



Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS 2014



Helping you enjoy wildlife



Helping to protect wildlife



Honeyguide

CONTENTS & CALENDAR

South Africa: Drakensberg and Zululand 30 January – 14 February 2014.	page 4
Tarifa & Gibraltar 3 – 10 March 2014.	page 5
Extremadura 18 – 26 March 2014.	page 6
Crete 22 – 29 April 2014.	page 7
Peloponnese 24 April – 1 May 2014.	page 8
Spanish Pyrenees 24 April – 3 May 2014.	page 9
Central Portugal 26 April – 3 May 2014.	page 10
Dordogne 8 – 15 May 2014.	page 11
Latvia 21 – 28 May 2014.	page 12
The Cévennes 30 May – 8 June 2014.	page 13
Danube Delta 7 – 14 June 2014.	page 14
Bulgaria, the Western Rhodopes 18 – 26 June 2014.	page 15
French Pyrenees 9 – 16 September 2014.	page 16
Booking form	page 18
Booking details	inside back cover

More information

In this brochure we can give only a flavour of the holidays on offer. You are welcome without commitment to have a pack of information about any holiday, including a previous holiday report and itinerary. Holiday reports are also on www.honeyguide.co.uk

Honeyguide conservation programme

£40 of the price of your Honeyguide holiday goes to a conservation body, often the bird protection society of the host country, towards its current conservation work. The societies and projects we support are described under each holiday.

HONEYGUIDE CHARITABLE TRUST

A donation to a local conservation project has been part of the holiday price since the start of Honeyguide in 1991. To date (August 2013), we have raised £89,420 for conservation projects, mostly in Europe.

The Honeyguide Wildlife Trust Limited was registered as a charity in June 2004, registered charity number 1104606. The object of the charity, in summary, is "To help conserve... the natural environment and wildlife".

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Holidays for the year 2014

Welcome to the 24th season of Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays.

Two new destinations in this year's Honeyguide programme are in countries as far north and south as we travel.

Latvia, on the Baltic coast, follows an interesting recce for Rob Macklin and me earlier this year. The visible stream of migrating honey buzzards over Kolka Cape and scanning round and counting seven red-backed shrikes in view remain striking memories.

South Africa regularly features in the programme, and Geoff Crane has come up with a new part of South Africa, the beautiful Drakensberg Mountains, combined with Hluhluwe Game Park and Wakkerstroom wetlands elsewhere in Zululand. We're usually looking forward to the end of the year for our South African holidays, but this one's as soon as February.

February was a good time for our Tarifa & Gibraltar holiday, but we've moved it into early March to have more of the early spring in southern Spain.

Five holidays return to the programme after a rest or group bookings: Central Portugal, the Spanish Pyrenees, the Dordogne and the Cévennes in France. In Bulgaria we concentrate on the Western Rhodope mountains, without the extra journey to the Black Sea coast as in previous Bulgarian holidays. It's not a new idea: a private group of Honeyguiders did this in 2012, and we know it works well.

Extremadura, Crete, the Peloponnese and the Danube Delta holidays follow their usual pattern. The French Pyrenees returns to September.

What you see in print isn't everything on offer. There is often scope to run additional holidays for groups of friends, perhaps for holidays that have run in previous years and aren't in this brochure. It's also quite likely that there will be additional holidays, including in autumn 2014 – keep an eye on www.honeyguide.co.uk.

The website has holiday reports, news, photographs and more and sometimes other updates to the programme – perhaps additional flights from airports near you that we didn't know about when the brochure was printed.

The Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust (see below) continues, with your help, to support conservation projects linked to each holiday.

I hope you can join us on a wildlife holiday in 2014.

Chris Durdin

Chris Durdin
August 2013

A benefit of being a charity is that, through Gift Aid, we can claim tax from HM Customs & Revenue against the contributions from Honeyguiders. This can raise an additional 25p in the pound, which brings in more than £1000 each year. This tops up the donations we make to the conservation projects linked to our holidays through LPO, SEO, HOS, SOR and others.

Trustees of the charitable trust are Helen Crowder, Malcolm Crowder OBE (secretary) and Chris Durdin (chairman).

We would be very grateful if everyone booking a holiday who is a UK taxpayer could complete the simple gift aid declaration on the booking form.

We also welcome additional donations or legacies through the Honeyguide charity.

We are very grateful to the Wildlife Outreach Network in Essex, which provided extra support for our projects for several years.

Your leadership team 2014

Chris Durdin, this year leading in **Tarifa, the Dordogne and the French Pyrenees**, (and probably elsewhere, too), is the driving force behind Honeyguide, running holidays since 1991. For many years he combined this with his work for the RSPB in Eastern England, often the Society's spokesman, but has been concentrating on Honeyguide full-time since 2009, alongside writing a book about Norfolk's cranes. He's also a qualified soccer coach, for one son's under eleven year group. As a naturalist, Chris is an all rounder.

South Africa

Geoff Crane is the man behind Crane's Cape Tours & Travel, both local leaders and ground agents for Honeyguide in South Africa. An experienced guide himself, Geoff co-leads all Honeyguide's holidays in South Africa.

Tarifa & Gibraltar

Frank (Francisco) Vargas is the RSPB's Farmland Bird Recovery Officer in Essex, but he comes from near the Strait of Gibraltar and his family's farm is there still. **Chris Durdin** – see above.

Extremadura

Martin Kelsey OBE is our regular leader in Extremadura where he lives with his family, close to Finca Santa Marta. His background in ecology includes a three-year study on marsh warblers. After three years in the Amazon rainforest with the British Ornithologists' Union, where he met his wife Claudia, he worked for BirdLife International, before joining Save the Children. **Robin & Rachel Hamilton** – see below.

The Peloponnese and the Cévennes

Robin Hamilton has a wide knowledge of western and central Europe and its wildlife, especially birds. He worked for many years for English Nature. **Rachel Hamilton** spent her working life teaching natural history and conservation with the Field Studies Council and at Otley College in Suffolk. She is an enthusiastic all round naturalist, though her first interest is botany. Robin and Rachel, both of whom are experienced wildlife leaders and keen linguists, are regular leaders in Greece and in France.

Crete

Tim Strudwick is the RSPB's Site Manager for the Mid Yare nature reserves in Norfolk – Strumpshaw Fen and nearby. Naturally Tim knows his birds from his work, 40 years of birdwatching and leading for Honeyguide in Crete for the last two years. He's also a keen botanist and runs courses on sedges and rushes. Another expertise is in solitary bees and wasps, for which he is the Norfolk county recorder.

Spanish Pyrenees and Bulgaria

Chris Gibson is a marine conservation specialist for Natural England based in north Essex, an author of several wildlife books and has led many holidays for Honeyguide. He is an outstanding all rounder, from birds through flowers to moths, recognised as a 'naturalist of distinction' by the British Naturalists' Association.

Central Portugal

Domingos Leitão works for SPEA, the Portuguese BirdLife partner, and alongside this is a holiday leader in his home country. Honeyguiders have particularly enjoyed his ability to find reptiles and amphibians! **Rob Macklin** was until recently the RSPB's area manager on the Suffolk coast, covering Minsmere and North Warren among several nature reserves. He now lives in Devon and uses his years of experience in nature conservation as an environmental consultant.

Danube Delta

The team of local leaders from our friends at **Ibis** was undecided when going to print.

Latvia

Karlis Millers is a birdwatching guide and ornithologist working with our hosts, Baltic Wildlife. Karlis also runs the Latvia Birds website, which tracks bird news across the country. **Rob Macklin** – see Central Portugal.

French Pyrenees

Ivan Nethercoat is training & interpretation manager in the RSPB's People Engagement department at Sandy. He is a regular and well-travelled Honeyguide leader, including holidays in the Balearics, Crete and French Pyrenees. His degree, many moons ago, was in photography, and he is very happy to help any photographers in the group. **Chris Durdin** – see above.



Chris Durdin



Geoff Crane



Frank Vargas



Martin Kelsey



Rachel Hamilton



Robin Hamilton



Tim Strudwick



Chris Gibson



Domingos Leitão



Rob Macklin



Karlis Millers



Ivan Nethercoat



The air holidays shown are **ATOL Protected** by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is **ATOL 3253**. ATOL protection extends primarily to customers who book and pay in the United Kingdom.



Our logo is a greater honeyguide (*Indicator indicator*), an African bird that guides people or honey badgers to bees' nests. Those guided and the bird then enjoy the honeycomb. Honeyguide wildlife holidays also have enthusiastic leaders to guide you to nature's best.

Our holidays have been designed with the general naturalist in mind. Beginners are especially welcome but all holidays offer much to the more experienced naturalist. Some holidays are loosely based on 'birdwatching without blinkers'; some are a mix of birds, flowers and other wildlife. Several holidays can be good for butterflies. Local history, culture and food play a part in every holiday.

The holidays lend themselves to anyone wishing to leave the organised programme to sketch, paint, write or just potter.

