

# BIRDS AND FLOWERS IN THE LOT

25 May – 1 June 1991



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List of participants

Mr John Burrough	Holt, Norfolk
Mrs Jo Burrough	Holt
Mrs Betty Griffin	Dereham, Norfolk
Mrs Angela Smith	Abingdon, Oxon
Mrs Pauline Watts	Oxon
Mrs Rosemary Blyth	Norwich
Mrs Bridget Jemmett	Bracknell, Berks
Mrs Janet Capper	Berks
Mrs Avril Fletcher	Guernsey
Mr Martin Read	Bushey, Herts
Mr John Durdin	Norfolk

Leaders: Chris Durdin and David Brewster

Our hostess: Gilly Lewis, assisted by Barbara and Sheila

Our home for the week: Maison Meulet, Galoubet, Beaumat, 46240, Labastide-Murat, Lot, France, owned by Lynn and Doreen Todd.

*Illustrations by Rob Hume*

#### Saturday 25 May - Toulouse to Galoubet

After a slight delay at Gatwick we flew smoothly to Toulouse. There we were met by our coach driver, Guy, and his English speaking friend, Guille. A couple of junctions up the *peage* and into the rolling countryside; soon we were seeing our first black kites and buzzards quartering the fields and engaging in energetic debates on the identification of flowers passing the coach at 60mph.

In the glorious early evening sunshine we paused by a roadside *auberge* for a drink under a superb *Paulownia* or foxglove tree. In the rough lawn beside us grew horseshoe vetch, tassel hyacinths and pyramidal orchids.

With lively conversation the short trip to Galoubet passed quickly. There we were met by our hostess, Gilly Lewis, Barbara and Sheila. We unloaded, took in the beauty and warmth of our home for the week and were shown to our rooms. This was the first trip to Galoubet, not just this year but ever, but the conversions and decorations were, we agreed, a delight. All rooms had a bunch of the abundant wild flowers: crosswort, cow parsley, quaking grass and many others.

A super meal in the large farmhouse kitchen followed, complete with generous supplies of the palatable local *vin de table*. As dusk gathered the nightingales sang louder and a nightjar churred in the middle distance. Venus then Saturn appeared in the night sky.

#### Sunday 26 May - Around Galoubet

Those who strolled a handful of yards before breakfast became aware that not only was the weather and the timing of our visit perfect but that we were surrounded by the most incredible wild flower meadows. The talk over breakfast was of orchids and nightingales as we tucked into our croissants, bread and jam.

The morning walk was planned to be short, but the question was how far we'd make beyond the back door there was so much to see. For a start, outside the old privy there were large spikes of lady orchid and military orchid. Then down the hill, hedgerows of hawthorn, spindle and field maple were fringed by purple meadow clary. The butterfly list was already starting, encouraged by Martin, his net and his butterfly box; brilliant blue adonis blues, pale clouded yellows.

