins among the clouds of swifts above the village but also the smaller, more uniformly brown crag martins that nest in a colony on the cliff face.

In spite of the day's rain, it was warm enough for drinks on the terrace and then we enjoyed a wonderful supper of carrot soup followed by a cheese omelette. Then there was a beautifully succulent dish of roast lamb in mint gravy, cheeses and a delicious light almond tart. The windows were flooded with the rosy light of a beautiful sunset, boding well for the following day.

Tuesday May 17: Le Bugue and the Cave Walk

Today was the first really bright and clear day, though there was still some mist in the valley. We headed for the wood, passing a woodlark perched uncharacteristically on a telegraph wire. A cirl bunting (*right*) was singing from the top of an oak tree beside the path and the melodious warbler was perched high on a dead elm branch in the hedge singing his persistent scratchy song. There were more cirl buntings – a pair – feeding on the ground in the walnut grove and they gave us a rare opportunity to watch both at leisure and in good light. On the edge of the wood we heard a great spotted woodpecker drumming and deep in the wood blue tits and great tits were flitting about and feeding and both blackbird and blackcap were in excellent song.

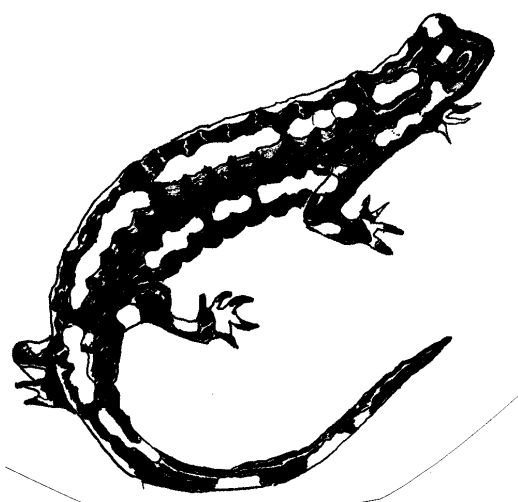


Tuesday means market day at Le Bugue and, in good Honeyguide tradition, the market was our morning destination, though we reached it after being taken by Gilles up the lane above the town so that we could look across it at the view over the valley and reach the town via a very pretty lane. It was a pleasant walk, sunny and mild, and a fruitful morning in the market was enjoyed by everyone. We ate our picnic beside the river at the edge of the town and then Gilles drove us the few miles south to the end of a lane leading, eventually, to the Gouffre de Proumeyssac.

We parked at the bottom of the track, at the edge of a disused quarry, and found a nice specimen of a dingy skipper for everyone to look at. Pyramidal orchids were scattered in the verge and we passed

some fine specimens of man and fly orchid as we walked along together with a solitary woodcock orchid. It was perfect for butterflies: pearly heaths, dingy skippers, a black-veined white, a scarce swallowtail, a brown argus and a beautiful Cleopatra all showed themselves in good positions for viewing and we also had a close encounter with a fine hornet. Two commas posed for photographs and there were also red admirals about and several Glanville fritillaries. Firecrests were singing in the wood and we heard the cackle of jays and managed to catch the spectacle of a pair of them ferociously mobbing a buzzard. As we emerged from the wood at the top of the hill at Colombet, a farmer was mowing a large area of grass on an improbably fancy mowing machine. We stopped to admire a wonderful stand of tongue orchids – both small *Serapias lingua* and large *Serapias vomeracea* (long-lipped) along with both green-winged and pyramidal orchids. Then we began to worry that we might be where we shouldn't be as the farmer strode over towards us. In fact he turned out to be an English 'ex-pat', (which explained the inappropriate mower) and, realising that we were interested in flowers, he wanted an identification of a very fine broomrape growing along his track! The final delight of the afternoon was another wonderful patch of orchids, this time of the pretty yellow and inappropriately named sombre bee orchids.

We reached the Gouffre de Proumeyssac where refreshments could be obtained and many of the group decided to go down and view the spectacle of the huge underground cavern, famed for its crystal deposits and magnificent stalactites and stalagmites. Those of us who stayed above ground were rewarded by a fine view of yet another honey buzzard.



