

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Maison Meulet, Galoubet

Flowers and Birds in the Lot 1996

11-18 May 1996

18-25 May 1996

Flowers and Birds in the Lot 1996

Participants

11-18 May

Tamsin Dunningham

Anne Guiver
Chris Sage

Elizabeth Bernheim

Francis Erridge
Patricia Erridge

Peter Palmer
Margaret Palmer

Tony Shipton
Liz Shipton

Leaders: David Brewster

18-25 May

Tamsin Dunningham

Anne Guiver
Chris Sage

Sheila Thompson

Cliff Robinson

Jean Maynard
Peter Maynard

Nick Michael

Mike Pill
Doreen Pill

Chris Durdin

Our hosts at Galoubet: Lynn and Doreen Todd.

Galoubet is but a tiny hamlet, not even marked on most maps. But it is a real and rather special place now to scores of people who have stayed at Maison Meulet, and even more firmly on the map for David and myself who have had the pleasure to lead holidays here since 1991.

This report tells the story of the 1996 Honeyguide holidays, an *aide memoire* for those there in 1996. We hope it may also be an encouragement for anyone else who may be thinking of going there in the future to enjoy the flowers, birds and butterflies in the French *département* of the Lot.

The holiday reports are combined as there is much in common, not least three people who were there both weeks - Tamsin, Anne and Chris. We were a little earlier than usual this year, but the timing worked well, not least with more orchid species than ever. There were orchids every we went, but nowhere better than around Galoubet, and Maison Meulet's fields - literally outside the back door - remain the best place to see military and lady orchids. The orchids always steal the show here, rightly so, though there is much more besides.

At the back of the report there are various lists, but we start with our daily diaries. I hope you enjoy reading it.

Chris Durdin

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

Week 1 with David Brewster

Saturday 11 May - Gatwick to Galoubet

Eight degrees centigrade and a blustery north wind made Toulouse Airport feel more like the England that we had left behind than southern France and the swollen Garonne, Tarn and Lot Rivers were ample testimony to the fact that the present storm had not been an isolated event. Anxious eyes scanned the limestone embankments as the coach ascended into the Gramat Causse to see if the late spring had affected the flowering time of the orchids. Tantalising glimpses of the odd monkey and pyramidal orchid appeared to indicate that it had not but confirmation would have to await the morrow.

Lynn, Doreen and Lucy rushed out into the rain to greet us as we arrived at Galoubet and even the weather failed to dampen our enthusiasm for Maison Meulet and its wonderful setting. Lance's initial offering from the kitchen confirmed that we were in for something special.

Sunday 12 May - Local Walks

The sound of rain during the night put off the early risers and it was a modest group who set off expectantly down the valley and who were immediately rewarded by a profusion of orchid flowers just coming to their peak. Normally these walks are for pre-breakfast birdwatching which took a back seat this morning although good views of the continually trilling Bonelli's warblers were achieved as they fed in the tops of the oaks.

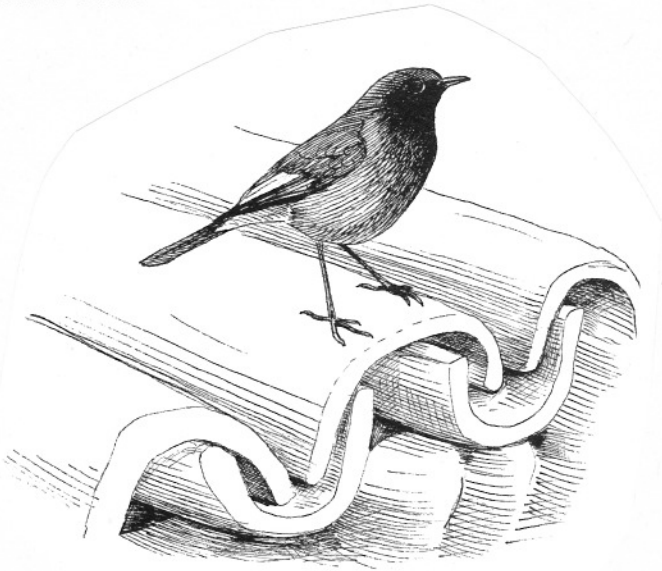
After breakfast a leisurely pace was set up the road to La Croix Blanche, dictated by the frequent lady, fly, bee and burnt-tip orchids. As the clouds started to break and a hint of warmth developed, the first butterflies drifted along the roadside: adonis blue, pale clouded yellow, green hairstreak, Duke of Burgundy fritillary and the delightful pearly heath. Observation of them was not aided by Gibus, the neighbour's large friendly hound who seemed to have adopted us and who took rather too much interest in whatever we were looking at. Occasionally our eyes would be raised from the ground to scan the horizon for raptors but today it was too cool for thermals to develop and the skies remained empty. On one such sweep of the opposite side of the valley we spotted a rather furtive looking Frenchman, carrying a plastic bag, who kept disappearing among the juniper bushes. It was too early for the legendary truffles, besides he had no dog or spade with him, there were no juniper berries left so we could only conclude that he was after the large Roman snails that had been tempted out by the dampness. Thoughts of food prompted Margaret to inquire about lunch arrangements after we had only covered a mile, but sure enough it was already after midday so we hastily descended a convenient track back to Galoubet.