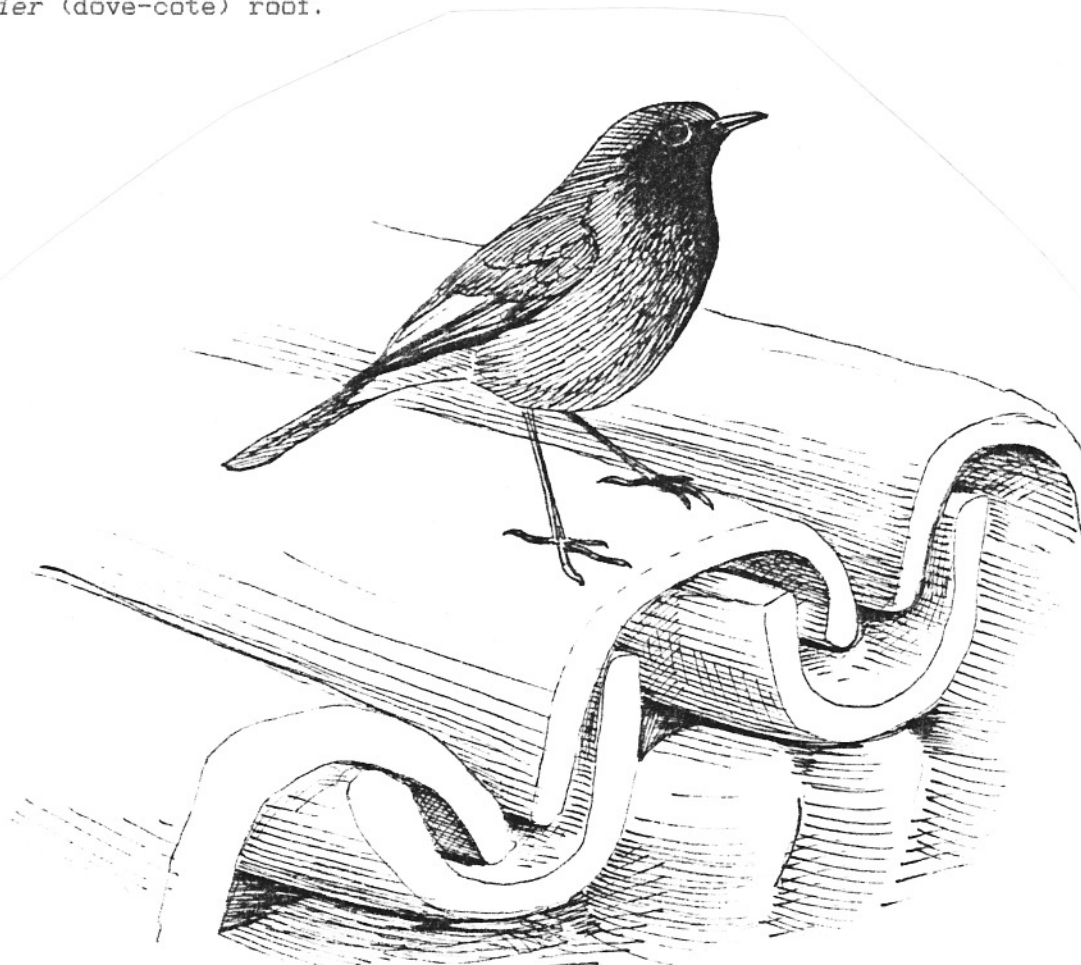
A patch of pink beyond a harvested hay field took us to a bank solid with pyramidal orchids. Some searched the woods and found narrow-leaved helleborines; others watched four honey buzzards and a black kite circling low. The 'triangle' walk planned proved to be grazed and barred by sheep netting, but was bypassed with ease, except for your co-leader David - well someone needed to check that the electric fence was working. A woodlark sang overhead. This lovely lark, so scarce in Britain, was common round Galoubet. Your leader's description of its song flight - 'short tail and flight like a bat' - was seized, repeated and remembered!

Lunch was *al fresco* by the spreading chestnut tree and some of what were to be many dips were taken in the solar-heated swimming pool as red kites flew overhead.

We popped into the barn to see a brood of black redstarts in an old swallow's nest. The afternoon walk took us left past the post box to the welcome shade of a more wooded roadside walk. Here one of the great puzzles of the trip started. An abundant spike of well-veined, opposite, stalkless, gentian-like green leaves a foot or two tall by the roadside led to scratched heads and much fruitless searching through field guides. Further on it became apparent that this was the regrowth of a common woody shrub, found elsewhere with usually smaller leaves and sometimes an indistinctive tiny unpetalled flower in short spikes from the leaf junctions. This plant defeated us through out the trip. Further investigation shows it to have been *coriaria* (*Coriaria myrtifolia*).

A right turn took us onto a grassy track where we paused to practise rusty French with a family out for a Sunday afternoon walk. This route took us down the 'runner's track', a name coined as it came out by a tumbledown house described by one optimistic early visitor to Galoubet as a "nice little runner". No chance!

Supper was outside in the warm evening air accompanied by the rich warble of a blackcap and the twittering song of our local black redstart on the *pigeonnier* (dove-cote) roof.



#### Monday 27 May - Labastide-Murat

A pre-breakfast birdwatching stroll (7.30-8.30) started quietly apart from the barking of the dog down the road. A golden oriole started its evocative, flutey call and before long two flew out of the trees and overhead. Neither were black and golden, rather yellowy greenish, presumably a female and a first year male. Turning the corner back to Galoubet, a trilling Bonelli's warbler emerged from the sessile oak and hovered beside and fed in and out of an exposed branch.