While he was waiting for us, Gilles had been for a walk in the wood. He proudly displayed his lunch-box for us to see a beautiful, and this time extremely active, fire salamander. We admired it and Gilles restored it to its damp hollow in the wood.

Drinks on the terrace again were followed by another gastronomic spectacle: spinach soup, a ham and cheese feuilletée with sorrel sauce, confit de canard with ratatouille, cheese, of course and then, in honour of Gill's birthday, a wonderfully decorated marron gâteau, with chocolate icing and a fine inscription.

Wednesday May 18: Keith's Walk

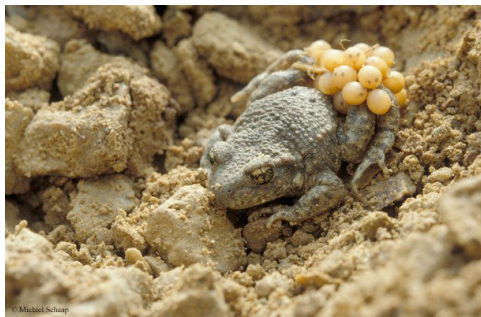
Wednesday was bright and clear and, looking out across the fields down to the hedge, we could see the girl bunting on the wire again and the melodious warbler singing from his usual song post on the dead elm branch, his breast shining in the sunshine like a ripe pear. We could hear a hoopoe calling and then spotted him on a tree beyond the bungalow and we were able to watch him for quite some time. Then a gang of noisy young starlings arrived and threatened to disturb everything on the way to the wood so we turned up the hill towards the vineyard. There, it was a girl bunting this time on the vine post and a different hoopoe called from not far away. It soon appeared and perched briefly on one of the stakes itself and then it flew slowly past us, giving us a lovely view. Breakfast time was fast approaching and the sky was beginning to cloud over, so we made our way back to Castang for a very welcome breakfast.

It has become an excellent Castang tradition that one of our walks should be a local one and led for us by Cathy's husband Keith. He has a fund of local knowledge, particularly into the social and agricultural history of the area and chose a route to take in, not only some fascinating historical landmarks but also some excellent natural history sites.

The first stop was a fine ancient dovecote or *pigeonnier*, in the field opposite the end of the Castang drive. It is a beautiful building but in poor repair and clearly home to both bats and barn owls. The next stop was at a complex ancient stone irrigation system or *abrevoir*, now beautifully restored, but still a testament to the ingenuity and hard work of the medieval farmers who had originally designed and constructed it. Then we were led to a disused quarry, deep in the wood, a source of much of the hard won stone used for the extensive network of ancient dry stone walls and terraces that form a web through the landscape.

All the time, we were conscious of the calls and song not only of chiffchaff and Bonelli's warblers but also of golden oriole all around us. Eventually, some of the group decided that they would go off in pursuit. One or two were rewarded by a fleeting view but everyone was confirmed in the opinion that they were a frustrating species! A little farther on, we were excited to find the caterpillar of an oak beauty moth and then, another object of interest that was not so hard to observe - some pine marten droppings! A nightingale was singing from the woods in the valley and we walked around it rather like an amphitheatre; all the time, the taunting call of the invisible golden orioles followed us.

Lunch back at Castang was a feast of quiches, cold meats, salads and fruit and after lunch we dispersed for a 'free' afternoon, of lazing, exploring, letter-writing and so on. We reconvened for tea and again for drinks, sharing our recollection of the morning and our sightings of the afternoon, before retreating to the dining room for more of Cathy's delicious cooking.

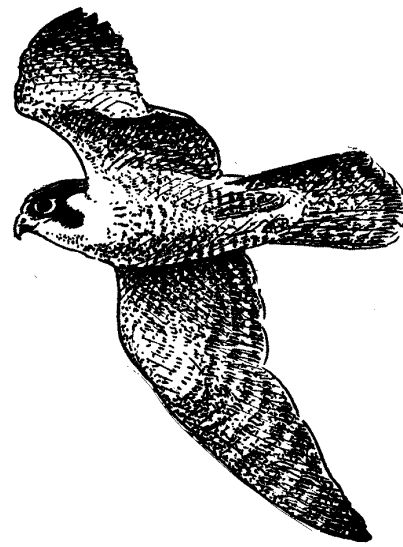


After dinner, we had been invited to the garden of a neighbour, Anne-Marie, where a substantial colony of midwife toads lives. So, armed with torches and with Olivia and Keith in the lead, we headed off to visit them. The tiny creatures live in crevices among the rocks and stones of the terrace and rock garden and can easily be located by their bell-like calls. We were all enchanted by the tiny things, the males carrying the yellow spawn like a loose cloak over their hindquarters. It was a magical end to the evening.