One of the delightful shady tracks down the western part of the valley had become known as Meg's walk after its discoverer in 1993, but it was its sheltered nature that appealed after lunch. Here the last of the cowslips were in flower; well we always thought that they were cowslips but this one proved to be an oxlip. In the meadows by the stream the poet's narcissi still flowered in graceful drifts, each flower solitary with its short trumpet having a crisped, orange margin. The white of these flowers contrasted wonderfully with purple spikes of the loose-flowered orchid and the occasional southern marsh orchid. The lack of birds in the valley bottom drove us up onto the farmland at the top where corn buntings jangled on posts and woodlarks circled above. Birds of prey remained elusive with only fleeting views of the local buzzard. Lance excelled himself that evening and as we staggered from the table there was little enthusiasm for a walk to hear the nightjars who seemed to have the same view of the weather as we did.

Monday 13 May - Labastide-Murat

After a frustrating search for the golden oriole, an alternative route was sought by the early morning walkers wanting their breakfast. The tracks are so frequent in this area that one was readily found after a skirmish with an electric fence that left David very nervous of future encounters. A passing green woodpecker was clearly amused by the episode.

While the first group was transported to Labastide-Murat, the Essex contingent were able to observe the middle spotted woodpecker that had taken up residence in a dead ash tree in front of the house, close to the entrance of an earlier home that was now occupied by bees. We were then transported the short distance to the market for purchases of maps, postcards and more unusually French bean seeds that rattled furiously in rucksacks on the walk back. The first serins were seen as we left the town and a black redstart perched on the gutter of one of Murat's barns. Murat rose from humble beginnings, in the village that was then called Labastide Fortunière, to become one of Napoleon's most trusted generals before marrying his sister Caroline. His fame also helped the village which grew into an important market town.



With the town behind us, we crossed the main road and found the track that descended along the limestone ridge in the direction of Beaumat. In the middle of this track Liz discovered a new species of orchid for the area, the tongue orchid or Serapias, which generated much excitement among the botanists. The rest of the group were looking for a suitable lunch spot sheltered from the north wind. It was found in the oak woodland that was full of violet birdsnest orchid, narrow-leaved helleborine and that most showy member of the labiate family, bastard balm, and in the adjoining juniper a melodious warbler sang unmelodiously.

After sustenance we descended to the valley bottom adding early spider orchid to the growing plant list and there found the road to the golf club that had been started six years earlier by an English couple. Hot coffee appealed so we climbed up and were greeted most hospitably by Alison who recounted stories of previous groups nearly expiring of heat stroke on the walk back from the town - chance would be a fine thing. One advantage of the temperature was that the insects were grounded and if you could find them they afforded good opportunities for photography and adonis blues and the striking yellow and black antlions were captured in this way. Not surprisingly the pool had no takers on our return but the duck has eaten with gusto. Lynn informed us that the sun would materialise tomorrow so we held the nightjar walk over.

Tuesday 14 May - St Cirq Lapopie and Pêche Merle

Lynn proved to be correct and the sun broke free of the clouds and at last promised real warmth. In response the numbers on the early morning walk doubled and we had a lovely trip up the limestone ridge beyond Merle. The birds responded with song and woodlark, tree pipit and circl bunting were all seen singing their hearts out. A rather monotonous call was heard from the foliage of an oak tree and Tamsin eventually spotted and identified it as a pied flycatcher, the first spring sighting at Galoubet. On our return Elizabeth reported good views of the middle spotted woodpecker and Peter and Margaret had discovered a buzzard's nest.

Guy then drove us to St Cirq Lapopie down increasingly narrow valleys with towering limestone cliffs until the famous hilltop village was sighted over the muddy waters of the meandering River Lot. Interest was divided between the architecture and the wildlife but as the buzzards and alpine swifts were only seen a long way off we adjourned into the village to botanise and admire the stunning 14th and 15th century buildings. On the rocky outcrops Anne discovered a number of new plants including vipers bugloss, round-headed leek, ivy broomrape, Spanish broom and tower cress with its distinctive long drooping seed pods.