Gilly and Barbara ferried us to Labastide-Murat. Market day here falls on alternate Mondays and we had the right week. The livestock market was already beginning to close but the charming town centre was full of food and clothes stalls. We gathered for a coffee with our *methode Champenoise* (95p acceptable fizz; £3.80, excellent stuff), cheeses and new straw hats before loading our shopping into Gilly's car beside the basket of asparagus.

The plan was to walk the five miles back to Galoubet. Labastide had black redstarts, serins and white wagtails. We left the town round the back of the chateau built by Napoleon's brother-in-law, past Guy the coach driver's house and across the main road onto one of many grassy tracks that criss-cross this area. It was hot and still as we stopped for a late picnic lunch in the shade.

An ortolan bunting sang from a wire; swallowtails and black-veined whites drifted past. We continued along charming, flower-filled, traffic-free trackways. The flower list grew longer; bastard balm, monkey orchid and the last lingering blooms of poet's narcissus. Hedgerows of dogwood and honeysuckle; but looking closely at the latter there was perfoliate and fly honeysuckles as well as the common *Lonicera periclymenum*. Banks were covered in cowslip seed heads; certain fields were full of the large fleshy green leaves that turn to the glorious pink sheets of meadow saffron in mid-September. Then up the rocky track past the Charolais cattle, down the runner's track and back for a welcome dip.

The anecdotes and laughter over the outdoor supper carried on until late. Then followed a stroll searching for glow-worms, found eventually on a dry bank not far from the post box; a good excuse to try the local bubbly.

#### Tuesday 28 May - St Cirq Lapopie

The early walk found the blackest black redstart to date and a singing woodlark up by the Mayor's house.

The drive to St Cirq Lapopie took a little over an hour, this morning in two minibuses driven by Guille and Guy's wife - also the local hairdresser. The route took us through the rugged and impressive Lot valley past emerging crops of asparagus and tobacco.

The morning, another hot one, was spent gently pottering up and down the narrow streets of the picturesque hill top village of St Cirq. It appears to have changed little since the English and French battled for its possession in the Hundred Years War, save for the careful conversion of properties to craft shops. We photographed, botanised, shopped, visited the church, watched serins and black redstarts before gathering for a drink on the shady terrace of the Bar Lapopie. Lunch was taken in the shade of the town's square.

Guy and his coach replaced the minibuses and we continued east up the Lot valley past houses built into the rock and more clifftop villages. We stopped at Larnagol for an hour or so and went over the bridge towards the riverside poplars. Here orioles were heard but not seen; black kites and buzzards the other way round. An interesting flower discovery here was large Venus's looking glass.

Not far from here was our afternoon visit to the Grottes Pech Merle - the welcome cool of a fascinating network of underground caves. The conducted tour was in French but helped by an English leaflet there was no trouble in appreciating the prehistoric cave paintings of bison and horses. We then rejoined Jumbo and Jo who'd been botanising outside, returning home a little later than usual but still time for a swim before supper.

#### Wednesday 29 May - local walks

The morning walk took us over the hill opposite Galoubet towards the farmstead of Girou. At the bottom of the the lane that leads to the house the melodious warbler sung unmelodiously but well in the open, much as it had for the few who had ventured out on the pre-breakfast walk.

Past the cirl bunting and along the edge of the sainfoin field, we then found ourselves on the track through the wood and out into the open. Much of the morning was spent on an uncultivated area to the right of the path. Particularly impressive here were several violet birdsnest orchids plus a generous array of pyramidal orchids and narrow-leaved helleborines. Several more butterflies were caught, examined and identified with the aid of Martin's net.

For the afternoon walk we split into two parties, fast and slow. The slower walkers - the botanising potterers - set off first past the Mayor's house and through the woods. One of many observations was how some of the field maples had three-lobed leaves and some had five. It turns out that the former are Montpellier maple, not found in the UK. Our first man orchids were on a roadside verge at the furthest point from base. The return leg brought us back by the Combe De Cayres, and the farmhouse at Cayres near where we had walked on the first morning. Here a golden oriole sang loudly and continuously from the oak wood.

It turned a little cooler after supper as we all went in search of the nightjars that one or two had seen the previous evening. They were heard briefly but not seen, no doubt due to the breeze that got up as lightning started to flash in the north.

Thursday 30 May - Rocamadour

Guy was unavailable, his friend's coach had broken down, but nonetheless transport was there at 9.30 as usual (after the school run) in the shape of the two minibuses and two lady drivers. We never did discover who they were, the French conversation concentrating on the route and the arrangements.

