

CORSICA & THE FRENCH ALPS

1 – 9 MAY 2010

TOUR REPORT

LEADER: PETE MORRIS

This year saw us returning to the original format for this lovely tour which visits some of the most scenic parts of southern Europe. Following a very cold winter, the spring was late and the whole of the Mediterranean area seemed to suffer a particularly cold and wet spring. To a small degree this affected us, and it wasn't all shorts and t-shirt weather, especially not when it was snowing in the Alps!! Despite that, the weather always seemed to give us a long enough break when we needed it and indeed we recorded our highest ever total of species on this circuit, a very respectable 172, and this included just about all of the hoped for endemics and specialities. On Corsica, the obvious highlight was the superb endemic Corsican Nuthatch which was our overall bird of the trip, but an excellent supporting cast included Marmora's, Dartford and Moltoni's Warblers (the local form of Subalpine), Corsican Finch and Italian Sparrow as well as more widespread species such as Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwaters, Red Kite, Red-footed Falcon, Audouin's Gull, Pallid Swift and Eurasian Wryneck. Our time in the Alps was most pleasant and yielded the hoped for Rock Partridges (great scope views with minimal effort!) and a fine supporting cast which included lekking Black Grouse, a fine male Black Woodpecker, a superb pair of Wallcreepers, Alpine Accentor, White-winged Snowfinch and Citril Finch. Our final day in the lowlands near to Marseille rounded off a great tour with numerous Little Bustards, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Great Spotted Cuckoos and Calandra Larks being the pick of the bunch. During the tour we also admired great scenery, saw over 20 species of orchids and experienced some excellent cuisine (some great cheeseboards) and friendly hospitality, all washed down with fine French wine. Can't be too bad?!

After a rather tedious journey, including a rather long wait in Marseille, we eventually made it down to Ajaccio on Corsica late in the afternoon. The weather was cool and overcast and although a few Red Kites livened up the journey, by the time we arrived at Bonifacio it was pretty cool, breezy and wet. A brief foray into the field yielded a single Scopoli's Shearwater offshore, but it was otherwise quiet and cold so we returned to base for a well-earned meal in the attractive town.

The following morning, the weather had not really improved but we were out looking all the same. Flocks of European Bee-eaters and a Golden Oriole suggested there were a few migrants around, a Peregrine called loudly from the cliffs and offshore, good numbers of Yelkouan and Scopoli's

Shearwaters could be scoped side-by-side. The damp maquis was full of Sardinian Warblers but our other hoped-for species were elusive in the poor weather. A Blue Rock Thrush was noted on our way back to breakfast, after which we packed up and headed north, pausing to see Italian Sparrows in town before we left. A stop in another area of maquis produced some Dartford Warblers and a few nice species of orchid before the heavens opened again! Little else was found as we headed up the wet east coast, although a Moltoni's Warbler (the distinct local form of Subalpine Warbler) did show to some of us. We finally made it up to the Etang de Biguglia where the rain had abated a little and here bird activity was a little more evident. A pair of Little Bitterns were an excellent surprise here and also much appreciated (though more expected) were some fine Audouin's Gulls which gave some excellent scope views. As the rain fell again, we decided to head for the hills and relax with a glass of wine and another fine meal.

The forecast was not great but we awoke to clear and blue skies and made the most of it! Before long we were in some lovely mature montane coniferous forest watching the bird we had come to see, a fine male Corsican Nuthatch that serenaded us almost as soon as we had left the vehicle! Having soaked up this stunner we continued with a series of superb sightings which included a fine Eurasian Wryneck, a fabulous Firecrest complete with flaming headgear, a fine singing male Marmora's Warbler and some jumpy Corsican Finches complete with brown backs and bright yellow underparts. In just a couple of hours we had seen all the birds we were after, and in glorious sunshine, with plenty of orchids to keep us amused too! As the skies were still clear we decided to head over to the top of the Asco Valley in the hope of a Lammergeier, but this time luck was not on our side. The clouds built as we enjoyed (as did the local corvids!) a lavish picnic, and scanning of the crags yielded little more than Alpine Choughs and some Mouflon. The area was botanically interesting with the endemic insectivorous Corsican Butterwort being particularly noteworthy, and as we headed back to the hotel, we paused at an area where many raptors and swifts were evident, and managed to pick-out a female Red-footed Falcon and a few Alpine Swifts.

The following morning the weather had deteriorated somewhat, but it did not deter us. We decided first of all to have a look for more Corsican Finches and duly found a large and showy flock as well as a few Woodlarks. We then headed down to the Etang de Biguglia where we found a stunning trio of Red-footed Falcons hawking over some reeds as well as some more great views of Audouin's Gulls and a few other trip ticks including Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers. We then decided to do something a little rash and headed for Cap Corse on the northern tip of the island. The area is famous as a migration hotspot but is quite tortuous to get to! Nevertheless, we made it, and it proved to be an interesting afternoon. Large numbers of European Bee-eaters were present along the wires as we made our way there and a few large birds were clearly attempting to head north in the inclement weather including a Honey Buzzard and a few Purple Herons. At ground level, several Whinchats were present as well as a Pied Flycatcher, Wood Warblers and a migrant Woodchat Shrike. Best of all though was the very showy Moltoni's Warbler which gave great views to all. On the way back we stopped at a small wetland where a large mixed flock of Blue-headed and Grey-headed Wagtails was the pick of the birds on view.