A very civilised lunch was taken in the shade of the oaks at Pêche Merle and afterwards the group split into two, with the majority descending into the caves to see their natural wonders and superb Stone Age paintings. The remainder set off for a short botanical walk laced with the odd green-underside blue butterfly. This went well until it was time to return and it was felt that a short cut through the wood might prove to be an interesting diversion. Tamsin plunged into the thick understorey of box and yew and Chris, Anne and I struggled after. A coiled black and yellow western whip snake decided that valour was the better part of discretion and refused to leave its warm hollow. Oh that we could move like a snake through this tangle and next half mile took nearly an hour and when we arrived hot and dishevelled at the caves the offer of magnum ice creams from the gallant Tony was accepted with alacrity. We then descended to the village of Cabrerets along a rocky path lined with bloody cranesbill, milkwort, kidney vetch and bastard balm. Down by the stream Frank spotted a fleeting dipper and the final few yards into the village produced rock soapwort and ivory-fruited hartwort.

A concerted effort was made to see the barn owl after dinner but as the numbers increased so did the noise level and the parent birds were only seen fleetingly. The young birds however could clearly be heard, wheezing from the top of the pigeonier. At least that's what we thought it was; Liz, however, thought it might be Tony in the bedroom below as he had turned in early.

Wednesday 15 May - Local walks

Nuthatches, great spotted woodpecker and an unusual sighting for Galoubet, a wheatear, were all seen by the early risers. As we returned down the road from Merle, Peter and Margaret could be seen excitedly watching something above the woods; assuming it was the buzzards on the nest we hurried up but it proved to be an agitated pair of golden orioles seeing off another male and good views were had of all three.

The butterfly net was used in anger for the first time on the holiday and Bath white, adonis and small blues and wood white were quickly netted, the last species proving to be particularly easy to catch in view of its weak floppy flight. These butterflies were found over an area of limestone grassland studded with green-winged orchids with a single white specimen showing off the characteristic green veins on the hood particularly well. A swallowtail was netted beside the main road and then a less exotic dingy skipper as the group relaxed among the pyramidal orchids on the embankment. As we started down the track to the Mayor's house, part of a beetle was found impaled on a barbed wire fence. Was

this the first sign of the elusive red-backed shrike that Elizabeth was so keen to see? Further on a stream of spectacled sheep were crossing the track and while awaiting their passage the staccato belching of a pool frog was heard from one of the numerous ponds. The pace quickened as thoughts turned to one of Lance's lunches and a chance to put one's feet up before the next sojourn.

By popular demand we started off on Meg's walk and then continued further down the valley. Butterflies were hatching out in the warmth and soon knapweed, Glanville, meadow and heath fritillary had been recorded, all in mint condition. Lucy was accompanying us and was duly shown all the orchids so she could impress Lynn on her return and the list included numerous early spider and lax-flowered orchids. One of the lush valley bottom hay meadows was alive with star of Bethlehem and poet's narcissi and it was with reluctance that we turned back seeking what shade we could. A honey buzzard drifted over and for once the barred underside and tail could be seen, though everything else seemed to be having its siesta.

There was a treat before dinner, with Frank and Pat leading a session of mediaeval dancing on the lawn. It was all very civilised until the rest of us were asked to join in, then somehow the co-ordination seemed to break down, but still it was most enjoyable. After the dancing, the tables were brought outside and our first dinner outside was enjoyed with much talk and laughter. Afterwards for another attempt to see nightjars the group split as two could be heard in different directions. However neither party found it although barn, tawny and scops owls were heard and two satellites were spotted winging their way across the star strewn sky with Venus pre-eminent.

Thursday 16 May - Rocamadour

Gibus led the early morning walk and proved to be a great curiosity to two roe deer on the road in front of us which gave us excellent views. After several minutes the buck took off barking furiously at which point Gibus disappeared as well to be seen later chewing on what appeared to a stick in the woods. As binoculars were raised to see what it was, to our horror we realised it was the hind leg of a deer. Had he caught one?. Closer inspection fortunately showed it to be a long dead carcass that he was now trying to drag down to show us. The appropriate French phrase was shouted at him and to our amazement it worked.

Guy performed the usual miracle of getting the coach up to Maison Meulet and then we were off to Rocamadour. On the way we passed a silage field and predictably there were black kites, six in number, flying low over the cut grass. Was it live prey they were seeking or those that had gone through the drum mower? Rocamadour was like a giant layer cake with the diminutive River Alzou at the bottom of the gorge, with the houses above, then the churches on the next layer, then the cliff and, on top of the lot, the chateau. We walked down in reverse past the stations of the cross, watching black redstarts, serins, ravens and griffon vultures! The last were, unfortunately, from the bird of prey collection. After trips to see the black virgin, Notre Dame de Rocamadour, and to do the necessary shopping we then assembled in the oak woods on the other side of the valley. A western whip snake was clearly unhappy with our presence and it hissed as shot across the path in front of us. The humidity deterred many from walking all the way to the top on the other side but those who did were rewarded by the first lesser butterfly orchid and grizzled skipper.