Thursday May 19: Font de Gaume, Gorge d'Enfer and Roque St Christophe

The melodious warbler was there to greet us as usual from his song post in the hedge when we set off for our early walk, so we walked down the drive towards him. We could hear the golden oriole again too, calling from the trees in the valley, and spent some time patiently scanning the treetops and the clearings in the hope of catching a glimpse. At last, patience for some was rewarded and we caught a brief view of a female, but nothing like the spectacle one always hopes for. A hoopoe, too, was much in evidence for his call, but was not to be seen.

Today, we had booked a visit to the spectacular and famous caves at Font de Gaume, near Les Eyzies on the Vézère. The visit was for the afternoon so we headed north-eastwards, along the Vézère to another ancient site, La Roque St Christophe. Gilles drew the coach to a halt under the cliff and we all climbed out. We were immediately rewarded. Drawn by small screeches, we could see a ledge above us on which there were no fewer than four young peregrines; a parent was perched on a branch some distance from them, keeping up a conversational contact call with them. We watched them for a long time as they moved about on the ledge, exercising their wings and jostling with one another. There were plenty of other things to interest us too. House martins and crag martins were both nesting on the cliff face, their nests distinguishable both by the position and by the colour of the mud they had used. Swifts were nesting in crevices there and there was a good deal of activity from a grey wagtail. Eventually, we tore ourselves away. There was just time for morning coffee in the little log cabin in the car park and then we walked through to a hay meadow beyond the car park that was full of interest for both botanists and entomologists. Adder's tongue fern and twayblade lurked in the damper hollows with common spotted, burnt tip, man and military orchids all to be found among the long grass. Where it was drier, the unlikely purple of bloody cranesbill, the yellow of Irish spurge, a blue bellflower and white star of Bethlehem all stood out against the green. We watched a dragonfly, *Aeschna cyanea* devouring a fly and several beautiful demoiselle damselflies hawked over the meadow. We had very good views of a clouded buff and a six spot burnet moth and of a small heath butterfly while Ascalaphids threatened them with their powerful, predatory flight. We puzzled for a time over a distant and very pale raptor but as it approached it became clear that it was just a very pale buzzard, part of the natural variation of the species on the continent.



We had lunch under the trees there and then there was time for one brief visit before we were due at Font de Gaume. We followed a narrow path, with woodcock and fly orchids, which leads up a little

valley towards the Gorge d'Enfer. We watched black kites and peregrines overhead and eventually the path comes to a huge rock overhang or *abri*. These *abris* were used as shelters and habitations in prehistoric times and have been the site of many important archaeological finds. Now, they are awesome features, penetrating far under the cliff into deep shadow, with only maidenhair fern growing under the roof, supported by seepage of water through fissures in the rock.

We were too large a group to visit Font de Gaume as a single party so we split into two groups. The walk up to the cave is through some botanically fascinating and rich habitat, so those who were waiting or those who had already been down were able to take their time and explore the natural rockery on the track-side. We found a flora unlike any other we had seen during the week, characteristic of a more arid and sheltered environment that is now rarely encountered. There were Nottingham catchfly, yellow and white rock-roses, pink convolvulus, meadow rue, sermountain, artemisia, swallow-wort, dyer's greenweed, common tormentil and its relative alpine cinquefoil, hairy rock-cress, St John's-wort, and feather grass, all in a rich and colourful array. There were some nice butterflies too: swallowtail, wood white, speckled wood and dingy skipper.

The visit to the cave itself is awe-inspiring, with strict regulation of the numbers of visitors for fear of irreversible damage. It is the only cave in France with polychrome paintings of this type that remains open to the public. The visitor sees paintings and engravings of bison, horses and mammoths and the famous and touching image of a male reindeer licking a kneeling female. It is altogether a most moving and unforgettable experience.