We stopped all too briefly on the stony plateau above Rocamadour - an area worth exploring in the future. Here there were white rock rose and purple milk vetch and genuine wild corncockles growing in a wheat field. Another ortolan bunting sang from a wire; we were doing well with a traditionally elusive species.

As we turned the corner the view of Rocamadour, built into the rock, was quite staggering. We were dropped at the archway into the town, the ladies being off to other jobs, with the rest of the day at our leisure at Rocamadour. The main street is quite striking despite the rather touristy souvenirs for sale in what is one of France's best known visitor attractions. After a drink, everyone braved the steps - rather than take the *ascenseur* - past churches and shrines, including the celebrated black virgin. The climb took us past the twelve stations of the cross and to the top where we picniced accompanied by serins, nuthatches and for some a blue tit in and out of a nest hole.

A close examination of the walls on the way down revealed thick-leaved stonecrop and the fern maidenhair spleenwort as well as abundant pellitory-of-the-wall. Two of us found an enormous ocellated lizard. Most of the party did a little more souvenir shopping and convened at a cafe overlooking the valley. A black kite drifted past, then a white-tailed eagle wearing jesses (from the bird of prey collection at the top of the rock) and finally a raven mobbed a buzzard.

Then it rained - no, not rained, poured. Apart from David who got thoroughly soaked while searching a nearby hillside, the rest of the group were in the cafe or a shop nearby. We forced ourselves to take tea and cakes to pass the time before *les femmes* with the minibuses arrived and took us back to Galoubet.

Now this was not only Honeyguide's first year and Gilly's first group at her new centre but, as by now most people were aware, it was also Gilly's last week. Galoubet was sold, and the contract to be exchanged the following day. This, then, was Gilly's last evening as Galoubet's owner. A rather unusual set of circumstances for a wildlife holiday but we all felt privileged to be part of the one and only mould-breaking group to Gilly's Galoubet. The evening meal was inside although the rain had about cleared up, and we were delighted to share the evening with the next door neighbours. Maurice Pages is the neighbour, local farmer, and Mayor of the commune of Beaumat, and had done much to smooth the way to Galoubet's establishment as a wildlife holiday centre. He and his wife Brigitte, their daughter Celine, their young son Pierre and Sylvie, a student staying with them, joined us for the evening. Sylvie spoke excellent English but the Pages family knew none so we dusted down our French and conversed with, I think, great success.

The as always superb meal was followed by gifts for Maurice and his family and speeches, short but full of emotion. Then, after Maurice left, the argument started. Would Gilly let us do the washing up? Hopelessly outnumbered Gilly put up a good fight but lost and eleven pairs of hands made light work of it as we washed, laughed, dried and sang our way through the pile of dishes.

#### Friday 31 May - all day walk

The weather was back to dry and hot as we headed first west then north towards the hamlet of Le Plegat. In a field of meadow clary we admired flowers, buildings and both Glanville and spotted fritillaries brought to us by the ever nimble-footed Martin. Further on there were the first red helleborines for all but one or two and a brilliant and slow moving green lizard. John found a praying mantis - a female *Mantis religiosa*. A quail called - *wet-my-lips* - corn buntings jangled and a tree pipit did the most perfect demonstration of their classic parachuting display flight.

Lunch was somewhere down a track full of pyramidal orchids with a view over the rolling hills to the north. After forty winks in the shade we headed along the land to Beaumat. There was some traffic: an old 2CV and a flock of goats to be precise!

A cry of "woodpecker" from your leader as a yellowish bird emerged from the trees, but no, a golden oriole, then a second, and then a third. Then across the crossroads and into the sleepy village of Beaumat. No shop or cafe here but a simple church being renovated. Avril and Pauline saw a snake that didn't reappear, naturally. Then more traffic as we headed towards La Croix Blanche, this time a flock of sheep following a car. Probably distracted by us they headed into a field but were soon redirected by the farmer, now out of the car, and his sheepdog. Through La Croix Blanche, past Merle, then down the runner's track and back to the pool. Supper was again outside, accompanied by wine and limericks.

#### Saturday 1 June - around Galoubet, then home

The sweet song of golden orioles floated through the windows as we rose on our last morning. After breakfast there was time for an hour and a half's walk towards Girou. Lunch was early and we were joined by Galoubet's new owners, Lynn and Doreen Todd. With ten minutes to spare before the one o'clock arrival of the coach there was time enough for your foolish leaders to have one last dip. Then in Guy's safe hands it was Toulouse, Gatwick and home.