We then travelled to Loubressac which overlooks a wide sweep of the Dordogne valley towards the castle of Castlenau. This immaculately kept town proved to be very busy on Ascension Day and so we dropped down the road to see what birds might be about. The best sighting was a close encounter with a serin nesting by the road but a families of ortolan buntings and stonechats and a fleeting view of a wryneck were also notable. Buzzards wheeled overhead and one group included a solitary honey buzzard. The rain descended

as we boarded the coach and surprisingly this proved to be the only rain that fell during the holiday while we were out and about. Unfortunately it precluded another al fresco meal, the nightjars also failed to perform and only a single glow-worm graced the late night stroll.

Friday 17 May - All day walk

The all day walk involved a cross-country section in order to gain access to Combe de Font Neuve and therefore Tam and I decided to undertake a recce before breakfast to ensure that there were no electric fences to cause embarrassment. Fortunately the coast was clear and we descended into the combe to the consternation of a roe deer hind who watched with us with interest until an injudicious movement sent her rushing into the trees where she must have startled a buck who proceeded to bark furiously for several minutes. Unfortunately the deer were not there later as the group descended, which is perhaps not surprising given the noise we made as we explored the botanical delights on the wooded ridge. Fifteen species of orchid were discovered including a new one, the violet helleborine.

We joined another green lane at the bottom which wandered between hay meadows sprinkled with poet's narcissi and the strap like leaves of autumn crocus. This one was also marked with green paint like the others on the local walks, proving we were on a right of way. We lunched sitting on the short grassland turf that had become so beloved by the botanists, with numerous adonis blues flitting about and the odd buzzard and honey buzzard overhead. Nearby a traditional barn built of the local, warm yellow limestone with red tiled roof caused some interest as a weekend retreat although the access was not thought to be too good until a Renault drove past, the first vehicle we had seen all day. We then climbed up another wooded ridge to Murat, on the main road, before completing the circle by descending back into Combe de Font Neuve. Here we found a French couple collecting the fresh tips of black bryony which they assured were absolutely delicious. We then rested in a hay meadow while gathering strength for the final climb up to the Mayor's house. This proved to be a long slog in the heat, with the call of a golden oriole going on before us. Frank, who had obviously been practising, gave a passable imitation and much to our surprise got a response. On several occasions it came closer and we could hear the cat like calls of the female, but it stayed out of sight. Frank, who was getting cramp in the lips, gave it one more go and the male flew right overhead and the female landed in the oak beside us. They quickly realised that they had been conned but most of us got our best views of the week of this glorious bird. The storm clouds were building by this time so the pace quickened and again we arrived home before the rain started.

The local lamb at dinner was excellent and we reluctantly sampled the last of a seemingly endless array of French cheeses that Lynn had provided, aided by a very presentable Cahors red wine. Then it was the limerick competition and probably the less said about that the better. The rain continued to deluge down so unfortunately we were not able to have a last wander along the byways in the twilight.

Saturday 18 May - Toulouse

The rain had departed by the morning but the vegetation was so wet that we changed plans and walked up the road to La Croix Blanche where a solitary black kite inspected a silage field. A whitethroat sang from a cherry tree and the jangling call of the corn bunting was heard from the wires. On the descent, the 26th species of orchid for the week was found, a common spotted, so they were better than expected which was compensation for fewer raptors than normal and of course no sign of Elizabeth's shrike. Weighed down by another of Lance's excellent lunches, we bade our fond farewells to Lynn, Doreen, Lucy and Lance and boarded Guy's coach for the last time. Then it was Toulouse, Gatwick and a very mundane England. Our thoughts were with Tam, Anne and Chris who were staying on for a second week - lucky devils.

Week 2 with Chris Durdin

Saturday 18 May - Gatwick to Galoubet

After a distinctly turbulent flight, two familiar figures could be seen through the glass at Toulouse airport as we waited at baggage reclaim. The first was David Brewster, with news of last week's findings, and the second Guy of *Guy Transports*, our coach driver for the week. We were soon loaded and making our way up the *péage*, and mallard, magpie and collared dove were soon seen from the coach, followed a little farther north by many black kites and several buzzards. Along the roadside were the black and white flags of cheering rugby supporters as Brive had just beaten Toulouse, we learned. Despite the occasional *bouchon* - bottleneck - from the rugby traffic, the journey north along the N20 passed quickly, over the bridge with its fine views of Cahors and then into the limestone of the Gramat Causse where the first pyramidal orchids could be seen growing by the roadside.

At Galoubet, there was quite a party to greet us: our hosts Lynn and Doreen Todd, housekeeper Lucy, New Zealand chef Lance, Bob and Joan, guests of Lynn, and of course Tamsin, Chris and Anne still here from David's group.

After unloading and settling in, it was time for one of Lance's many wonderful creations for our evening meal. Lynn enjoys fine wines and delights in sharing them too. There are always two with every meal; tonight the white a Cotes de Gascoigne and the red a gamay from Touraine. Between the main meal and pudding, the cheese 'checklist' started too - three tonight and every night.

After dark, the buzz of crickets was joined by the distant churr of a nightjar and the 'poo poo' of a midwife toad.