Our final morning on Corsica was another good one as we began by successfully finding a couple of male Blue Rock Thrushes. We then headed for an area of the Etang de Biguglia that we had not previously explored and found several new species for the tour including Great Egret, Wood Sandpiper, some smart Eurasian Stone-curlews, Great Reed Warbler, Eurasian Golden Oriole and a fine male Red-backed Shrike amongst others. We then headed to Bastia Airport and checked in for our short flight across to Marseille.

All ran smoothly and before too long we were heading north on the motorway towards the Alps. We paused on the way, but in the cool grey weather things were pretty quiet, though we did enjoy some lovely views of Bonelli's Warblers and some vocal Short-toed Treecreepers. We arrived at our very homely hotel late in the afternoon and settled in for a fine meal, some good wine and our first crack at the amazing cheeseboard!!

The following day we drove some distance to have a crack at some of the key birds that we were after. Our first stop was at an amazing gorge where we did not take too long to find a fantastic pair of Wallcreepers that flicked their crimson wings at us as we watched in awe! Unfortunately many of the high passes were still closed so we had to somewhat alter our plans and just get to where we could! We drove fairly high and walked on but the snow was so deep on the slopes that there was little prospect for seeing much so we decided to look lower and before too long had heard the much-wanted Rock Partridge! They sounded like they should be in view, but try as we might, we could not see them. Plan B was required, so a couple of us began to climb the steep slope, and from a new vantage point, we were able to see the pair foraging on the steep slope above us and climbed back down to put them in the scope for the rest of the group. Brilliant, the tough one was under the belt. Further explorations that day yielded more Alpine goodies that had been forced down by the harsh weather including an Alpine Accentor, a fine flock of White-winged Snowfinches and several attractive Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes. In another area we found comical Crested Tits, some fine Citril Finches and some Alpine Ibex to complement the Alpine Chamois we had seen earlier. To round things off, a Short-toed Eagle showed well on our way back; not a bad day really!

The following day we explored some Alpine areas closer to our accommodation. The mist was swirling all around us but lifted long enough for us to enjoy eight brilliant male Black Grouse at their lek. Ring Ouzels were seen well as they perched up in the scope and more Rock Partridges could be heard from the slopes but the mist made things difficult! Lower down, the woods held a fantastic selection of orchids as well as a number of common woodland species, and we then made our way back for a pleasant lunch. Later the same day we explored another high pass closer to the hotel, and here we found a Golden Eagle, good numbers of Red-billed and Alpine Choughs, a male Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush and a male Red-backed Shrike, whilst in the nearby woodland a fine male Common Crossbill and a small and showy flock of Citril Finches were much appreciated.

On our final day in the Alps, we took things decidedly easy as we had already seen most of our targets. Consequently we did not venture too far from the hotel, though this did not stop us finding our top target, a magnificent male Black Woodpecker! We had plenty of time for orchid watching and saw other interesting birds including a couple more Golden Eagles, some smart Water Pipits, several White-throated Dippers, more dapper Firecrests, and many of the species we had seen previously. We also got back in time for a relaxing last meal, washed down with the obligatory fine wine!

An early start was required on the final morning for we had a long drive to get to La Crau, a stony desert that is one of southern France's top birding spots. Despite the cool weather, we were not to be disappointed as we got some brilliant views of the numerous Little Bustards present. We also saw a couple of flocks of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse in flight and found numerous Calandra Larks which showed well. Lesser Kestrels hovered all around us and several elegant Montagu's Harriers quartered over the plains. Tawny Pipits and Greater Short-toed Larks were also much in evidence whilst at the edge of the plain we found some splendid Great Spotted Cuckoos, a Southern Grey Shrike and a vocal Melodious Warbler. Numerous other interesting species were also seen including a pair of (non-introduced) Red-legged Partridges, a dashing Eurasian Hobby, several Eurasian Stone-curlews, some

confiding Eurasian Hoopoes and several Crested Larks. As we left the area a White Stork drifted over, and we made our way to Marseille for a final stop at Les Paluns Nature Reserve.

As usual, the incredible display of *Ophrys* orchids on display took up much of our time but we did look up and find a few birds too! In fact new trip birds came thick and fast with Squacco Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron and numerous Red-crested Pochards being amongst our favourites. Now, all that was left was to make the very short journey back to Marseille and head for home. It had been a fantastic trip, despite the sometimes unseasonable weather, and we had achieved what we had set out to do: fantastic looks at some seldom seen European endemics; great scenery; (too much!) great food; plenty of wine (for the group members at least!) and a fun group. Not too bad a combination!