Price: £3,950 per person in twin room for 13 nights plus two travelling days (Thursday to Friday)

Single room supplement: £200

En suite facilities

Scheduled flights, London to Johannesburg

Deposit: £500

Number: minimum of 4, maximum 14

Main leader: Geoff Crane

30 January – 14 February 2014

South Africa

Drakensberg Mountains and Zululand

Including Hluhluwe Game Park and Wakkerstroom wetlands



Drakensberg Mountains (4 nights)

The Golden Gate Highlands National Park – named after its ochre-hued sandstone rocks – is best known for its magnificent landscapes and rock paintings. Paleontology finds here have included dinosaur eggs and skeletons. Less widely known is the wildlife: beautiful flowers and a range of mammals and birds, rather different in character to lowland South Africa.

The highland habitat provides home to a variety of mammals. Black wildebeest, eland, blesbok, oribi, springbok and Burchell's zebra roam the lower foothills. Two legendary rare birds, the lammergeier and the southern bald ibis, breed on high ledges in the sandstone cliffs. Other birds of prey include Cape vulture, Verreaux's eagle and martial eagle.

Nerine, gladiolus, arum lily, watsonias, fire lilies and red-hot poker can be identified close to our accommodation and protea species can be found higher up the hillside.

The diurnal grass owl quarters grassy road verges. There are larks, swallows, swifts, chats, cisticolas, sunbirds and francolins. The very local Drakensberg siskin, broad-tailed warbler and Gurney's sugarbird are in the Royal Natal National Park, below the sheer face of the Drakensberg escarpment.

The Drakensberg Mountains were once the hunting ground of the San people (Bushmen). Though the San no longer live in the area, they recorded their exploits in the form of remarkable rock paintings. We will be visiting these paintings on one of our walks.

Hluhluwe Game Park (6 nights)

Zulu kings hunted here and put in place the first conservation laws. The park, near St Lucia, covers some 96,000 ha and contains an immense diversity of fauna and flora. Hluhluwe (also known as Umfolozi or Imfolozi) is characterised by hilly topography.

Today the 'big five' of African legend – lion, elephant, buffalo, leopard and both black and white rhinos – haunt the fertile savannah; but we also look out for the 'small five' – the lion ant, elephant shrew, buffalo weaver, leopard tortoise and rhino beetle.

There are viewing hides overlooking waterholes which help visitors to see animals and birds at close range. Early morning and afternoon drives will be the day plan, to avoid the midday sun, and a night drive for nocturnal animals is an option.



Drakensberg mountains

Birdwatching is always rewarding, especially in the northern section of the park. Raptors include tawny eagles and we hope to find the large, ground-foraging southern ground hornbill. Louries, mousebirds, bee-eaters, kingfishers, rollers, wood-hoopoes, hornbills, barbets, shrikes, starlings, widows, weavers and sunbirds are all well represented.

Around the chalets, barn, white-faced and African scops owls roost in the trees, while mosque, red-breasted and grey-rumped swallows hawk insects over the camp, plus much more.

Wakkerstroom (3 nights)

The wetlands and grasslands that surround the small town of Wakkerstroom have been managed as a bird reserve for many years by BirdLife South Africa. Montane grasslands are rich in wild flowers such as orchids and aloes. Wakkerstroom is also steeped in history from the Anglo-Boer & Zulu wars.

Southern bald ibis, ground woodpecker, buff-streaked chat, Rudd's & Botha's larks and yellow-breasted pipit are a few of the local endemics that we will be looking out for.

The Wakkerstroom wetland at the edge of town is very productive, with bird hides that afford elevated views over the wetlands. Grey crowned crane, African snipe, African rail and a diverse selection of waterbirds can be seen from the hides. Dark-capped bulbul, red-throated wryneck, South African cliff swallow, Levallant's cisticola and blue crane are all regulars in the area.

Conservation project

The second South African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP II) is one of the most intensive monitoring programmes ever undertaken in South Africa. Many areas are difficult to access but critically need atlas work and ongoing monitoring work for BirdLife South Africa to understand the bird conservation challenges in these remote sites.



Tawny eagle



Southern ground hornbill



White rhino

3 – 10 March 2014

Tarifa and Gibraltar

Early spring in Andalucia

Within sight of the Strait of Gibraltar and north Africa, the winter in southern Spain is mild and spring starts early. Late wintering birds mingle with early migrants, and early flowers include regional specialities. Temperatures can be mild, adding to the easy conditions for a relaxed, early season wildlife holiday.

Wetlands – especially La Janda – support good numbers of wintering, passage and breeding birds. Among the waterbirds are herons, egrets, spoonbills and glossy ibises. Coastal birds include Audouin's and slender-billed gulls, various waders and there's often a Caspian tern with the Sandwich terns. Ducks can include the threatened white-headed duck, here in its core area in western Europe.

Another threatened bird, one of the rarest in the world, is the northern bald ibis, for many years reduced to one colony in Morocco and a few elusive birds in the Middle East. This area has a reintroduction programme that is going well, and this iconic species can be surprisingly easy to see.

Northern European robins, song thrushes and black redstarts overwinter here, alongside any number of blackcaps and chiffchaffs. Farmland supports winter finch flocks, buntings and larks. Interesting residents include firecrests, short-toed treecreepers, crested and Thekla larks.

Signs of spring will include the first martins and swallows, including red-rumped. Birds of prey aren't moving on the huge scale of the autumn migration, but there should be a steady trickle of griffon vultures, along with black kites, eagles and lesser kestrels. White storks increasingly overwinter in the Iberian peninsula, but are also early migrants. Many hoopoes also stay year-round, and great spotted cuckoos will be arriving.

We stay at Huerta Grande, situated inland from Tarifa, within the southern tip of the Natural Park of Los Alcornocales (the cork oak). Cork oak woodland is one of the key habitats of the area, and our base is in a narrow gorge or 'canuto', the year-round moisture conserving a sub-tropical habitat unique in Europe.

Gibraltar

We will also visit the British territory of Gibraltar. It's famous for its Barbary macaques, the last wild population in Europe. By contrast, Barbary partridges are usually elusive; blue rock thrush and peregrine are more likely. The Rock is botanically rich, with local specialities including rock marigold, toothed lavender, Tangier fennel and the big blue cones of *Scilla peruviana*.

The area is known for its cetaceans and, weather permitting, the holiday will include a boat trip into Gibraltar Bay or the Strait to look for these. Dolphins and long-finned pilot whales are the likeliest species.



Flowers

Many flowers have adapted to take advantage of the mild winter, including asphodels, cistuses, Barbary nut irises, giant and early *Ophrys* orchids and the strange-looking friar's cowl. There are daffodils, especially paperwhite and hoop petticoat narcissi. Local species include Andalusian rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum baeticum* and Andalusian birthwort. It may not be in flower yet, but we will seek out *Drosophyllum lusitanicum*, an unusual and very local carnivorous flower that is related to sundews.

Other wildlife

Our base at Huerta Grande has stripeless tree frogs and Moorish geckos. Early butterflies could include Spanish festoon, Cleopatra and the monarchs resident in the area, plus migrants such as clouded yellow, painted lady and green-striped white.



Common dolphins

Conservation project

The Ornithological Group of Estrecho (GOES), formed in 1982, studies and protects wild birds and their habitats. It operates a ringing station and here and elsewhere more than 90,000 birds have been ringed since 1983, both resident species such as white storks and the many migrants that rely on this route to and from Africa. Other work includes publications and school visits.

SUPPORTING



Price: £1,430 per person in twin room for a full week (Monday to Monday)

Single room supplement: £100

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flights Gatwick to Gibraltar, or Monarch flights Manchester to Gibraltar.

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 14
Leaders: Frank Vargas and Chris Durdin



Griffon vulture



Barbary nut iris



Barbary macaque

Gibraltar

18 – 26 March 2014

Extremadura

Wild central Spain

Extremadura is one of the few remaining truly wild areas of Spain and, indeed, Europe. The region is renowned for its amazing variety of birds of prey, especially in Monfragüe National Park, and special species such as the bustards and larks to be found on the rolling plains of the Spanish steppes.

The plains around Trujillo and Cáceres form part of the great Spanish steppes with their fascinating assemblage of birds. Here we will search for great bustards performing their incredible breeding display; if we are lucky, an astonishing ritual in which the male turns himself into the appearance of a huge white pom-pom of feathers. Other steppe birds in this area are little bustards, stone-curlews and both pin-tailed and black-bellied sandgrouse. Crested and calandra larks are also found in the plains. Another speciality is Spanish sparrow, a rather local bird in Spain despite its name.

We will explore Monfragüe National Park, some 25 miles north of Trujillo. This is one of

is famous for the wintering cranes, most of which leave in February, but here also are azure-winged magpies, that amazing, colourful bird of the east with an outpost in Spain. One theory was that they originated from birds escaped during trade with China in earlier times, but proof that it is a relict population has recently come to light with the discovery of sub-fossil bones.