Sunday 19 May - local walks

The usual form for *Honeyguide* groups at Galoubet is a pre-breakfast walk for birds. Several of us walked up the hill past the Mayor's house, by which there was a girl bunting on a wire, a black redstart on the rooftop, and nightingales and blackcaps singing. In the woods, a Bonelli's warbler trilled and a rich flutey sound told us that a golden oriole was not far away. On the first morning's bird walk ignoring the orchids is impossible, especially this morning burnt-tip orchid by the track and birdsnest orchids under the oak trees.

Introductory words at the start of the morning walk were interrupted by a middle spotted woodpecker on the old ash outside Maison Meulet. There they were nesting, as last year, and were enjoyed many times during the week. Down the road there was dogwood, field and Montpellier maples and spindle in the hedge. A shower of rain was no doubt why the jack-go-to-bed-at-noon hadn't got out of bed, but it was in full flower at 12.45 on our return in sunshine, as if to remind us not to take these names too literally. A perched tree pipit was followed by an oriole call which Cliff was quick to pick up. Past the farm at Cayres, Jean found man orchids for us and we took time to look at Mediterranean coriaria, a shrub that is such a feature of this area.

Golden orioles sometimes are heard and not seen but today we were in luck in both respects. Several in the group saw what was probably a young male fly across a meadow, and a little later we heard the 'cat call' of a female from the wood. Buzzards soared, the tree pipit re-appeared on the same perch, and we found spurge laurel by the small triangle of tracks that were to be electric-fenced shortly for the cattle to be put in. Wayside flowers included Dame's violet, a

distinctive crucifer that, unlike many, is not ignored by botanists, and pinky-purple bush vetch, with the ants after its nectar that seem to be a permanent feature and certainly help with its identification.

There was a little rain at lunch but it was fine and warm as we set off past Gibus's house along 'Meg's walk'. The ant lions and adonis blue butterflies were out in the sun, and so too were some pale clouded yellows, which on closer examination turned out to be Berger's clouded yellows. An unmelodious song alerted us to a melodious warbler; reminiscent of sedge warbler to the ear, when seen well (as it was on several occasions) this chunky yellow warbler looks more distinctive than at first it sounds. The track goes by the edge of the wood, and in the meadows alongside there were banks with pyramidal orchids and the chunky, pale green, knee-high stumps that we all came to recognise as lizard orchids on their way up and out.

As the track leads down to the wet meadows at its end, a close examination of purple-coloured orchids confirmed both green-winged and early purples. Three honey-buzzards came over - they were in good form all this week - including one with a tatty tail that we were to see again. In the wet meadow there were star-of Bethlehem and poet's narcissus in bloom, and probably hundreds of the elegant loose-flowered orchid, along with a few early marsh and one robust marsh orchid. On the walk back we found wild candytuft, another reasonably easy crucifer, and white ball mustard, a trickier one. The twentieth orchid of the day, broad-leaved helleborine, albeit not yet in flower, was fairly plentiful alongside the woodland path once your eye was tuned to it.

Monday 20 May - St Cirq and Pech Merle

On the pre-breakfast walk there was a parachuting tree pipit and a distant black kite.

On arrival at St Cirq, three magnificent short-toed eagles moved slowly towards us, large, pale underneath, as a good a view as you could hope for. St Cirq itself is a charming cliff top village, fought over by the English and French in the 100 years war, now renovated and full of charming corners and a few art and craft shops for the visiting tourists. The climb to the top of the old castle gives fine views over the Lot valley, and offers botanical treats: ivy broomrape at the bottom, yellow woundwort, vipers bugloss and toothed medick on the way up and Mediterranean buckthorn at the top. On the walls of the village everywhere there is pellitory-of-the-wall and ivy-leaved toadflax, and on one large wall a white-flowered pink that may well be *Silene alpestre* but needed the alpine flora which was not to hand, when everything else today needed northern European or Mediterranean floras which we did have.

After our picnic lunch, taken in an open area at Pech Merle, everyone then joined the next tour of the prehistoric caves. At an hour and twenty minutes, it lasted longer than usual due to the enthusiasm of both the group and the guide. Translation from Nick, Anne and Chris helped us all to appreciate the cave paintings and geological formations so relatively recently discovered. Outside we enjoyed tea and ice cream and found, near the bar area, the tree with the question mark whose roots we had seen down below, passing from the roof of the cave through open space and into the floor beneath us.

The walk down the hill from Pech Merle is by a particularly fine limestone bank bright with horseshoe vetch, white and common rockrose, bastard balm and bloody cranesbill. Crested cow-wheat was found, a semi-parasitic plant which occurs but is very rare in the UK. Swallowwort (*vincetoxicum*), Nottingham catchfly and peach-leaved bellflower were other finds, along with a super green lizard that stayed still long enough to be seen.