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/index.html>

PODICIPEDIDAE

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: We noted a couple at the Etang de Biguglia on Corsica with another seen at Les Paluns Nature Reserve near to Marseille Airport on the last day.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: Small numbers were noted at the Etang de Biguglia and at Les Paluns Nature Reserve near to Marseille Airport on the last day.

PROCELLARIIDAE

Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*: Great views of 30 or more feeding off Cape Pertusato in southern Corsica where we saw them resting on the sea and flapping lazily over the waves. Most authors lump Cory's Shearwater *C. borealis* (which shows less white in the underwing and breeds on the Atlantic Islands) in this species, using the name Cory's Shearwater for the enlarged species

Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*: Up to 70 were seen with the previous species off Cape Pertusato near Bonifacio. This form was formerly lumped in Manx Shearwater *P. puffinus*, and indeed looks pretty similar to it. This species is classified as Near Threatened by BirdLife International. Its world population is estimated at 100,000 and is thought to be declining. Although the population is probably larger than some estimates suggest, reports of extremely low breeding success at several key breeding colonies indicate that current declines may accelerate markedly when current breeders approach the end of their life cycle, and may be moderately rapid over three generations, hence justifying its precautionary up-listing to Near Threatened. Declines have probably been ongoing for many years, and are projected to continue.

PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Just two or three were seen on Etang de Biguglia on Corsica.

European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*: Up to 30 were seen along the coast near to Bonifacio on Corsica. The subspecies in the Mediterranean is *desmarestii* which is generally fairly scarce. The young birds are much whiter below than birds from further north.

ARDEIDAE

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: A new bird for the tour, we enjoyed some very nice scope views of a pair from the bridge at Etang de Biguglia in northern Corsica.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: Another write-in, we saw two adults in flight at Les Paluns Nature Reserve near to Marseille Airport on the last day.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: A couple were noted at the marsh near to Cap Corse with others in the lowlands of southern France including a few on La Crau and at Les Paluns Nature Reserve. This form is more usually known as Cattle Egret, but if the eastern (Asian) form *coromandus* is split off under the name Eastern Cattle Egret (it is longer-necked, longer-legged and much more colourful in its breeding plumage) then Western is added as a modifier for this form.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: A couple showed well at Les Paluns Nature Reserve near to Marseille Airport on the last day.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: Fairly common at Etang de Biguglia and other wetlands on Corsica and others at wetlands on the mainland including at Les Paluns Nature Reserve where we recorded at least 15.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*: We saw a single at the southern end of the Etang de Biguglia on Corsica on our last morning there. This species seems to be spreading pretty rapidly into Western Europe.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Small numbers were noted at several spots during the trip, the first of which were at the Etang de Biguglia.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: At least four were noted at Cap Corse, presumably birds that wanted to move further north but were hampered by the poor weather.

CICONIDAE

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*: A single flew over us at the edge of La Crau, just as we were leaving the area.

PHOENICOPTERIDAE

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*: A couple of pallid immatures were noted at Etang de Biguglia on Corsica and a few more were seen near to Marseille.

ANATIDAE

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: Up to 60 were seen on our visit to Les Paluns Nature Reserve – clearly of feral stock!

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: A couple were seen from the car between La Crau and Les Paluns Nature Reserve.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: About eight were seen at Les Paluns Nature Reserve where they must breed.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: Biggest numbers were on the Etang de Biguglia with just a handful elsewhere.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: A couple were seen at Les Paluns Nature Reserve including a female with small ducklings.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*: We enjoyed some great views of these gaudy ducks at Les Paluns Nature Reserve where several drakes were on show.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*: A couple were noted from the car near to Gap on a couple of occasions.

ACCIPITRIDAE

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: We noted three singles on Corsica, all of which were likely to be migrants, with quite nice views at Cap Corse.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*: This species was common in the low flat areas around Marseille where we had a high count of c50 on the day that we visited La Crau and Les Paluns though they were far less common up in the mountains.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*: Good numbers of this elegant raptor were seen on Corsica with up to a dozen logged in a day, with many close views. This species is listed as Near Threatened by BirdLife International. Its world population is estimated at between 42,000 and 51,000 and is decreasing. This species is listed as Near Threatened because it is experiencing a moderately rapid population decline, owing mostly to poisoning from pesticides and persecution, and changes in land-use amongst other threats. Despite the current rapid declines in southern Europe, if population increases in northern range states are sustained the species may qualify for down listing in the future.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: A single was seen as we were driving back on our first full day in the Alps, with a couple more hovering over Les Paluns Nature Reserve on our visit there.