We stay at the charming Finca Santa Marta, a granite-built olive oil mill converted into a country inn, situated in the countryside south of Trujillo.

Flowers

Patches of white Spanish broom and the pink *Silene colorata* bring colour to fields close to Trujillo. Miniature daffodils include delicate hoop petticoat and angel's tears narcissi. Early orchids, such as conical, champagne and naked man orchids, irises and lupins are flowering.

Birds

As well as those already mentioned, we should see a selection of the following: Montagu's harrier, red, black and black-shouldered kites, peregrine, raven, hoopoe, blue rock thrush, little owl, southern grey shrike, red-rumped swallow, woodlark, Sardinian warbler, cirl and corn buntings, spotless starling and great spotted cuckoo.

Other wildlife

Spain is western Europe's stronghold for wild mammals, including genet, mongoose and lynx, but these are mainly secretive or nocturnal. Stripe-necked terrapins and Iberian wall lizards are more obvious.

Itinerary

Excursions will include visits to the Monfragüe National Park, including places such as Peña Falcon and the Tiétar cliffs; the holm oak dehesa region; and exploration of the plains around Trujillo and Cáceres. We will also visit the wonderful old town of Trujillo with its striking central square and white storks and lesser kestrels.

Conservation project

Traditional low intensity farming, especially non-irrigated arable farmland but also seasonal grazing, supports much of the special wildlife of Extremadura – and can never be protected just by nature reserves. The conservation of the Spanish steppes and 'dehesa' wood pasture is a great priority for the Sociedad Española de Ornitología (Spanish Ornithological Society / BirdLife Spain).



Price: £1,520 per person in twin room for nine days (Tuesday to Wednesday)

Single room supplement: £200

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flights Gatwick to Madrid

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 13

Leaders: Martin Kelsey, Robin and Rachel Hamilton



Lesser kestrels



Belén Plain



Iberian fritillaries

the most outstanding areas for seeing birds of prey in a country which is itself probably the best for raptors in Europe. It has the core Spanish population of black vultures, which breed here along with griffon and Egyptian vultures.

Eagles are well represented here with Spanish imperial, golden, short-toed and booted. From the various viewpoints, which make fine vantage points for raptor-watching, other species that can be seen include black stork, chough and rock bunting.

The lower valleys approaching Monfragüe hold good stands of holm oak woodland, the 'dehesa' or wood pasture that is such a distinctive feature of Extremadura. The dehesa

22 – 29 April 2014

Crete

Island birds and flowers in the cradle of civilisation

Crete is a magical and mysterious island. Home of Europe's earliest civilisation, influenced by many nations, yet it retains its own identity and culture of which its people are justifiably proud.

The island's position in the Mediterranean has not only played a crucial role in its history but is an important migration route for birds on their way north in spring. Crete in April is free of crowds, the days can be warm and the hillsides are full of flowers.

This, the largest and most southerly of all the Greek islands, is dominated by a backbone of mountains through which cut many deep gorges. These are as spectacular as they are rich in wildlife, be it migrant birds, nesting vultures or endemic wild flowers.

Wildlife and history are difficult to separate on Crete, with many important archeological sites also rich in both plants and birds. We shall sample Minoan ruins at Phaestos and Ayia Triada and, perhaps, spend some time in the old Venetian port of Rethymnon.

We are based at the small and friendly Sophia Hotel in the small town of Plakias on the south coast. It is ideally placed for local walks and excursions and has an impressive backdrop of gorges and mountains.

Flowers

Crete's rich flora of 1600 native species includes 140 endemic to the island, such as Cretan cyclamen and Cretan ebony. In April many orchids are at their peak with Cretan bee, naked man, few-flowered, rainbow, four-spotted and bumblebee orchids among 20 or more species. Shrubs like Jerusalem sage and cistus contribute to colourful and aromatic hillsides.

Birds

The mountains and gorges of Crete are a stronghold for birds of prey, with the largest population of griffon vultures in Greece. Lammergeier, Bonelli's and golden eagles and

buzzard all breed, as do crag martin, blue rock thrush, chough and raven. The hillsides and scrub support both Sardinian and the much rarer Rüppell's warbler. At this time of year a whole range of birds passes through on migration, pausing especially at wetlands, however small; these might include red-footed falcon, alpine swift, bee-eater, squacco heron, little bittern and various waders and warblers.

Other wildlife

Even at this time of the year there are butterflies such as swallowtail, scarce swallowtail, Cleopatra and eastern festoon. We often see freshwater crabs; reptiles can include Balkan (stripe-necked) terrapin and Balkan green lizard.

Excursions

As well as local walks, our minibus trips this week include visits to Moní Préveli, Kourtaliótiko and Kotsiphos Gorges, Frangokastello, Spili, Ayia reservoir and, probably, the mountain plateau at Omalos.

Conservation project

The lammergeier conservation project is run by the Hellenic Ornithological Society, BirdLife Greece. In the Balkans it occurs only in Greece, with the bulk of the population on Crete. Alongside survey and monitoring, the long-term survival of Europe's rarest vulture is being tackled by site protection, food provision and the encouragement of traditional grazing systems.

SUPPORTING



Freshwater crab



Price: £1,390 per person in single or twin room, for a full week (Tuesday to Tuesday)

This includes taverna evening meals, with wine and coffee plus picnics or a taverna lunch.

En suite facilities

EasyJet flights, Gatwick to Heraklion

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 14, with two leaders

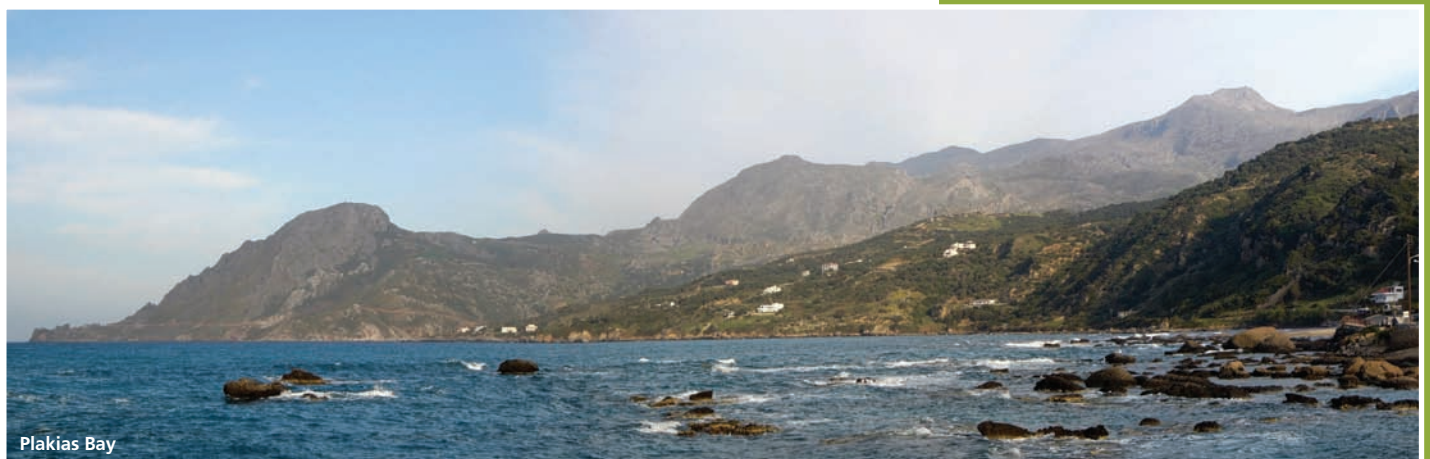
Main leader: Tim Strudwick



Little bittern



Orchis boryi - Spili



Plakias Bay

More information visit www.honeyguide.co.uk 7

Price: £1,430 per person in twin room for a full week (Thursday to Thursday).

Single room supplement: £150

En suite facilities

Scheduled flights London to Athens, probably easyJet from Gatwick or BA from Heathrow

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Robin and Rachel Hamilton

24 April – 1 May 2014

Peloponnese

Traditional, rural Greece

Three fingers of the Peloponnese, pointing south towards Crete, form the distinctive shape of Greece's southern tip. Already culturally and ecologically different from mainland Greece, this was reinforced when, in 1893, the Corinth Canal was cut through and the peninsula effectively became an island.

Bridges mean access is straightforward, but the separation is reflected in the wildlife community – such as Peloponnese cyclamen and two endemic lizards – and in everyday life. In today's increasingly urban Greece, here is an area where links to the land, small communities and a slow pace of life persist – Greece as it used to be. Donkeys used as working animals remain a common sight. The region has its own language, still spoken by older residents.

We're based in the Tyros-Livadi area on the coast of Arcadia, facing east into the Aegean Sea. Tyros is a small village with a long sea front and a fishing harbour. It is not on the main tourist trail; the majority of visitors are Greek. We stay in holiday apartments at nearby Livadi, a quiet coastal village with a friendly taverna for our evening meals.