Guy collected us after our meander down the road, and we headed north to Galoubet. The route took us through woods where I fruitlessly jogged along the road to find butterfly orchids, one of which was then spotted right by the coach. There was a consensus on lesser rather than greater butterfly orchid after some debate about the pollinia, parallel or otherwise. Then, in the valley of the Vers, alternative strategies for dealing with wet meadows were revealed with Nick removing shoes and socks which avoided following my example of simply getting wet shoes. The reward was several robust and early marsh orchids, with military and man orchids on dryer bits. Those on terra firma found columbine and much star-of-Bethlehem.

Tuesday 21 May - Gourdon, and walk from Vaillac

The local market today was in Gourdon, and a green woodpecker flew from the rugby pitch as we parked. The town was full of bustle as the group split up with various purchases in mind. The provision market by the church was this year a car park, sadly, though there was still lots to see. Most met for a coffee at the Hotel Divan and all were back for the agreed 12.30 departure. Guy then took us to Vaillac, where we picnicked on a wall overlooking the stream that runs through the village. The heavens then opened and we sheltered under cover; Sheila's guess for how long the shower would last was nearest as after 10 minutes we set off. The serins in Vaillac were singing, and we left them to turn up the hill by the yellow cross from where we were to follow the yellow waymarks towards Beaumat.

Through the woods, then left in a southerly direction we went on what, it has to be said, was a very wet walk. Nonetheless diversions were made off the path into grassy scrub where there were, quite literally, thousands of pyramidal orchids in the most stunning of displays. The walk was also particularly rich for narrow-leaved helleborines, fly and lady orchids. The last leg is down through an oak wood, over a few stones through a stream and up again to the road. However the recent rains were so heavy that the stepping stones were well under water, so a diversion through the meadow alongside was rapidly improvised. At Beaumat, a telephone call to Maison Meulet to request a lift back home ascertained that Lynn had already left to find us. Peter and Jean and bits of luggage returned home by car, and there was a fairly swift walk back for the rest of us, pausing though for melodious warbler, a crow mobbing a buzzard, and a look at common spotted and woodcock orchids.

With the rain stopped and clothes organised to dry, there was time to study the big ash tree and work out in which branch was the middle spotted woodpecker's nest hole. That done, it was then easy to set up the telescope by the pool to allow frame-filling views for all as the two adults came to and fro to feed their brood, both during the early evening and for a pre-breakfast woodpecker watch the following morning.

Wednesday 22 May - local walks

Armed with butterfly net, the morning walk took us past the Mayor's house and into the oak woods. The golden oriole was whistling and cat calling close to us, including in response to Cliff impressive impersonation. The Bonelli's warbler was also heard. Then past the bee hives, the trackside ponds with their newts and frogs, and as the sun came out so did some butterflies, including meadow fritillary and Berger's clouded yellow. There was a patch of pale flax as we reached the road, walked along it for a few yards, then turned left down the Combe de Cayres. Man and monkey orchids found on Sunday were rediscovered and the tree pipit was still using the same perch.

Scarce swallowtails usually fly too fast to be caught but a lucky sweep had one in the net for all to see close up. Our first spotted flycatcher was on the outside of the wood on the last lap and

there was a honey-buzzard over Maison Meulet as we returned. Lunch was al fresco, and there was a generous supply of fresh lemonade or white wine to wash down.

The afternoon was hot. This brought out the butterflies in force. Small and pearly heaths were compared; Tamsin found a green hairstreak; but everyone's favourite was the southern white admiral that was caught, and then continued to patrol, alongside the D22. A paddle failed to locate the southern marsh orchid found last week, prior to turning up the limestone scarp towards Pisserate and Le Plegat. Highlights along here included a field full of burnt-tip orchids, scores of adonis blues, a pristine scarce swallowtail feeding in the middle of the road, and woodlarks also in the road. Sheila and Anne took a short cut to the hamlet of Merle and found a bush cricket. On the long route there was a whitethroat and, by the runner's track, wild gladiolus.

It was hot enough to tempt some into the pool on our return, though others guessed that the temperature of the water, despite the solar panels, meant the invitation to come on in could wait for a day or two's extra sun.

Galoubet is one of those places where hearing the churring of nightjars is easy but they tend to sit on perches out of sight on the steep bank above the D22. But not so this evening, as one swept low over us as we walked in the twilight.

Thursday 23 May - Rocamadour

Between Calès and Rocamadour, part of the Gramat Causse makes an outcrop onto a limestone plateau that always makes a good stopping place. Pink convolvulus, the yellow pea flower *argyrobolium* and blue lettuce were soon found, and grass-leaved buttercup was a surprise. Cliff was soon left to his own devices photographing a fully out lizard orchid - they are always a little ahead here on the open slopes. By a sheltered lane the tall white spikes of St Bernard's lily was in full flower too.