- Western Marsh Harrier (Eurasian M H) *Circus aeruginosus*: We noted a total of 13 on Corsica where they were most conspicuous around Etang de Biguglia and at least eight on the mainland on our last day around La Crau and Les Paluns Nature Reserve.
- Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: At least four, including an adult male and an immature male, were seen quartering over La Crau on our productive visit to this excellent site.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: An adult male was seen well at Cape Pertusato near to Bonifacio during our rather damp morning there. The subspecies concerned, *wolterstorffi* is endemic to Corsica and Sardinia.
- Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: We enjoyed regular sightings of small numbers of this widespread raptor on a daily basis. The subspecies on Corsica, *arrigonii*, is endemic to Corsica and Sardinia.
- Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: We enjoyed some good sightings of two individuals close to St Disdier-en-Dévoluy, including one perched high on a crag. The spectacular Aigle Royale as it is known in French was otherwise not too conspicuous, perhaps due to the often poor weather.
- Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*: A single was noted at Cap Corse where I believe they probably breed and another was seen at Les Paluns on the final day.

FALCONIDAE

- Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*: It was a real treat to see such good numbers of these attractive insectivorous falcons in La Crau on our last morning. This species is classified as Vulnerable by BirdLife International. Its world population is estimated at 140,000 and is thought to be declining. This species has undergone rapid declines in western Europe, equivalent to c46% in each decade since 1950, on its wintering grounds in South Africa, equivalent to c25% in each decade since 1971, and possibly in parts of its Asian range. If these declines are representative of populations in all regions, the total population is likely to have declined rapidly, which qualifies the species as Vulnerable. It is predicted that these declines will continue.
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Fairly common and widespread in small numbers, and often present around high cliffs in the Alps.
- Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*: After a rather unsatisfactory view of a female on Corsica, we went on to have brilliant views of a pair hawking over the reeds at the Etang de Biguglia with another female also there. The adult male was a joy to watch. This species is listed as Near Threatened by BirdLife International. Its world population is estimated at between 300,000 and 800,000. This species is listed as Near Threatened because it is experiencing a moderately rapid population decline, owing to habitat loss and degradation. This species would qualify for up-listing to a higher threat category if evidence suggests a rapid population decline.
- Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: An adult showed well over La Crau on the final morning.
- Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*: A single showed well along the dramatic cliffs at Cape Pertusato near Bonifacio and another was noted at the opposite end of the island at Cap Corse.

PHASIANIDAE

- Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix*: Some fine scope views of these gorgeous creatures on our early morning visit to the area above our hotel. The group of eight lekking males were particularly great to see. A cracking bird and always a delight to see.
- Rock Partridge *Alectoris graeca*: We had life rather easy with this one this year, with only Pete and Jo needing to venture from the track in order to locate a calling pair. Once this had been achieved, we could all relax and watch this tricky species foraging for as long as we

wanted through the scopes. One of Europe's most difficult endemics, it made it in to all of our top sixes and was our second favourite bird overall.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*: A pair were flushed and seen briefly near to Bonifacio but we had much better views of another pair by the road in La Crau on the final day. As with the above species, this species is a European endemic though occurs outside Europe where populations have been introduced.

RALLIDAE

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: A total of four singles were noted, the first of which was in the north of Corsica.

Eurasian Coot (Coot) *Fulica atra*: First seen at the Etang de Biguglia where they were pretty common, and we went on to see quite a few more, including good numbers at Les Paluns.

OTIDIDAE

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*: c15 were seen in La Crau on the final morning, some of them showing very well indeed. Great to find them to be so common here still and a real tour highlight watching fine males strutting through the grass. Made it into Grahame's top six. This species is listed as Near Threatened by BirdLife International. Its world population is estimated at around 260,000. This species is listed as Near Threatened because it is probably experiencing a moderately rapid overall population decline, driven by rapid declines in the west of its range, owing mainly to habitat loss and degradation, as well as low-level hunting pressure. Recent increases in the east of its range are so far unquantified, and require further study. Such data may have implications for the overall population trend and listing of the species.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: At least three at Les Paluns Nature Reserve on the final afternoon.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: Four seen from the van as we drove along the coast near to Marseilles on the last day.

BURHINIDAE

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedipnemus*: Great views of three on Corsica that were cunningly spotted by Grahame, and another six or so of these bug-eyed, semi-nocturnal, waders were seen at La Crau.

CHARADRIIDAE

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: A single was found on the beach near to the Etang de Biguglia.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*: A fine male was also present on the beach at the mouth of the Etang de Biguglia.

SCLOPACIDAE

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: A smart adult summer plumaged bird was found by Mick and Grahame at Les Paluns on the last afternoon.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: A couple were found in a roadside flooded field adjacent to the Etang de Biguglia.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: A total of four were seen at Etang de Biguglia and Les Paluns.

LARIDAE

Black-headed Gull (Common B-h G) *Larus ridibundus*: c12 at Les Paluns Nature Reserve on our final day. Most were non-breeding first summer birds.

Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*: We enjoyed excellent views of up to eight sat on posts at the Etang de Biguglia. Two of these smart gulls were ringed and I have found out the history of the individuals concerned and put it in an appendix at the end of the report (see page 17). This species is listed as Near Threatened by BirdLife International. Its world population is estimated at around 58,000. This species may undergo a moderately rapid population decline in future if current fishery practices change and as such it is precautionarily treated as Near Threatened.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*: By far and away the commonest gull on Corsica and along the Mediterranean coast with more than 100 being logged on some days.

STERNIDAE

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: A couple were seen on our visit to Les Paluns Nature Reserve.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: A single summer-plumaged individual was seen distantly on the Etang de Biguglia just before we left for the airport.

PTEROCLIDAE

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*: Despite plenty of scanning, we only managed a couple of relatively distant flight views of small groups at La Crau on our last morning.

COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: Most of the birds we saw were Feral Pigeons, though a few of those seen on Corsica were perhaps the genuine article.

Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*: Scattered sightings of small numbers on Corsica and throughout the mainland.

Eurasian Collared Dove: *Streptopelia decaocto*: Reasonably common in towns and villages throughout.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Pleasingly common and conspicuous on Corsica where many showed well. This species has declined at an alarming rate in the UK in recent years.

CUCULIDAE

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*: Great views of a couple of adults at La Crau on the last day. They mostly parasitize Common Magpies.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: Frequently heard, we were also fortunate to see a few on both Corsica and the mainland. Another species that is conspicuous by its absence in much of the UK countryside these days.

STRIGIDAE

European Scops Owl *Otus scops* (H): Sadly, this species remained largely silent and steadfastly refused to show, with just a few calls heard.

APODIDAE

Common Swift *Apus apus*: The commonest swift throughout, with up to 100 or more per day both on Corsica and in Southern France.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*: A few were seen around Bonifacio with others over Corte on a couple of occasions. Sadly the climatic conditions were not always conducive to swift-watching!

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: Four were seen very well in a swift feeding-frenzy as we were travelling back from the Asco Valley.

MEROPIDAE

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: Commonly heard on Corsica where we also managed to see some excellent flocks of migrants including at least 200 in the Cap Corse area. We also saw a few around La Crau and Les Paluns at the end of the tour. A cracking species and always a delight to see.

UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: A couple of singles were seen briefly on Corsica and then another couple were seen at La Crau at the end of the tour, including one which showed at exceptionally close range.

PICIDAE

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: It took some effort but we ended up seeing three on Corsica, including one which showed really well. Always an endearing bird to see.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*: Quite a few yaffles and in the end, good views of a single near to our hotel in the Alps.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: We were not really expecting to see this one, making it all the more satisfying when a fine male was lined up in the scope near to our hotel in the Alps. Grahame's top bird, Jo's third favourite, and third overall.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: On Corsica, we saw the endemic subspecies *parroti* and we saw another in the Alps with one or two more heard.

ALAUDIDAE

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*: At least a dozen were seen at La Crau, including excellent views of several perched birds.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*: Another interesting lark that was pretty common at La Crau on the final morning.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: At least four were seen around the edge of La Crau, with some good views.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*: Several were seen giving their wonderful yodelling song in the Corsican mountains.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: A few heard and eventually seen in the Alps and very common at La Crau.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia*: Small numbers were noted at several of the wetland sites.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*: We enjoyed some great views in craggy areas on Corsica and further scattered sightings throughout the Alps with many great views.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Recorded daily and common throughout with hundreds seen on some days.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica*: Another common hirundine that was present in good numbers.

MOTACILLIDAE

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: A couple in Corsica were only seen calling in flight, but we made up for this with at least four at La Crau which showed well perched atop piles of stones.

- Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: Several in the Alps where their marvellous parachuting song flights were much admired.
- Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*: Some fine breeding plumaged birds were eventually observed at a couple of locations in the Alps. They were particularly fond of feeding around the edge of snow-melt. I suspect that the late spring may have stopped them from returning to their breeding areas as we didn't hear any singing.
- Blue-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] flava*: An active and skittish flock of about 50 *flava* wagtails near to Cap Corse included several of this form, and we saw another at Les Paluns on the final day.
- Ashy-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] cinereocapilla*: A single singing bird that showed characters of this form was found north of Marseille.
- Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] thunbergi*: The flock of *flava* wagtails near to Cap Corse included several of this form, and we saw another one or two at Les Paluns on the final day. Several of those that we saw were pretty dark on the crown. This form breeds a long way north and is hence a later migrant as its breeding grounds are not habitable until later in the spring.
- Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: Surprisingly, just three were seen on Corsica and two further individuals in the Alps.
- White Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] alba*: Just a handful on Corsica and then common in the Alps.

CINCLIDAE

- White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: Having failed to find this species on Corsica, we eventually managed to find a few in the Alps, with some good scope views. The form concerned is *aquaticus*.

TROGLODYTIDAE

- Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: We enjoyed great views of singing birds of the *koenigi* (endemic to Sardinia and Corsica) on Corsica and heard a few more in the Alps but we did not try too hard to see one there!