With a coast running north-south, it's well placed for migrant birds. Some drop in to refuel on the brackish lake at Moustos and on the intertidal flats near Nafplio – the latter an unusual habitat in the scarcely tidal Mediterranean.

Breeding birds are a fairly typical southern European mix: short-toed eagle, woodchat shrike, Sardinian and subalpine warbler, for example. Rock nuthatches pop up in villages and historical sites, such as Mycenae.

Carob, citrus, fig and Judas trees emphasise the Mediterranean feel. Spring wild flowers are a rich, colourful mix including purple vipers bugloss, orchids and the local endemic Parnon alkanet.

Uncovering more about the Peloponnese is why we're here: Honeyguide is following a Honeyguider. Sue Davy moved here in 2006 and has a passion for the area's wildlife and way of life. She likes to share it with us – and glean information from the combined wildlife expertise of a Honeyguide group and leaders.

Trees and shrubs

In Greece, Syrian juniper is confined to this area. Other conifers are Aleppo and black pines and Grecian fir. Both species of strawberry trees occur, sometimes growing side by side. Kermes oak, lentisc, Jerusalem sage and various cistuses are common shrubs. Hillsides have evergreen maples and wild olives; we expect to find almond leaved-pear and Valonia oak. Around villages chaste tree is common, as is the pretty but invasive lantana.



Flowers

Spring flowers could include peacock and crown anemones, tulips *Tulipa orphanidea* and *Tulipa goulimyi*, *Cyclamen peloponnesiacum*, widow iris, *Gagea graeca*, four-spotted and few-flowered orchids, *Fritillaria messanensis* and old friends like crown daisies and pitch trefoil.



Peloponnese cyclamen

Reptiles and mammals

The area boasts two endemic lizards. Greek rock lizards – distinctively unstriped – and chunky Peloponnese wall lizards are found nowhere else. That's if the books are right: we wonder as nature guides show no wild boar here, but in chestnut forest we have found clear evidence from rootings, backed up by locals' reports. Golden jackal occurs but is tricky to see: mammals more likely to be seen include stone marten and eastern hedgehog. Other reptiles include geckos, Balkan green lizard and margined tortoise.

Birds

Those noted above plus little bittern, slender-billed gull, buzzard, black-winged stilt, rock partridge, red-rumped swallow, blue rock thrush, crested lark, sombre tit, firecrest and curl bunting.

Other wildlife

Spring butterflies include southern swallowtail, Cleopatra, southern festoon, southern comma and southern white admiral. The supporting cast includes Egyptian locust and violet carpenter bee.

Itinerary

Local walks and minibus trips, coastal and into the hills, all within the eastern part of the Peloponnese peninsula.

Conservation project

The Management Body of Mount Parnon & Moustos Wetland record and protects biodiversity in the protected area. For mammals such as jackals and otters this is a challenge as they avoid human contact, and Honeyguide has already helped by supplying infra-red cameras.



Woodchat shrike



Greek rock lizard (L) and Peloponnese wall lizard (R)



Corinth canal; Aegean coast; spring flowers.

24 April – 3 May 2014

Spanish Pyrenees

Spring at Berdún

A stunning landscape and a wealth of wildlife make the Spanish Pyrenees attractive in any season. In spring, with vultures soaring, birds singing and flowers in bloom, it's a wildlife experience difficult to top anywhere in Europe.

Raptors often steal the show. The foothills of the Pyrenees, where we are based, are acknowledged as having Europe's highest density of birds of prey. Red and black kites feed in the river valleys. Short-toed eagles hover as they search for snakes and lizards; booted eagles are regular too. There are three vulture species: griffons are easily the commonest and increasing, Egyptian vultures are getting scarcer here and everywhere. We are at the heart of Europe's stronghold for the rare lammergeier.

The scenery is dramatic with the constant backdrop of snow-topped mountains. There are deep gorges that attract griffon vultures, alpine swifts and crag martins. High pastures have gentians and other early alpine flowers, and on lower slopes asphodels and early spider orchids are among the species to be found.

Berdún itself – host to Honeyguide holidays for 20 years – is a charming, fortified village perched on a hilltop in the Pyrenean foothills. Our base now is Casa Sarasa, where Peter Rich and Melanie Hallam offer a warm welcome and fine food.

The Pyrenees may sound quite strenuous, but our itinerary is actually fairly relaxed. Anyone reasonably fit will have no trouble keeping up.

Itinerary

Our trips take us to the monastery and pine woods at St Juan de la Peña, the high Pyrenees at Aísa or Portalet, the sandstone cliffs at Riglos and

the gorges of Arbayún and Lumbier. Local exploration is equally rewarding to the rivers Veral and Aragón and to Binies gorge.

Birds

Those mentioned above plus golden eagle, bee-eater, hoopoe, crested lark, golden oriole, black-bellied dipper, Cetti's, subalpine and Sardinian warblers, rock sparrow, spotless starling, chough, blue rock thrush, nightingale, citril finch and many more.

Flowers

Lady and elder-flowered orchids, hepatica, amelanchier, trumpet and spring gentians, beautiful flax, wild daffodil, rush-leaved narcissus, tassel hyacinth, Pyrenean saxifrage, petrocypis to name just a few.

Other wildlife

Mammals could include alpine marmot and isard – Pyrenean chamois – at the high tops, and red squirrel. Butterflies include Cleopatra, scarce swallowtail and Spanish festoon. Spanish moon and giant peacock moths are often seen.

Conservation project

The Sociedad Española de Ornitología (Spanish Ornithological Society) manages 1600 acres of steppe, one of the most threatened bird habitats both here in the Aragón region and in Europe. Dupont's and lesser short-toed larks, pin-tailed and black-bellied sandgrouse and stone-curlews benefit from the establishment of this reserve at Belchite, near Zaragoza.



Price: £1,520 per person in twin room for ten days (Thursday to Saturday)

Single room supplement: £120

Nine rooms, two of which share a bathroom, the rest have en suite facilities.

Scheduled Ryanair flights London Stansted to Biarritz

Deposit: £300

Group size, and if we need a co-leader, will depend on the mix of twins and singles in the group.

Main leader: Chris Gibson



Hoopoe



Above: spring gentians, below: Berdún



Price: £1,430 per person in twin room for a full week (Saturday to Saturday)

Single room supplement: £150

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flights, potentially Bristol, Gatwick, Liverpool or Luton to Lisbon

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Domingos Leitão and Rob Macklin

26 April – 3 May 2014

Central Portugal

Cork oak country and much more

From limestone hillsides to granite outcrops, cork oak woodlands to estuaries and dry grasslands, central Portugal offers a varied landscape with a rich range of wildlife.

This two centre holiday, starting close to Lisbon, offers contrasting habitats both between and within the holiday's two bases, one in the west of Portugal, the other in the east close to Spain.



Cork oak



Black-shouldered kite



Spanish festoon

Around Santarém

Here wildlife thrives in a mosaic of abandoned olive groves and farmland. Black-shouldered kite, bee-eaters and southern grey shrikes compete for attention with orchids, including yellow bee and giant orchids and violet limodora.

Spoonbills join nesting night herons, little egrets and thousands of cattle egrets on an island in the Tejo Estuary. The estuary's mudflats supports a good mix of waders – wintering, passage and breeding – and there or on nearby lagoons and fields there may be glossy ibis, Caspian tern and large numbers of white storks.

Much of the estuary is adjacent to wood pastures – *montados* – of cork oak, where nature and man have combined to create a sustainable harvest of cork on which a valuable ecosystem is based. Birds include Bonelli's and booted eagles, hoopoes (a few now overwinter here as the climate has warmed), curlew buntings and woodchat shrikes.

The limestone pavements and hills of the Serra de Aires and Candeeiros Natural Park provide a complete contrast. Flowers include Iberian fritillary and orchids such as woodcock, sawfly and naked man. As well as birds seen in previous days, we should find Dartford warbler, Thekla lark and choughs.

Northern Alentejo

After three days near Santarém, two hours' driving takes us east to near Marvão. This fortress village remains intact from the Islamic occupation in the Middle Ages and has applied

to be a World Heritage site. Marvão offers stunning views from the massive quartzite outcrop on which it is set.

In this part of the Alentejo countryside, granite outcrops and the drier climate favour mixed forest cover with holm oak (rather than cork oak) and Pyrenean oak. Around and over the Mediterranean scrub and rocky outcrops special birds can include griffon & black vultures, alpine swift, crag martin, black-eared wheatear, Orphean and subalpine warblers and rock bunting.

In steppe grassland, groups of great bustards display among a carpet of wild flowers. A range of raptors includes Montagu's harriers and lesser kestrels. Other steppe birds include little bustard, stone-curlew, roller and great spotted cuckoo.

Birds

As well as those already mentioned, other likely birds may include black stork, red-crested pochard, golden oriole, spotless starling, blue rock thrush, short-toed lark, red-rumped swallow, Spanish sparrow, Iberian chiffchaff and Bonelli's warbler.