Leaving Chris and Anne behind - Guy collected them a little later - the rest of the party went onto Rocamadour. This is one of the great tourist sites and sights of France; the castle on top, the church hanging onto the rock part way down and the old street down below, now full of shops of all sorts. Over lunch in the garden at the top of the cliff there was a short-toed treecreeper seen briefly and many serins. The descent meant seeing the 14 stations of the cross in reverse order, and custom was further ignored when none of the group followed the route on their knees. The fern southern polypody is quite a feature of the trees here, like common polypody in growth habit but much larger. Crag martins and jackdaws were new birds today, on route to the shrine of the black virgin that so many come to see or pay their respects too. Many had an ice cream down below, and most sensibly took the *ascenseur* back to the top, but special mention in despatches to Mike and Doreen who walked with me all the way up again. There was a griffon vulture as we rejoined the coach, but from the bird of prey collection, not a wild bird.

The day here always includes a trip to somewhere on the Dordogne river a little further north - though still in the *département* of the Lot - and at Lynn's suggestion we tried for the first time the village of Gluges. This small village is built under a cliff which then runs alongside the river. Very unusually, the cliff has nesting house martins, in the sort of habitat which presumably they used before someone invented eaves. Perhaps more attention was given to the obviously resident peregrine which first was seen carrying food then stayed with us along the cliff for the whole of our stay. In a damp corner there was maidenhair fern, ivy broomrape growing here as it did at St Cirq, and a bellflower that took a while over a drink at Les Falaises to identify as

Campanula erinus. Cliff found a male redstart, and black redstarts were everywhere feeding young. Then the short walk back to the main road where Jean Claude collected us in a different coach.

Maurice, the local farmer, neighbour and Mayor of the commune of Beaumat joined us for supper, along with his wife Brigitte. Nick, Chris and Anne again did sterling work with their French conversation. Outside, the scops owl was calling 'piu...piu...piu', the nightjar churring in the distance, and a bright Venus in the night sky was, through the telescope, plainly in a crescent like a waxing moon.

Friday 24 May - Labastide-Murat and walk back

There were several good views of a golden oriole before breakfast and a roe deer too.

Labastide-Murat is a pretty market town. A look at the church, and the birth place of its famous son, Joachim Murat, Napoleon's brother-in-law, are *de rigueur*, though none of this takes long to take in when it's not market day. So it wasn't long before we were all at the Hotel Climat for a drink and ready for the cross-country walk back to Galoubet. There was some time spent recapping on the many local geraniums on the first leg of the walk, round the back of the chateau. These included shining, cut-leaved, long-stalked, round-leaved, dovesfoot and hedgerow cranesbills, plus herb Robert and little Robin. The route then took us along a quiet lane past Guy's house, before crossing the main road to seek out a spot for lunch. This was part in the shade and part in the sun opposite a field in which there was false scorpion vetch and gladioli.

The carefully planned route included no fords, to the relief of all, rather through orchid-rich woods. A brief detour took us into the golf club at Bourrat, run by Alison and Paul, where we had a much needed cold drink and watched an impeccably behaved school party arrive for their golf lesson.

Real swallowtail and brimstone were two of the many butterflies seen as the walk continued through the tracks that eventually led up the hill to Bel Air. Pausing there - to admire the view, not for breath of course - one could see the church of Labastide-Murat now some distance behind us. Black-veined moth and a large wall brown butterfly were found on the last leg back to Galoubet.

We were back in good time so some had a dip and everyone joined Bob and Joan for early evening drinks in the Vernay suite.

Saturday 25 May - Galoubet to Toulouse

A local walk this morning, and with the recent warm weather the lizard orchids locally had come into flower and many more butterflies had come out. Alongside the D22, a Bonelli's warbler not only sang but was seen well. Black-veined whites, knapweed & spotted fritillaries were caught and studied.

Back at Maison Meulet, the first of the red helleborine flowers was out on the plant under the hedge, and in the scrubby field beyond there were the best clumps of birdsnest orchids to date.

Then lunch, farewells, by coach to Toulouse and a much smoother flight back to England.

CHEESES

This list of cheeses has rapidly moved from being an eccentricity to being *de rigueur* in the holiday report. At least three every evening - Monday was a gap in the recording, not in the choice of cheese - and some days an extra one at lunch too (eg Cantal one day), underlines the touch of luxury enjoyed. This is the list for the second week, though the range was as good in week one, and for a change they are listed in day order. The cheeses were always served with generous supplies of good wines, so this may account for any omissions or spelling mistakes ...