PRUNELLIDAE

- Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: A few seen in the junipers in the alpine meadows in the Alps.
- Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*: A single showed well through the scope in amongst a flock of snowfinches. They were fairly low down, below the tree line, presumably due to the hard winter.

TURDIDAE

- European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: Mostly heard but at least one was seen well on Corsica and a few in the Alps.
- Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: Commonly heard in the lowlands of Corsica and the mainland, we did manage to see a couple near to Sisteron.
- Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: Fairly common in the Alps where they could be found in rocky areas and sometimes on buildings in villages. An interesting song.
- Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: Our first, a female on Corsica, was a migrant, and we went on to see a few more in the Alps including some splendid males.
- Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: At least a dozen migrants of this smart species were seen on Corsica and a few more on the mainland, though this was another one that didn't really seem to have made it back to its breeding areas higher up.
- European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*: We noted a pair on Corsica and a few around the edge of La Crau. Many authors lump this form (of Europe and North Africa) and Siberian Stonechat (occurring from the northern Caucasus eastwards across Eurasia) in African Stonechat *S.*

torquata (of sub-Saharan Africa) using the name Common Stonechat for the enlarged species.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: A couple of singles (presumably migrants) were seen on Corsica and we went on to get many great views in the Alps, some of the males looking particularly pristine.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: We enjoyed great views of several in the Alps including a few that had been forced lower down by the hard weather. The one amongst the red berries in the snow was particularly fine.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*: A female was seen near to Bonifacio but we managed to better this with a couple of males on our final morning on Corsica.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*: A total of four were seen in the Alps, including a couple of fine males which showed very well in the scope above St Disdier-en-Dévoluy. The subspecies concerned is *alpestris* which shows more extensive pale fringes than northern birds.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*: Small numbers throughout.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: One seen and others heard singing above St Disdier-en-Dévoluy.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: We noted a single on Corsica and then several were seen at various locations in the Alps.

SYLVIIDAE

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*: Heard and seen well at Etang de Biguglia on Corsica and also heard at Les Paluns Nature Reserve on the last afternoon.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*: Heard and seen on a few occasions around the Etang de Biguglia on Corsica and also heard at Les Paluns Nature Reserve at the end of the trip.

Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*: It was a real surprise to hear one of these singing in the centre of Corte! Presumably a late migrant, it gave some good views to us all as it sang from a small area of waste ground.

European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: At least a couple seen at the marsh at the edge of the Etang de Biguglia, with one or two others heard.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: One showed well at the marsh at the edge of the Etang de Biguglia just before we flew out of Corsica.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*: We managed some good views of a singing bird at the edge of La Crau on our final morning.

Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda*: It took some hunting about, but eventually we got some excellent views of several of these charismatic little warblers on Corsica. This species is very close to being a European endemic, only occurring elsewhere as a scarce winter visitor to North Africa. It's amazing to think that one is singing in Gwent as I write this, the fifth one to have made it to the UK!

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*: Great views of at least four individuals at a couple of sites on Corsica. The nominate subspecies here is greyer on the upperparts than British birds. This species is listed as Near Threatened by BirdLife International. Its world population is estimated at around 5,700,000 and 11,000,000. This species is declining at a moderately rapid rate, qualifying the species for uplifting to Near Threatened. Declines in the core population in Spain were largely responsible for the global declines; the drivers are not entirely clear but include habitat degradation and modification.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*: After a difficult start when we only saw them briefly near to Lecci, we went on to get much better views at Cap Corse. The birds concerned are colloquially known as Moltoni's Warbler *S. [cantillans] moltonii* and differ from nominate birds by their pinker underparts and 'churred' wren-like (rather than 'tacked') contact call notes.

- Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*: Annoyingly common in the maquis at Bonifacio when we were looking for more interesting *Sylvias*!
- Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: A single individual, presumably a migrant, was seen at Bonifacio, with another briefly for some later on Corsica.
- Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: Very commonly heard throughout the trip with a few showing well, especially on Corsica.
- Bonelli's Warbler (Western Bonelli's Warbler) *Phylloscopus bonelli*: First seen as we made our way up to the Alps, and several more in the delightful mixed forests that we visited in the Alps.
- Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*: A few migrants of this colourful species were noted around Cap Corse.
- Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: Several heard in Corsica and the Alps, with just a few seen.
- Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: One seen and a couple of others heard in the higher altitude coniferous forests in the Alps.
- Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*: Some great views of a couple of males in the mixed forest of Corsica and in the Alps. Amazing when the males flare out their firey crests.

MUSCICAPIDAE

- Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Several were noted on Corsica. At this time of year it is hard to know which were migrants and which were breeding birds, but at least some of them are likely to be referable to the subspecies *tyrrhenica* which is endemic to Corsica and Sardinia. Another species that has declined rapidly in the UK in recent years.
- European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*: A migrant female was seen at Cap Corse and we went on to see another female and a male in the Alps.

AEGITHALIDAE

- Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: A few seen in Corsica and on the mainland.