Flowers

Other local specialties include Iberian fritillary, one-leaved squill and Spanish bluebell. Iberian orchids include *Ophrys dyris*, conical orchid and *Orchis albiensis*, plus many species found farther afield including narrow-leaved helleborine, small-flowered serapias and champagne orchid.

Other wildlife

Spanish festoon is, perhaps, the most sought after early butterfly; others should include Cleopatra and swallowtail. Large psammomys and Iberian wall lizard are the likeliest lizards; Iberian ribbed salamander and various snakes are possible.

Itinerary

Visits include natural parks in the hills of Aires and Candeeiros in the west and São Mamede in the east. Important Bird Areas include the Tejo Estuary, the plains and grasslands of Elvas and Caia Dam IBA. Much of the interest is in the farmland, scrub, cork and holm oak wood pastures in both the east and west parts of the holiday.

Conservation project

The Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves (SPEA, BirdLife in Portugal) has a network of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) with volunteers monitoring these and acting as 'caretakers'. The Albufeira do Caia IBA has a large population of waterbirds, including collared pratincoles (100 pairs), little terns (50 pairs, the only inland colony in Portugal), gull-billed terns (an astonishing 500 pairs), red-crested pochards and other duck and egret species. SPEA is helping to manage the IBA by clearing and creating islands for terns and grebes, and runs a ringing station.



8 – 15 May 2014

Dordogne

A taste of the good life

The department of the Dordogne in south-west France is justly famous for its pretty villages, cave paintings, elegant towns and landscapes of river valleys and quiet countryside. Less discovered is the wildlife: a charming mix of flowers, birds and butterflies.

Orchids are the most striking natural asset: up to 25 species can be found. Half of these are around our base at Castang. Birds on the doorstep include cirl bunting, melodious warbler, wryneck, honey buzzard, firecrest and black redstart.

Castang

Castang is a hamlet close to the Dordogne river above the village of Le Coux et Bigaroque, not far from St Cyprien. Cathy and Keith Parker are our hosts; Cathy is from Montcaret, a little farther west along the Dordogne valley, and Keith is from England. The house was once a Perigordian tobacco farm of great character and charm, parts of which are thought to be more than 400 years old. The farmhouse, together with its complex of converted barns, provides comfortable accommodation around a sunny terraced courtyard. Dinner, after a leisurely aperitif, is one of Castang's great features. Five courses of the best of the region's cuisine, from soup to dessert, accompanied by local wines, are prepared and cooked by Cathy.

Castang's large meadow has many hundreds of green-winged orchids along with tongue and pyramidal orchids. Loose-flowered orchids grow where the meadow gets damper down the hill, close to where golden orioles and nightingales can be heard and, with a little luck, seen. Beyond the orchid field, the area is a mix of meadows, cropped land and woods, cut by the wide river valleys of the Vézère and Dordogne.

Flowers

Lady, man, burnt-tip, fly, woodcock, narrow-leaved helleborine and greater butterfly are among the orchids, and two great surprises this far north are sombre bee orchid and long-lipped serapias. Meadows thick with yellow rattle, banks with meadow clary, tassel hyacinth, milkwort and a range of cranesbills, flaxes and rockroses are just a few of some 250 plant species. Shrubs include dogwood, fly honeysuckle and Montpellier maple.

Birds

Serins, Bonelli's warblers, short-toed treecreepers and hoopoes are all found around Castang or close to home. Black kites and buzzards are the most frequently seen birds of prey; hobbies and peregrines are also likely.

Other wildlife

Butterflies on the wing in mid-May include scarce and common swallowtails, black-veined and wood whites, Cleopatra, Glanville fritillary,

green hairstreak, large copper and small blue. Elegant yellow and black ascalaphids – something between a lacewing and an ant-lion – hunt over meadows. Other invertebrates include violet carpenter bee and hummingbird hawkmoth. After dark, a short walk away, midwife toads are carrying their eggs.



View near Castang



Midwife toad

Itinerary

Two days will be on walks around Castang. Three days will be gentle walks a little farther afield, combined with visits to the village of Limeuil, at the confluence of the Vézère and Dordogne rivers, and a morning on market day in the town of Le Bugue. Our cave walk includes an optional visit to the crystal cathedral cavern of the Gouffre de Proumeyssac.

The Dordogne is justly famous for its pre-history, paintings and etchings especially, notably at Les Eyzies. We will arrange a suitable visit one morning, though exact plans are not certain, as our favourite site of Font De Gaume is restricting access. At Roque St Christophe there is an opportunity to see how troglodytes once lived, and it's an excellent site for meadow and woodland flowers and butterflies, plus peregrines and crag martins.

Conservation project

La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (French Bird Protection League) has set up a network of no-hunting sanctuaries throughout France. LPO is also battling French hunters to prevent an extension of the shooting season into the spring.

SUPPORTING



Price: £1,450 per person in a twin room for a full week (Thursday to Thursday)

Single room supplement: £150

En suite facilities

Scheduled Ryanair flights Stansted or Flybe Exeter to Bergerac. Flights from other UK airports may also be possible

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 12

Leader: Chris Durdin



Knapweed fritillary on pyramidal orchid



Woodcock orchid

More information visit www.honeyguide.co.uk 11

Price: £1,490 per person in twin room for a full week (Wednesday to Wednesday)

Single room supplement: £200

En suite facilities.

Scheduled Ryanair flights, London Stansted to Riga

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 10

Leaders: Karlis Millers and Rob Macklin

21 – 28 May 2014

Latvia

Migration on the Baltic coast

Tucked away on the Baltic coast is, for British naturalists, the largely undiscovered country of Latvia. It offers an attractive mixture: partly Scandinavian in feel, partly eastern and partly continental, with the wildlife reflecting this mix.

Latvia, the middle of the three Baltic countries, is bigger than a glance at the map might suggest. This two-centre holiday concentrates on an area west of the capital city of Riga. It takes in two national parks, leading to Latvia's north-west tip at Kolka Cape.

Our visit in May is to coincide both with the arrival of summer visitors and for migration along the coast, especially of birds of prey and passerines. It is also well-timed for woodland flowers.

Kemer National Park

Though the majority of the Kemer National Park is forest, wetlands are probably the main draw for naturalists. On the extensive Dunduri meadows, grazed by Konik ponies and Heck cattle, there are likely to be whooper swans, cranes and white storks; black storks are present, but scarcer. Birds of prey should include lesser spotted eagles, and there is every chance of a hunting white-tailed eagle. Damp scrub can have river warbler, marsh warbler and scarlet rosefinch.

An area of flooded woodland is particularly attractive to woodpeckers, including white-backed, lesser spotted and three-toed.

From the nature trail and birdwatching tower at Lake Kanieris, reedbeds stretch as far as the eye can see, providing a home for Savi's and great reed warblers. There's a huge cormorant colony in distant trees. Red-necked and black-necked grebes may be on open water areas, often with black and white-winged black terns. There are marsh harriers, as you'd expect, probably with an osprey or white-tailed eagle.



feel with forest of pine, spruce and birch, interspersed with bogs that hold cranes and breeding green sandpipers. One woodland spot has greenish warblers, one of Europe's trickiest leaf warblers to locate. There are capercaillie and black grouse, too, but you need luck to see these.

Much of Kolka Cape is more open, with meadows and scattered houses. Nearby, Scots pine trees, felled by a gale, still litter the beach, and have been left as they protect the coast. It's this area, jutting out where the Baltic meets the Gulf of Riga, that is most known for visible migration. Predicting this is risky, but on two days on Honeyguide's recce visit there were more than 100 honey buzzards (*above*), red-backed shrikes, many sparrowhawks, hawfinches, short-eared owls, scores of yellow wagtails, golden orioles and more. Out at sea, long-tailed ducks gather, perhaps with a summer plumage black-throated diver.

Birds

Those noted above plus great white egret, black woodpecker, wryneck, black redstart, whinchat, redwing, icterine warbler, wood warbler, pied flycatcher, siskin, plus various migrant warblers, waders and wildfowl.

Other wildlife

Elk is possible, but tricky; red squirrel is more likely. Raccoon dogs are an established alien species. There'll be a modest range of spring and migrant butterflies, and the prospect of large numbers of migrating dragonflies.



Red-backed shrike



Wild Pansy *Viola tricolor*



Kolka roadside bog



Riga

Flowers

Lady's smock and marsh marigold are common in damp areas, and other wetland flowers include bogbean, in fen pools, and birdseye primrose. Bird cherry is abundant. Woodland has lily-of-the-valley, hepatica, wood sorrel and wood anemone, plus the unusual chickweed wintergreen, a member of the primrose family found mainly in northern pine forests.

Itinerary

Three nights in the Kemer National Park area, and four nights at Kolka. As well as wildlife watching, we plan a visit to the Ventspils International Radio Astronomy Centre and to allow time to see the beautiful city of Riga on the final day, if flight times make it practical.

Conservation project

The Latvian Owl Research Society is a new NGO, established in 2013. Its research, education and protection work includes creating nest boxes and tracking pygmy owls in Kemer National Park.