Saturday	Appenzel Saint Albray Blue de Causse	mature Swiss hard
Sunday	Tomme de Savoy Brie St Agur	from the high Alps
Monday	Crème de Bleu Fol épi	
Tuesday	Chaume Reblochon Forme d'Ambert Comte	Jura
Wednesday	Emmenthal (Swiss) St Nectaine fermier Rambol (with walnuts)	
Thursday	St Albray Roquefort société Salers	
Friday	Cabicoü Mascapone & Dulcilette Beaufort Vieux pané	goats cheese, from Rocamadour <i>causse</i> Rhône Alps

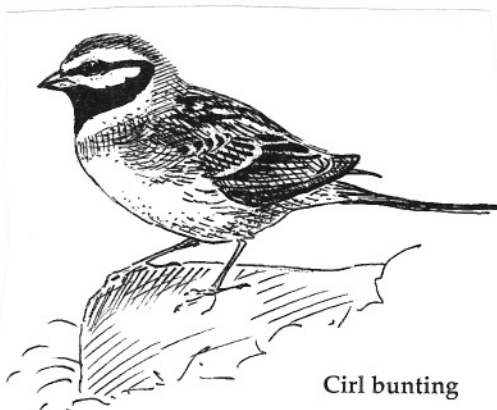


golden oriole

BIRDS

Species marked with a 1 or 2 were seen only on the first or second week respectively, otherwise everything was seen or heard both weeks. H = heard only.

Mallard		Woodlark	
Honey buzzard		Skylark	
Black kite		Swallow	
Short-toed eagle		House martin	
Sparrowhawk	1	Tree pipit	
Buzzard		Grey wagtail	
Kestrel		White wagtail	
Peregrine		Dipper	1
Quail		Wren	
Red-legged partridge		Robin	
Moorhen	1	Nightingale	
Black-headed gull	2	Black redstart	
Rock dove/feral pigeon		Redstart	2
Woodpigeon		Stonechat	
Collared dove		Wheatear	1
Turtle dove		Blackbird	
Cuckoo		Song thrush	
Barn owl		Mistle thrush	
Scops owl	H	Melodious warbler	
Tawny owl		Whitethroat	
Nightjar		Blackcap	
Swift		Bonelli's warbler	
Alpine swift	1	Chiffchaff	
Hoopoe	1	Goldcrest	1
Wryneck	1	Spotted flycatcher	2
Green woodpecker		Pied flycatcher	1
Great spotted woodpecker		Willow tit	1
Middle spotted woodpecker		Blue tit	
		Great tit	
		Nuthatch	
		Short-toed tree creeper	
		Golden oriole	
		Jay	
		Magpie	
		Jackdaw	
		Carrion crow	
		Raven	1
		Starling	
		House sparrow	
		Tree sparrow	2
		Chaffinch	
		Serín	
		Greenfinch	
		Goldfinch	
		Cirl bunting	
		Ortolan Bunting	1
		Corn bunting	



Cirl bunting

ORCHIDS

Most orchid species - those in the first list below - were seen in both week one and week two.

Man orchid
 Pyramidal orchid
 Narrow-leaved helleborine
 Red helleborine (not in flower for week one)
 Robust marsh orchid
 Broad-leaved helleborine (not in flower)
 Lizard orchid
 Violet birdsnest orchid (= limador)
 Common twayblade
 Birdsnest orchid
 Bee orchid
 Woodcock orchid
 Fly orchid
 Early spider orchid
 Loose-flowered orchid
 Early purple orchid
 Green-winged orchid
 Military orchid
 Lady orchid
 Monkey orchid
 Burnt-tip orchid
 Lesser butterfly orchid

These three were seen in week one ...

^{marsh}
 Southern orchid
 Tongue orchid
 Violet helleborine (not in flower)

... and these two in week two ...

Common spotted orchid
 Early marsh orchid

... giving a combined total of 27 orchid species seen this year.



early spider
orchid

BUTTERFLIES

Numbers and the species list of butterflies seen at Galoubet vary a little from week to week and between years according to the weather, the amount of effort put into catching and identifying the difficult groups such as fritillaries, and of course the time of year (for example the southern white admirals had plainly just emerged during the course of the second week. But irrespective of all this, a combined list of 37 species underlines the richness of this area for butterflies.

	week 1	week 2
Dingy skipper	x	x
Grizzled skipper	x	x
Small skipper		x
Green hairstreak	x	x
Holly blue	x	
Green-underside blue	x	
Duke of Burgundy fritillary	x	x
Small blue	x	
Small copper	x	
Adonis blue	x	x
Common blue	x	
Painted lady	x	x
Southern white admiral		x
Glanville fritillary	x	
Knapweed fritillary	x	x
Spotted fritillary	x	x
Meadow fritillary	x	x
Heath fritillary	x	
Comma	x	x
Red admiral	x	x
Scarce swallowtail	x	x
Swallowtail	x	x
Orange tip	x	x
Black-veined white	x	x
Small white		x
Berger's clouded yellow		x
Clouded yellow	x	x
Pale clouded yellow	x	
Brimstone	x	x
Wood white	x	x
Bath white	x	
Pearly heath	x	x
Small heath	x	x
Large wall brown		x
Wall brown		x
Meadow brown		x
Speckled wood	x	x



Scarce swallowtail