This was our final destination of the day so Gilles drove us back to Castang in time once again for tea on the terrace, a brief break (for some packing before tomorrow's departure) and then drinks, and the daily review. As it was the last evening, we had also asked everyone to pick out what they considered to be their personal highlight of the week, to be discussed over dinner.

Andrew – the shared expertise

Ann – the hospitality and the company and laughter and shared expertise

Caroline – the beauty of the surroundings, the shared expertise

Gill – the hobby on the hilltop

Graham – the meadows and woods

Jane – her first hoopoes, and introduction to grasses

Jill – warmth and kindness of the hospitality, the food and the shared expertise out on the walks

Liz – the meadows

Margaret – the hospitality at Castang, and the meadows

Mary – the midwife toads, and the warmth of their welcome into the 'Cambridge group'

Mike – the hobbies over the river, and the salamander (even though it was dead!)

Peter – the shared expertise

Norah – the Castang meadow

Rachel – the peregrines and the hobbies

Robin – the hobbies over the river

Sally – the hobbies and the hoopoes and the melodious warbler, the meeting and sharing of knowledge

Thea – the meadows, and the wonderful variety of small birds we had seen

Thelma – the peregrines

After dinner, Olivia came in and delighted us all by her charming farewell – she would be at school tomorrow when we were due to leave.

Friday May 20: Le Coux

Our last morning dawned bright with a mackerel sky. We could hear the strange and incongruous call of peacocks in the distance and set off towards the, now familiar, melodious warbler. The blackcap with a liking for telegraph wires was there again and parent blue tits were very busy looking after their noisy brood in a hole in the walnut tree on the corner. We watched a heron flying leisurely down towards the river and a black kite flopped across the valley in front of us. We scanned unsuccessfully for golden orioles – just a cuckoo about its business, and then for some of us at last, the first good sighting of a hoopoe.

After breakfast, most of the cloud had dispersed and we headed down, through the wood, towards Coux. The woodlark was at his position in the vineyard, we listened to Bonelli's warblers and chiffchaffs as we strolled down through the wood and enjoyed the cool shade. Golden orioles were

calling and we were hopeful of a sighting at the bottom edge of the wood. We paused there for a while, watching a black kite and a buzzard and then the group split into two, the more energetic striding off towards Coux for the round trip back to Castang and the others preferring to retrace their steps through the shady wood. The 'Coux' party enjoyed some good views of serins and black redstarts and the woodland group lingered in the vain hope of visible golden orioles!

We arrived at more or less the same time back at Castang for the last of Cathy's feasts and then it was time for our appreciative 'goodbyes' to Cathy and Keith as we climbed aboard the coach for the last time ready for Gilles to drive us to Bergerac.

DAILY WILDLIFE LISTS

Day 1: Around Castang

Day 2: Woodland Walk and Limeuil

Day 3: Berbiguières, the Two Views Walk and Montalier Haut

Day 4: Le Bugue and the Cave Walk

Day 5: Keith's walk

Day 6: Roque St Christophe, Gorge d'Enfer and Font de Gaume

Birds

Grey heron 12346
Mute swan 234
Mallard 23456
Honey buzzard 123456
Black kite 123456
Red kite 4
Buzzard 23456
Kestrel 1456
Hobby 235
Peregrine 6
Rock dove/feral pigeon 23456
Woodpigeon 1
Collared dove 123456
Turtle dove 234
Cuckoo 123456
Barn owl 2
Tawny owl 25
Swift 123456
Hoopoe 13456
Green woodpecker 123456
Great spotted woodpecker 3456
Woodlark 12345
Skylark 3
Sand martin 24
Crag martin 6
Swallow 123456
House martin 2346
Grey wagtail 46
White wagtail 12346
Wren 26
Dunnock 124
Robin 123456
Nightingale 13456
Black redstart 123456
Stonechat 123456
Blackbird 123456
Song thrush 1235
Melodious warbler 12456
Whitethroat 13
Blackcap 123456
Bonelli's warbler 23456
Chiffchaff 123456
Firecrest 46
Long-tailed tit 3
Blue tit 123456