CD

## BIRDS

All the following were seen at or on the walks around Galoubet, except for greylag goose seen from the coach north of Toulouse, hoopoe at Rocamadour and grey wagtail and dipper in the valley of the Lot.

Opinions will vary as to which were the best birds; the nightingale from the window, the swallows nesting in the hall, a perfect parachuting tree pipit. Marked in **bold**, however, are a dozen birds that a UK-based birdwatcher might consider to be the most special.

Grey heron	Black redstart
Greylag goose	Blackbird
<b>Honey buzzard</b>	Mistle thrush
<b>Red kite</b>	<b>Melodious warbler</b>
<b>Black kite</b>	Blackcap
Buzzard	Chiff-chaff
Kestrel	<b>Bonelli's warbler</b>
Red-legged partridge	Spotted flycatcher
<b>Quail</b> (heard only)	Willow tit
Pheasant	Blue tit
Woodpigeon	Great tit
Collared dove	Nuthatch
Turtle dove	Short-toed treecreeper
Cuckoo	<b>Golden oriole</b>
Tawny owl (heard)	Jay
<b>Nightjar</b>	Magpie
Swift	Jackdaw
<b>Hoopoe</b>	Rook
Green woodpecker	Carriion crow
Great spotted woodpecker	Raven
<b>Woodlark</b>	Starling
Skylark	House sparrow
Swallow	Chaffinch
House martin	Serin
Tree pipit	Greenfinch
Grey wagtail	Goldfinch
White wagtail	Linnet
Dipper	<b>Girrl bunting</b>
Wren	<b>Ortolan bunting</b>
Robin	Corn bunting
Nightingale	

Total: 61 species.

CD

## BUTTERFLIES

Although a number of the larger species such as the Swallowtail and Black-veined White were readily identifiable on the wing, it took the agility of Martin to help put names to the numerous blues and fritillaries. In total an impressive 24 species were seen, including 8 that are not found in

Britain and a further 4 - the Glanville Fritillary, Pale Clouded Yellow, Adonis Blue and Swallowtail - that are rarities in the UK.

Large Wall Brown  
Small Heath  
Pearly Heath  
Wall Brown  
Pearl-bordered Fritillary  
Meadow Fritillary  
Glanville Fritillary  
Spotted Fritillary  
Red Admiral  
Comma  
Small Tortoiseshell  
Southern White Admiral  
Small Blue  
Adonis Blue  
Common Blue  
Idas Blue  
Green Hairstreak  
Swallowtail  
Scarce Swallowtail  
Small White  
Large White  
Black-veined White  
Clouded Yellow  
Pale Clouded Yellow  
Orange Tip

#### Other insects

Although no systematic attempt to identify other insects was made, several of the more distinctive ones were named. For sheer volume of sound pride of place went to the Field Crickets, whilst in the air it was the graceful black and yellow lacewing-like insects that attracted most interest. These were identified as *Ascalaphus libelluloides* (which left most of us none the wiser!)

At night the lights of the gentlemen's lounge attracted a number of moths, the most beautiful being the Cream Spot Tiger and the Large Emerald. Further afield, on our night walks, the oxidation of luciferin (the process by which female Glow-worms glow) excited almost as much interest among our group members as it did among the male population of Glow-worms.... Finally, remember the lovely black and red striped shieldbugs sitting on top of the cow parsley flowers? Well, they were *Graphosoma italicum*. Impressed?

DB

#### PLANTS

The Lot region is a mosaic of small fields, scrub, woodland, scree and rocky exposures formed on limestone and therefore with this diversity of habitats a rich flora could be expected. In fact an impressive total of

nearly 300 species were recorded without really getting to grips with the sedges, grasses and arable weeds.

It was the grassland species that really caught the eye, particularly plants like **sainfoin** and **meadow clary**, which grew in such abundance that they were able to colour whole meadows. The trip timing turned out to be just right to capture the beauty of the many monocotyledonous plants, particularly members of the lily and orchid family. Although the full splendour of the **poet's narcissi** was missed, a number were still seen and by the end of the week the first showy **field gladioli** were observed. In full flower throughout our stay were **tassel hyacinth**, with its unusual top knot of bright purple flowers, the **spiked** and **common star of Bethlehem** and the distinctive **wild leeks**.