Kolka Cape

At Latvia's north-western tip, the Slītere National Park surrounds the village and cape of Kolka. Much of the National Park has a northern

30 May – 8 June 2014

The Cévennes

Causses and Gorges in a little-known corner of France



The southernmost outpost of the Massif Central, before it plunges down into the Mediterranean heat of the Languedoc plain, is the vast limestone plateau of the Grands Causses. Monstrous movements of the earth's surface cracked this slab into sections, and water poured into the cracks, forming deep, dramatic gorges.

The largest of these carries the Tarn, one of France's most famous and spectacular rivers. Smaller rivers, the Jonte and the Dourbie, flow into the Tarn and the ancient town of Millau, near their confluence, is now famous for its magnificent bridge, the Millau Viaduct. Enchanting villages of honey-coloured stone are scattered in strategic positions on hillsides and beside rivers, each with its Romanesque church; the Knights Templar had strongholds in the area.

To the east of the Grands Causses, limestone gives way to schist and granite hills, culminating in the peaks of Mont Aigoual (1567 m) and Mont Lozère (1702 m). This is the true Cévennes, made famous some 130 years ago when the youthful Robert Louis Stevenson narrated his 'Travels with a Donkey'. The whole area is now recognised for its landscape and natural history as the Parc Regional Naturel des Grands Causses and the Parc National des Cévennes.

Ancient landscapes are entwined with cultural history. On the steppe-like plateaux of the Grands Causses, the characteristic small brown sheep, the brebis, have been fundamental to agriculture for many centuries. The sheep are milked for what many consider to be the finest cheese in the world – Roquefort. The cuisine is rich and inventive. The sweet, flavourful meat of the brebis and Roquefort cheese often play a part: you can have Roquefort in every course! Aligot, a dish of soft cheese and potato, devised by shepherds to prepare far from home, is not to be missed.

For many years, a railway transported people and produce across the Causse. The line itself is long defunct but several railway buildings remain along the old track. Above Nant, up on the Causse du Larzac, the *Gare aux Ânes*, the 'donkey station', renowned for many years as a restaurant, is a perfect base for Honeyguide.

Birds

If there is an iconic bird of the region, it is the griffon vulture, thanks to a highly successful reintroduction programme. Craggy cliffs of the gorges also provide nesting sites for choughs and golden eagles. The open, rocky causse landscape offers productive feeding for short-toed eagles, harriers, shrikes and wheatears. Woodlands and scrub echo to the song of nightingales, joined at nightfall by churring nightjars. Around villages, the song of serins and black redstarts may be heard, and the air is alive with swifts and crag martins.

Flowers

Nothing can outdo limestone for the richness of its flora. Grassland is white and yellow with rockroses and fragrant underfoot with wild

thymes. Roadside screes are pink and blue with rock soapwort, fairy foxglove, flax and aphyllanthes. On granites and schists we find saxifrages and cinquefoils; in the rich meadows, wild tulips and narcissi.

There are orchids too, a wide range of species, some in great profusion: carpets of lesser butterfly orchids among feather grass, banks of early purple and elder-flowered orchids on



Cantobre village

damp streambanks. Lady, monkey, man and military orchids are abundant (and hybridising!). There are two endemic *Ophrys* species.

Other wildlife

European beavers have been successfully reintroduced into the river Dourbie, close to our base. A herd of the rare Przewalski's horses has been established on the Causse Méjean, in a habitat akin to their native steppes. Reptiles are abundant: green and wall lizards and harmless viperine and grass snakes. We may hear the bell-like call of midwife toads at night. The open scrub and grassland of the causse is rich in butterflies and other insects.

Itinerary

We have limestone and granite to explore, three rivers with their magnificent gorges and several causses, each with its own individuality. There are flower-rich grasslands, pine, oak and sweet chestnut woods, rocky cliffs and scree and tumbling rivers. We shall drive to the top of Mont Aigoual, visit the Templar village of la Couvertorade, the Roquefort Caves and the famous Aven Armand – a beautiful cavern big enough to accommodate Notre Dame Cathedral. A good look at the Millau Viaduct is a must and lunch one day at the best local *ferme auberge* is on the schedule.

Conservation Project

Conservation contributions from this holiday support work to protect the vultures and other wildlife of the Grands Causses. La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, the French Bird Protection League) runs a programme of habitat management in partnership with landowners, combined with research, survey and education.

SUPPORTING



Price: £1,590 per person in twin room for ten days (Friday to Sunday)

Single room supplement: £200 (two only)

En suite facilities

Scheduled Ryanair flights London Stansted to Rodez

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 14

Leaders: Robin and Rachel Hamilton



Black-veined white butterfly



Griffon vulture

Price: £1,490 per person in twin cabin for full week (Saturday to Saturday)

Single cabin supplement: £150

En suite facilities

Scheduled Wizz Air flights, London Luton to Bucharest.

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 14

Optional three-day extension to the Carpathian Mountains, 14 – 18 June, including brown bear watching: £500 per person, single supplement £60.

Leaders: Ibis team, with a local guide from Ibis in the Carpathians

7 – 14 June 2014

Danube Delta

A week in Europe's largest wetland

There is nowhere in Europe quite like the Danube Delta. Covering 2,200 square miles, the lion's share in Romania, the rest in the Ukraine, no naturalist's lifetime should be without the experience of visiting the delta.

Immense, important, breathtaking, threatened, beautiful; almost any superlative seems to fit some aspect of the Danube Delta.

For wetland birds, it is birdwatching made easy. Most famous are the pelicans, white and the

combined with a hotel in Tulcea. The food is very good. From Tulcea, the pontoon is towed into the delta's core.

Some of the best areas for birds are in Dobrogea – the area round the edge of the delta. Lagoons with wildfowl and migrant waders and are best visited from here. Dry country birds include calandra and short-toed larks; raptors include long-legged buzzard. Scrub areas hold barred warbler and ortolan bunting; the villages have white storks and Syrian woodpeckers.

Our local guides know the area and its wildlife well. But equally important is their hospitality. As the Romanian Ministry of Tourism brochure rightly says, 'Come as a tourist, leave as a friend'.

Birds

Those above plus purple, squacco and night herons, great white and little egrets, spoonbill, pygmy cormorant, Syrian woodpecker, red-crested pochard, red-backed and lesser grey shrikes, penduline and sombre tits, icterine warbler and, with luck and perseverance, paddyfield warbler.



White pelicans



Brown bear, a highlight of the Carpathians



Spoonbills

globally threatened Dalmatian. Enjoy them as your boat drifts close to a flock on a lake; another day a flight of them catches you by surprise as they glide easily overhead.

The delta is as varied as it is spectacular. One hour you may be along riverine forest, with glossy ibises, egrets and sparkling blue kingfishers either side of you. Moving into an open area there may be lily-nesting whiskered terns alongside family parties of ferruginous ducks and red-necked grebes with youngsters clambering onto their backs. Then there are little bitterns disappearing into high reeds to the deep-throated sounds of great reed warblers or the distant buzz of a Savi's warbler.

The visit is timed for a combination of good weather and wetland birds at their most abundant and obvious. As well as true wetland birds, the land and wooded areas within the wetlands are rich with rollers, bee-eaters, golden orioles and woodpeckers, the last including black and grey-headed. Dragonflies bring hobbies and red-footed falcons in pursuit, and occasionally the vast form of a white-tailed eagle drifts through.

Much of this needs to be done by boat, or rather boats. This holiday is run in collaboration with Ibis Tours who are based in Tulcea, gateway to the delta. A delightful 'pontoon' – floating hotel – is our holiday base, usually



Whiskered tern

Other wildlife

This is, primarily, a birdwatching holiday, but the flowers in Dobrogea are a fascinating mix of eastern and northern European and Mediterranean species. Trees include Caucasian and manna ashes, Cornelian cherry, oriental hornbeam and silver lime. Terrapins, frogs and butterflies add interest, and muskrat is a possibility in the delta.

Itinerary

We'll spend three days in Dobrogea exploring a mix of wet and dry land. The other three days will be in the heart of the delta, much of it by boat but with walks onto dry land.

Conservation project

The Romanian Ornithological Society is a small but active bird conservation society. Our contribution goes towards a group of young naturalists called Falco cherrug (the saker), which is run by Eugen Petrescu, who is both one of the Ibis team – quite often a leader for Honeyguide groups – and the SOR representative in the delta.



18 – 26 June 2014

Bulgaria's Western Rhodopes

Wallcreepers, lilies and more

Few countries can rival Bulgaria's scenic splendour and diverse nature. The country's most valuable natural features are protected in three national parks, twelve nature parks and numerous wildlife and nature refuges

The higher plants number about 3,500 species, including more than 400 Bulgarian and Balkan endemics and nearly 70 species of orchids. Bulgaria boasts the richest dragonfly and butterfly fauna in Europe.

This holiday concentrates on the mountains, meadows and gorges of the Western Rhodopes. The Rhodope Mountains are in southern Bulgaria, close to the border with Greece.