Great tit 123456
Marsh tit 6
Nuthatch 56
Short-toed treecreeper
Golden oriole 123456
Jay 123456
Magpie 123456
Jackdaw 36
Carrion crow 123456
Starling 123456
House sparrow 123456
Tree sparrow 2
Chaffinch 123456
Serin 23456
Greenfinch 23456
Goldfinch 123456
Cirl bunting 12456
Corn bunting 1

Mammals

Hedgehog (dead) 4
Mole (hills) 1
Hare 2
Red squirrel 12
Pine Marten (droppings) 5
Badger (dung pits) 1
Fox 5
Wild boar (rootings) 13
Fallow deer 23

Amphibians

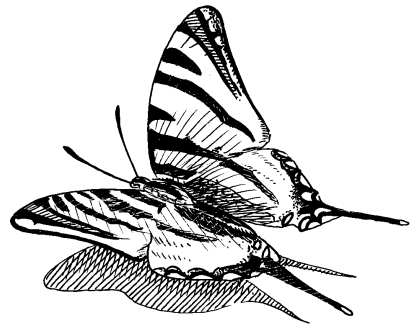
Fire Salamander 24
Palmate newt 15
Midwife toad 12345
Marsh frog 12345

Reptiles

Green lizard 34
Viviparous lizard 2
Wall lizard 13456

Butterflies

Dingy Skipper 346
Swallowtail 146 (*right*)
Scarce Swallowtail 3456
Black-veined White 2346
Orange-tip 2346
Pale Clouded Yellow 234
Cleopatra 46
Brimstone 46
Wood White 1246
Southern White Admiral 2
Comma 4
Red Admiral 346
Glanville Fritillary 456
Small Heath 12346
Pearly Heath 24
Speckled Wood 12346
Wall Brown 56
Green Hairstreak 34
Small Blue 3
Brown Argus 4
Adonis Blue 123456

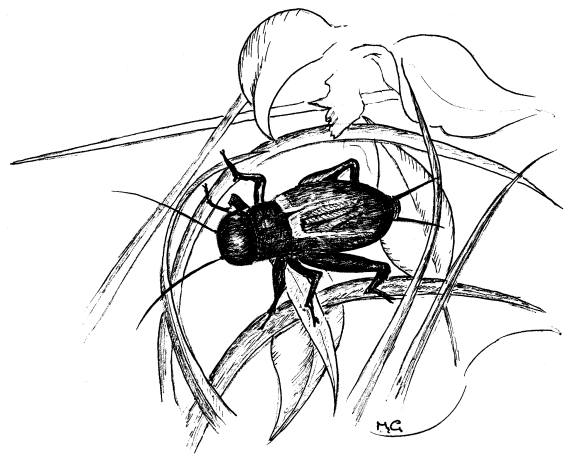


Moths – mostly day-flying

6-spot burnet 12346
Oak beauty (caterpillar) 5
Speckled yellow 3
Latticed heath 1
Cream wave 2
Yellow shell 2
Clouded buff 26
Pine processionary (tent) 4
Cream-spot tiger 2
Brimstone (moth) 2

Other insects

Ascalaphid *Libelloides longicornis* 12346
Wood wasp 3
Violet carpenter bee 23456
Hornet 35
Bee-fly sp 26
Ichneumon fly sp 3
Trichodes alvearius - a red & black soldier beetle 5
Bloody-nosed beetle 2
Rose chafer 6
Summer chafer
Oxythyrea funesta a chafer beetle 1
Oil beetle 5
Firebug 456
Graphosoma italicum – a black and red shield bug, the ‘Millwall bug’ (our name) or Hogweed bonking bug (official) 12
Field cricket 123456 (*right*)
Green bush cricket 12
Mole cricket 23
Wood ant sp 2
Alydus calcaratus – a bug
Paper wasp *Polistes gallicus* 1
Beautiful Demoiselle 236
Broad-bodied chaser 4
Hawker dragonfly *Aeshna cyanea* 6



Spiders and other invertebrates

Crab spider *Misumena vatia* 126
Ladybird spider *Eresus niger* 1
Garden spider *Araneus diadematus* 1
spider *Steatodea paykulliana* 1
Roman (edible) snail 4
Slug *Arion ater* 5