PARIDAE

- Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*: A few were seen well in the Alps, mostly in the woods above our hotel.
- Willow Tit *Parus montanus*: Best picked out by its distinctive 'chaying' calls, we first saw this one near to Barcelonnette.
- Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*: Several showed very well in the mixed forest in the Alps. A cute species and always great to see.
- Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Several seen at higher altitudes on Corsica where it is represented by the subspecies *sardus* which is endemic to Corsica and Sardinia. Also a few seen in coniferous forest in the Alps, where it is likely the nominate subspecies.
- European Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: Reasonably common throughout.
- Great Tit *Parus major*: Seen regularly in small numbers.

SITTIDAE

- Corsican Nuthatch *Sitta whiteheadi*: One of the stars of the tour, in fact our bird of the trip (seen on Mick's birthday!) we got some excellent views of two different males and a female in the mountains of Corsica. This species is classified as Vulnerable by BirdLife International. Its world population is estimated at between 3,100 and 4,400 and is thought to be declining. It has been up listed to Vulnerable because recent data has shown that its small population has declined in the last decade due to logging and fires reducing the amount of large, mature Corsican pine available. Although some forests are regenerating, the slow maturation time of the pine means that potential new habitat does not

compensate for the loss of mature pines elsewhere, therefore it is assumed that the population will continue to decline.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: We saw one at a roadside stop on the way to the Alps and heard others in the Alps.

TICHIDROMIDAE

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*: The views of the pair in the impressive gorge in the Alps were great and we were able to study both the male and the female at length in the scope! The flash of crimson as they flick their wings never fails to impress.

CERTHIIDAE

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*: A single bird high up in the Alps was our only one.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*: A single was noted in the open mature woodland near to Sisteron, and we went on to hear several more. A species which is best located by its distinctive song.

ORIOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: A migrant male was seen in flight near to Bonifacio and a couple more, including a perched female, showed well near to the Etang de Biguglia on our last morning on Corsica. Always a good one to catch up with!

LANIIDAE

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*: We were fortunate to see a few males of this attractive species, the first of which was a migrant on Corsica with others, presumably on territory, in the Alps.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*: A single was scoped in scrub at the edge of La Crau, where it is represented by the nominate subspecies.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*: A single migrant at Cap Corse showed a large white patch at the base of the primaries and was therefore presumably a migrant nominate bird rather than the breeding form *badius* which lacks the white patch at the base of the primaries.

CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: Seen regularly in small numbers throughout, the subspecies on Corsica *corsicanus* is endemic to the island.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: Absent on Corsica but commonly seen on the mainland.

Alpine Chough (Yellow-billed C) *Pyrrhocorax graculus*: Some distant individuals were seen circling around the crags at Haut Asco and then fairly common at a couple of spots in the Alps where we got some much closer views.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*: A more elegant species than the previous one, we enjoyed good views of small numbers at a few spots in the Alps, sometimes together with the Alpines.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Common in the low-lying areas around Marseille.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: At least 20 were seen on La Crau on the final day.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*: Common in small numbers on the mainland.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*: Common on Corsica. Some authors recognize the subspecies *sardonicus* for the birds on Corsica whilst others include this form in the nominate.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: We noted small numbers of these monstrous-billed corvids in Corsica and just the odd one in the Alps.

STURNIDAE

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: Common in the lowlands around Marseille.

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*: Truly spotless and very greasy looking! Fairly common on Corsica, the only place this species breeds in France.

PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Absent from Corsica but pretty common anywhere close to human habitation on the French mainland.

Italian Sparrow *Passer italiae*: All of the sparrows (males at least) seen on Corsica were this distinctive and attractive form. It is thought by some to be a stabilized hybrid between House and Spanish Sparrow, but as it seems to be stable and distinctive, some authorities (including Handbook of Birds of the World and the 2nd Edition of the Collins Guide) have recently treated it as a full species making it a localized European endemic.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: A couple seen on the edge of La Crau.

White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*: A flock of perhaps as many as 30 were scoped feeding lower down the mountains than usual (due to the hard weather) and looked particularly attractive when they fluttered across the valley like giant snowflakes!

FRINGILLIDAE

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: Present in small numbers throughout.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*: Their high-pitched twittering songs were frequently audible and we got some great views of these sprightly lemon-rumped finches on a number of occasions. The first were seen close to Bonifacio.

Citril Finch *Serinus citrinella*: Great views of a couple of small groups of these attractive finches in the juniper forests in the Alps. Another European endemic which has just strayed into North Africa as a vagrant on a couple of occasions.

Corsican Finch *Serinus corsicanus*: Great views of this brown-backed recently split form, in the mountains of Corsica, where it was relatively common. Another European endemic, it is restricted to Corsica and Sardinia.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*: Just small numbers noted.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: Small numbers throughout. The form seen on Corsica, *tschusii*, is endemic to Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily

European Siskin *Carduelis spinus*: Small numbers were noted high up a couple of times in the Alps.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: A small group was seen on the Corsican coast and then regularly seen (by most of us at least!) in the alpine meadows.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: On Corsica, we got excellent views of a female of the endemic subspecies *corsicana* and we went on to see a few more in the Alps including a male that was scoped up.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: A single was seen briefly in the Alps with a few others heard.