The mountains' pine-clad slopes are occasionally cut by rivers winding through deep gorges, one of which is the magnificent Trigrad Gorge. Its limestone cliffs are known for their wallcreepers. It's probably one of the easiest places in Europe to see this sometimes elusive bird, constantly flicking its crimson-and-black wings while investigating rocky nooks for food.

In Trigrad Gorge we can enjoy birds like peregrine, alpine swift, crag martin, red-rumped swallow and dipper. Elsewhere in the forests, crags and mountain meadows of the Western Rhodopes we hope to find black woodpecker, alpine and pallid swifts, nutcracker, sombre tit, red-backed shrike and rock bunting.

The cultural heritage and traditions of Bulgaria include magnificent architecture from the 18th and 19th centuries in many towns and villages. Ancient icons, breath-taking murals and superb woodcarvings preserved in monasteries and churches, form just a part of the religious, historic and cultural wealth. Other traditions include the tasty Bulgarian cuisine, salads especially, good local wines and, in our experience, a warm welcome in the mountain village of Yagodina.

We are based for a week at the family-run Hotel Yagodina, well located for walks around the village of the same name. There will be one night in the conservation village of Koprivshtitsa before the return flight.

Flowers

Low intensity agriculture means that the Western Rhodopes have retained vast swathes of beautiful grasslands, with a dazzling array of wild flowers, a mixture of familiar species and local specialities.

In the gorges especially, there are several endemic species, one of the best known being *Haberlea rhodopensis*, which is related to African violets. Others endemics include *Valeriana montana*, Rhodope sandwort *Arenaria rhodoea*, a bellflower *Campanula orphanidea* and the saxifrage *Saxifraga sibirnyi*. There are four geum species, two

foxgloves, three wintergreens, an unusual bugle *Ajuga lazmanii*, St Bernard's lily and many orchids – just a few names from so many in a rich and varied area for a botanist.

Perhaps the star species is the Rhodope lily, found only here and in nearby Greece. It's in flower-rich high mountain meadows, along



with corncrakes and swarms of marsh fritillaries and other butterflies.

Butterflies

The bewildering variety – 72 species on our previous visit – includes many local or unusual species: Balkan zephyr blue, Balkan copper, powdered brimstone and poplar admiral. These mingle with butterflies found more widely in mainland Europe, such as spotted, Queen-of-Spain and Glanville fritillaries, Apollo, chestnut heath, Idas blue and more.



Pennant-winged ant-lion *Nemoptera sinuata*

Other wildlife

Red squirrel, pine marten and wild cat are found in the mountains, plus souslik in the lowlands. Agile frog and fire salamander occur. Among a big range of dragonflies, moths and other invertebrates, one of the most spectacular is the pennant-winged ant-lion.

Conservation project

The Rhodope lily *Lilium rhodopaeum* is a very scarce flower of the Western Rhodopes. It's found on just a handful of sites in Bulgaria and just over the border in Greece, about half of which have no official protection. Our local leader, Vlado, is the Bulgarian authority on this spectacular endemic, and with our help leads on its monitoring and conservation.

SUPPORTING



Price: £1,490 per person in twin room for nine days (Wednesday to Thursday)

Single room supplement: £100

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flights, London Gatwick to Sofia

Deposit: £300

Maximum number: 14

Leaders: Vladimir Trifonov and Chris Gibson

Trigrad gorge



Wallcreeper



Lilium rhodopaeum

More information visit www.honeyguide.co.uk 15

Price: £1,450 per person in twin room for a full week (Tuesday to Tuesday)

Single room supplement: £160

En suite facilities.

Scheduled Ryanair flights Stansted to Lourdes

Deposit: £300

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Chris Durdin and Ivan Nethercoat

9 – 16 September 2014

French Pyrenees

Stunning scenery and mountain wildlife



For a combination of mountain views, flowers, butterflies and birds, the Pyrenees take some beating. Spectacular cirques, flower-filled meadows and soaring vultures; it lends itself to our mixed natural history style.

Many Honeyguiders know the Spanish Pyrenees: the French side is lusher, greener and the emphasis of this holiday is much more on the high Pyrenees. Access is easy to gentle walks or pottering in mountain pastures, up there with the isard – Pyrenean chamois – and marmots.

That most thrilling of birds, the lammergeier, is as easy to see here as anywhere; other birds of prey include griffon vultures, golden eagles and red kites. There are wallcreepers, though typically they are elusive. Red-billed and alpine choughs feed in the high meadows.

September also brings a flow of migrants. Countless numbers of birds are moving south and many rest and feed in Pyrenean valleys before crossing the high peaks. Weather conditions and luck will play their part in what we see: warblers, flycatchers and hirundines are the likeliest.



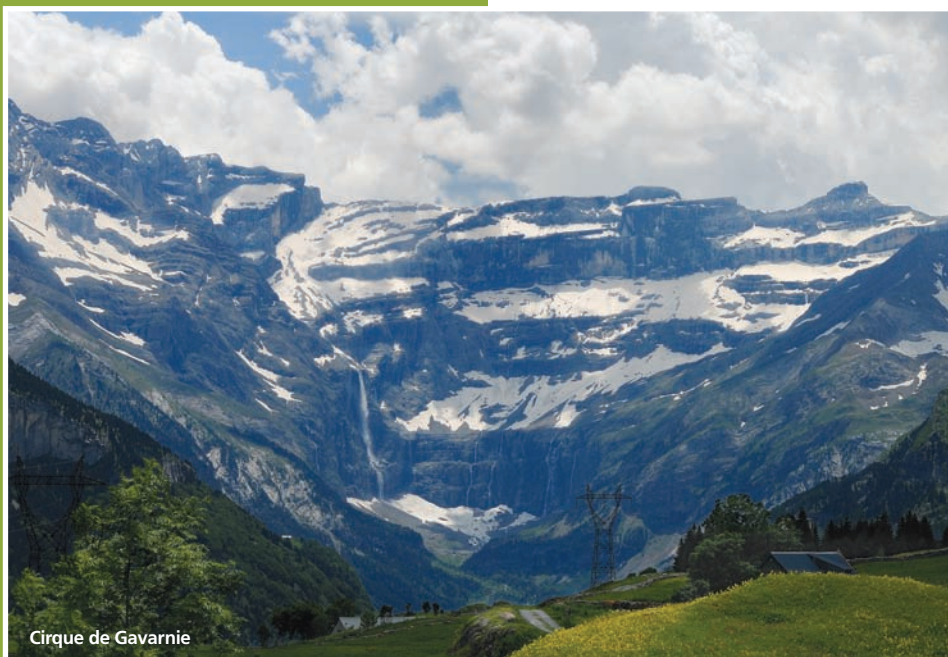
Camberwell beauty



Lammergeier



Marmot



Cirque de Gavarnie

Butterflies include Camberwell beauty, Queen-of-Spain fritillary and swallowtail, plus a selection of graylings, ringlets, blues, fritillaries and others.

Autumn flowering specialities include merendera, which can be common, and autumn crocus. High mountain pastures still have colour with later flowers such as Pyrenean thistle and purple and yellow monkshoods. We'll search screes and short turf for alpine toadflax and gentians. Damp patches have grass-of-Parnassus and yellow mountain saxifrage.

It's a good time of year to look for two specialised 'heptiles' of the area. Watercourses can hold Pyrenean brook newts and Pyrenean rock lizards scuttle around on rocks in the higher pastures.

Our base is the Hotel La Brèche de Roland, of Gèdre, just north of Gavarnie. It's an attractive former 17th century family house in the village, looking out onto Brèche de Roland. The 'brèche' or breach is like a bite out of the top of the cirque, measuring 100m by 60m. Roland, nephew of Charlemagne, carved it, according to 11th century legend. He was leading the fight against the Moors and was trying to smash his magical sword Durandel to save it from enemy hands.

Birds

Highlights, in addition to those mentioned above, could include short-toed eagle, peregrine, black woodpecker, crag martin, water pipit, black-bellied dipper, crested tit and crossbill.

Itinerary

The cirque of Gavarnie is rightly famous; it can be busy but that takes little away from its magnificence and wildlife interest. Other sites to be visited include the Barrage des Gloriettes, Saugué valley, Ossoue valley, Col de Tentes, Col du Tourmalet and Cirque de Troumouse.

Conservation project

The lammergeier, or bearded vulture, is Europe's scarcest bird of prey. Though never common, their decline prompted a partnership to tackle their protection and, as a result, numbers are now on the up. La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, the French Bird Protection League) is active here, with careful monitoring of the local population of the *casseur d'os* (bonebreaker), including tracking birds with radio transmitters; site protection in collaboration with other mountain users, such as climbers; and food provision in the breeding season.