Most of the orchids were also in full flower although the large spikes of the **lizard orchid** kept us guessing until the last day, and even then there were insufficient flowers to test whether they really smelt like goats. In all 17 species were found:

Bee orchid	Man orchid
Early spider orchid	Lizard orchid
Fly orchid	Twayblade
Early purple orchid	Lesser butterfly orchid
Lady orchid	Red helleborine
Military orchid	Narrow-leaved helleborine
Burnt-tip orchid	Broad-leaved helleborine
Monkey orchid	Violet birdsnest orchid
Pyramidal orchid	

In addition to the plants noted earlier in the report, there are one or two others worthy of mention. For those who struggled in the heat up to the highest point of St Cirq Lapopie, there was the **great yellow broomrape**, able to grow in a crack in the rocks by being parasitic on the roots of neighbouring shrubs. The discovery of the **brown vetch** was a welcome relief on the second day to the back-markers on the steep rocky track on the way back to Galoubet. The name scarcely does justice to the exquisitely simple crimson flower, set amongst the grass-like leaves that are unusual for members of the pea family.

Earlier on the same walk, as we left Labastide-Murat, numerous **Nottingham catchfly** plants were found on the roadside verge: a rarity in Britain, it was easily identified by its cream, rolled back petals. On these longer walks the urge to flop down on the turf at stops had to be resisted on occasions where the spiky leaves of the **field eryngo** were growing. Elsewhere however the compensation could be the smell of the aromatic herbs **thyme** and **marjoram** which grew in abundance, the latter not yet in flower.

If you would like a full list of all the plants seen, it is available on request. The greatest mystery has now been pinned down - the shrub **coriaria**. However, a number are still unsolved. Remember the very attractive blue knapweed? And was that yellow trefoil ever identified? Still, never mind - we have to leave something for participants on next year's trip!

DB

Participants in the trip will recall that £25 of the price of the holiday went to La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (French Bird Protection League) towards their campaign to set up a network of no-hunting sanctuaries throughout France and to change the law whereby, in some departments, it is illegal to forbid hunting on your own land.

The total contributions came to £275, and *Honeyguide* was therefore able to send this - equivalent to 2755.50 francs - to the LPO. I am pleased to be able to reproduce their thank you letter to you (opposite) which includes an update on their campaign.

You may be interested to know that *Honeyguide* also contributed £328 (60,000 pesetas) to the Sociedad Espanola de Ornitologia (Spanish Ornithological Society) towards their lammergeier protection work. I am therefore pleased to be able to say that *Honeyguide* has contributed over £600 to bird protection in Europe in 1991, our first year of operation.

Chris Durdin



# Ligue Française pour la Protection des Oiseaux

Association reconnue d'Utilité Publique

Mr Chris DURDIN  
Honey Guide  
Wildlife Holidays  
36 Thudner Lane  
Thoirpe St Andrew  
NORWICH NR7 OPX

August 12th, 1991

Dear Mr DURDIN,

The Ligue française pour la Protection des Oiseaux has been deeply touched by your financial support to his national campaign 1990-1991 "Créez chez vous un refuge LPO".

Thousands of information leaflets and press books have been forwarded to private people and local communities.

Over 1 000 hectares have become Refuge LPO in the early 1991 with a good taking part from towns : Caen – calvados, (470 ha), Béziers – Hérault (1 ha), Nancy – Meurthe et Moselle (20 ha), Toulouse (file not yet finished).

In Arrière, 4 LPO members have created a 140 ha refuge. In Paris area, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS = National Center of Research and Development) has protected its 67 ha property and so does the Company Electricité de France (EDF) with its 20 ha of land.

Politically speaking, 150 deputies or senators have asked the Minister of Environment, Brice Lalonde, for the law to be modified in order that every french owner can forbid the hunting at home.

Unfortunately, though the Minister of Environment's attempts, nothing have changed, the French hunters having had a malicious pleasure in blocking the situation.

LPO will go on its actions in favour of the creation of peace areas for the birds and in order to obtain the respect of the rights of the people against the hunting.

Many thanks, Dear Sir, thanks for everyone who has helped us in the success (yet too partial) of our action.

Jean-François LOUINEAU,  
Assistant Manager