SUPPORTING





Gavarnie, with lammergier



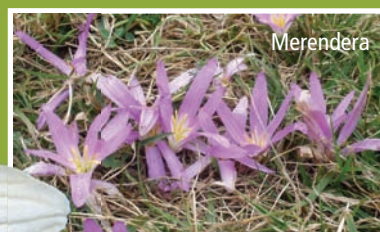
Cardabelle



Monkshood



Grass-of-Parnassus



Merendera



Yellow monkshood



Isard



Pyrenean brook newt

More information visit www.honeyguide.co.uk

Our holidays

- are all round natural history holidays, tailored to get the best out of the wildlife of each area
- go at a relaxed pace
- usually stay at one place
- include good, local food
- use the best of leaders, with extensive conservation knowledge, natural history skills, good experience of the local area and the right personal skills
- are designed to benefit you, wildlife and the local people whose services we use
- include a £40 contribution from each participant to wildlife conservation



Holidays for natural history societies, RSPB local groups or other groups can be arranged.

Visit: www.honeyguide.co.uk for holiday reports, photos and more.

Honeyguide booking form



Please use BLOCK CAPITALS and make cheques payable to Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays.

Please reserve _____ place(s) on your holiday to _____

I enclose / have sent by bank transfer _____ deposit(s) at £300 (£500 for South Africa) totalling: £ _____

Single room supplement(s): please book _____ single room(s) at _____ extra each

I understand that the balance will become payable eight weeks (12 weeks for South Africa) before departure.

Holiday insurance company and policy number (details can be sent later, if you prefer): _____

Passport number(s), issue dates and expiry dates: _____

Title	Forenames*	Surnames	Date of birth
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

*As written on your passport. Please note or underline what you like to be known as, if different from the first name

Address: _____

_____ Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Mobile _____ E-mail _____

Next of kin/home contact point in case of emergency (name & tel. no.) _____

Any special requirements (eg dietary) _____

Non-smoker ☐

Smoker ☐

_____ Signed _____

_____ Date _____

For couples, do you prefer twin beds ☐ a double bed ☐ or don't mind ☐

The price of all Honeyguide holidays includes £40 earmarked for a local conservation project. We would be very grateful if everyone booking could complete the following conservation contribution consent and gift aid declaration.

Please complete sections 1 and 2

1. CONSENT FOR CONSERVATION CONTRIBUTION

We agree that Honeyguide Wildlife Trust Ltd (registered charity no. 1104606) may apply £40 from the cost of this holiday on behalf of each person named on the booking form, to be donated to a wildlife conservation project in the country to be visited.

PLEASE TICK BOX ☐

Complete (a) or (b)

(a) Please print the name of each person on the booking form who qualifies to gift aid their contribution.

.....

.....

.....

Date

(b) If **nobody** on the booking form qualifies to gift aid their contribution, please tick this box. ☐

2. GIFT AID DECLARATION

If you pay UK income tax or capital gains tax, Honeyguide Wildlife Trust Ltd can reclaim from HM Revenue & Customs an extra 25p on every £1 donated, helping your conservation contribution go further. To qualify you must pay at least as much UK tax for the year in which you donate as the amount we are able to reclaim on your donation – currently £10 on each £40 contribution.

If you are a UK taxpayer, please give us the opportunity of increasing your donation in this way.

giftaid it

Thank you

Please return to: Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays, 36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich NR7 0PX

Honeyguide booking details



How to book: a booking is made when the completed booking form (a photocopy or emailed scan is fine) plus deposit have been received and accepted by us. We are very happy to take telephone or email bookings, to be confirmed with the form plus deposit during the week following your call / email.

Deposit and payment: £300 per person (£500 for South Africa) deposit is payable by cheque or bank transfer with the booking, with the remainder due eight weeks before departure (12 weeks for South Africa). Payments by credit, debit or charge cards cannot be taken.

Cancellation by you: if you have to cancel, please telephone as soon as possible and confirm in writing. The cancellation will take effect from when it is received in writing. The scale of cancellation charges below is calculated by the time period before departure.

More than eight weeks	deposit only
5-8 weeks	30% of total price
2-5 weeks	60% of total price
1-14 days; on or after departure date	100% of total price

Travel insurance should cover you (less any excess) for cancellation charges if circumstances are beyond your control, such as ill health, and more than simply a change of mind.

Cancellation by us: in the unlikely event of this happening your money will be refunded in full. A decision to cancel would normally be made at the time of reminders for the remainder of payment, i.e. eight weeks before departure.

Single rooms and supplements: we don't like single room supplements but sometimes they can't be avoided, and we pass on the extra that the single room costs us. If you are willing to share but we don't find someone to share with you, you pay only half of any single supplement. Because we have often chosen small, community-based accommodation, single rooms may not always be available. It often helps to talk it through with us at an early stage.



Honeyguide enamel badges
free from the Honeyguide office.

Information: including detailed itinerary, information on books, maps, shopping, weather etc will be supplied as part of the package for enquirers or will be sent after booking. Previous holiday reports are available for most holidays.

Flights: flights noted in the holiday details were the likeliest when the brochure went to print. However many summer schedules were not then out. Which airlines fly to where, and on what days, are increasingly prone to change; this may affect the flights and occasionally the dates for some holidays. Flights from other UK airports are sometimes possible: please contact the Honeyguide office. Boarding passes or booking references will be sent 1-2 weeks before departure.

We use scheduled services and cannot be held responsible for any departure delays. We are not in a position to state the aircraft type to be used.

Changes to the programme: should circumstances beyond our control make significant changes to the programme necessary we will consult you to see if these are acceptable to you.

Holiday leaders: we do our best to keep the leader named for the holiday, but we reserve the right to replace him or her in the event of illness or some other reason. When two leaders are listed, one may not accompany the holiday if there are not enough participants.

Group size: very occasionally if there is one place available on a holiday and a couple wishes to book we may go over the group size stated. The minimum is usually four.

Overnight accommodation and parking near the airport: we often cannot avoid flights that mean an overnight stay for many participants. We may be able to advise on a hotel and/or parking. If staying overnight, please consider if you wish to have an extra day on your travel insurance.

Extending your holiday: for some holidays it is possible to arrive early or stay on. Please contact the Honeyguide office for details.

Passport: a valid full passport is essential.

Brochure: a spare brochure (more if you wish) will be sent with every booking.

Our price commitment: the prices of our holidays are fixed – there are no surcharges.

What the price includes: flights, airport taxes, carbon offsets, all travel and excursions, services of your holiday leader(s) and your conservation contribution are included in the holiday price. Also included are accommodation and meals – breakfast, packed lunch and evening meal, normally inclusive of wine.

What the price excludes: insurance and personal spending.

Smoking: most Honeyguiders are non-smokers. Anyone who smokes is expected to ensure this does not affect others in the group, including in the field. There is no smoking in transport, in our accommodation and at meals.

Tips and gratuities: all services in the itinerary are covered. You may wish to leave a 'thank-you' for room or restaurant staff at the end of your stay. We may organise a collection if service has been particularly good.

Carbon offsets

Realistically, most of our travellers will fly. Air travel makes up only a small fraction of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions at present, but that fraction is growing. We're serious about our responsibility to tackle global climate change so we have chosen Carbon Clear to offset our carbon emissions from holiday flights. Carbon Clear invests in projects that remove carbon dioxide from the air by replacing polluting technologies with clean ones, and planting native trees.

Honeyguide has been including carbon offsets in the price of our holidays since 2007 and was one of the first travel companies to do so. Some Honeyguiders travel to our holiday destinations by public transport, and their holiday price is reduced by the cost of flights plus carbon offsets. For more information see www.honeyguide.co.uk



TRAVEL INSURANCE

Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays acts as an Introducer Appointed Representative for the purposes of your travel insurance, appointed by Global Travel Insurance Services Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority and whose status can be checked on the FSA Register by visiting www.fsa.gov.uk/register or by contacting the FSA on 0845 606 1234.

Contact details:
Global Travel Insurance Services Ltd,
The Turret
25 Farncombe Road
Worthing
West Sussex
BN11 2AY
Telephone: 01903 235042
Fax: 01903 229389
Email: enquiries@globaltravelinsurance.co.uk
Web: www.globaltravelinsurance.co.uk

You can go to our website where you can obtain a quotation and arrange the insurance online, or download an application form. If preferred, we can send you an application form on booking enabling you to arrange this insurance.

Beyond providing this information, we are not allowed to assist you in any way in the arrangement of your travel insurance or give any advice.

Honeyguide wildlife holidays



Cover picture: rock bunting in the French Pyrenees by Kevin Simmonds

Back cover: butterflies and moths in the Dordogne: clockwise from top left: map butterfly, narrow-bordered bee hawkmoths, 5-spot burnet moth, Glanville fritillary, forester moth, all by Chris Durdin

Other photos by:

Geoff Crane
Helen Crowder
Sue Davy
Chris Durdin
Steve Fletcher
Dimitar Georgiev
Chris Gibson
Robin & Rachel Hamilton
Chris Knights
Carol Leigh (Firecrest Photography)
Karlis Millers
Ivan Nethercoat
Daniel Petrescu
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Roger Tidman



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