EMBERIZIDAE

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*: Several seen at fairly high altitude in the Alps where some of the individuals were hopping about at the edge of the snow.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*: Some great views of several on Corsica, and a couple in arable land north of Sisteron.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*: Although reasonably widespread in the Alps, they were, as usual, a little elusive though in the end we had great views of several.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: Common in the open areas on Corsica and in the arable areas north of Sisteron and also around La Crau.

MAMMALS

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*: A total of three seen around La Crau.

European Hare (Brown H) *Lepus europaeus*: We saw a total of four in southern France.

Eurasian Red Squirrel (Red S) *Sciurus vulgaris*: We enjoyed some great views of some rather dark and tufty-eared individuals in the high coniferous forest in the Alps.

Alpine Marmot *Marmota marmota*: A constant companion in the higher meadows in the Alps, the calls could often be heard echoing across the valleys.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: Two singles seen, including one trotting across the snow quite close to the Rock Partridges!

Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*: We enjoyed some reasonably good views of a small pod just off the coast at Bonifacio.

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*: Our best views were of several at the tree line above St Disdier-en-Dévoluy where we also heard their gruff calls.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*: A small group were seen in a river bed one evening as we headed back to the hotel.

Alpine Ibex *Capra ibex*: A small group showed well in the Alps including one which was rather surprised by a close encounter with Jo.

Mouflon *Ovis gmelinii*: A small group were seen high in the Asco Valley. The exact status of Mouflon and indeed what it is, is a little confusing. It is sometimes treated as Domestic Sheep and sometimes named *O. orientalis*. From what I can understand, the Mouflon on Corsica were introduced (from domestic stock) about 8,000 years ago!

Alpine Chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra*: Several seen well on the high slopes in the Alps.

APPENDIX 1 – Data for the two ringed Audouin's Gulls that we saw at the Etang de Biguglia

Larus audouinii

ICZA

N0014709

Pullus ringed on 19-06-05 at Is. Pianosa - Arco P.ta Grottone, 4236N1005E, Italia by De Faveri, Sposimo

OBSERVATIONS:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Locality</i>	<i>Province details</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Coordinates</i>	<i>Remarks</i>	<i>Observer</i>
16-07-05	Is. Pianosa - Arco P.ta	Campo nell'Elba, Livorno	Italia	4236N1005E	giovane volante, davanti colonia	L. Leone
17-07-05	Is. Pianosa - Arco P.ta	Campo nell'Elba, Livorno	Italia	4236N1005E	giovane volante, davanti colonia	L. Leone
27-04-09	Is. Molara, P.ta Falcone	Olbia, Sassari	Italia	4052N0944E	up, in colonia di 200	N. Baccetti
02-05-10	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	photo, with KA3	Pete Morris

Larus audouinii

KA3

N0011036

Pullus ringed on 21-06-99 at Is. Sant'Andrea, 4003N1756E, Italia by G. Marzano

OBSERVATIONS:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Locality</i>	<i>Province details</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Coordinates</i>	<i>Remarks</i>	<i>Observer</i>
03-07-02	Is. Capense	Centuri, Haute Corse	Francia	4300N0920E	In colonia	S. Travichon
04-07-02	Is. Capense	Centuri, Haute Corse	Francia	4300N0920E	In colonia	S. Travichon
20-02-04	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	in gruppo di 11	J. P. Cantera
11-03-04	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	gruppo di 10	JP Cantera
25-03-05	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E		J. P. Cantera
21-02-06	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	20. inds.	J.P. Cantera
22-02-06	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	18 inds.	J.P. Cantera
28-02-06	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	8 inds	J.P. Cantera
16-01-07	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	2 inds	T. Rossi
17-01-07	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	5 inds	J.P. Cantera
04-04-07	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	22 ind	J.P. Cantera
02-05-10	Etang de Biguglia	Haute Corse	Francia	4230N0930E	photo, with ICZA	Pete Morris

APPENDIX 2 – Selective flora encountered on the trip, kindly compiled by Jo. Most of the Orchids are photographed in the following colour section

A. Orchids seen on Corsica

Sword-leaved (or Narrow-leaved) Helleborine *Cephalanthera longifolia*
Violet Limodore *Limodorum arbortivum*
Small White Orchid *Leucorchis albida*
Barton's Orchid *Dactylorhiza insularis*
Loose (or Lax)-Flowered Orchid *Orchis laxiflora*
Pink Butterfly Orchid *Orchis papilionacea*
Green-winged Orchid *Orchis morio*
Long-spurred Orchid *Orchis longicornu*
Milky Orchid *Orchis lactea*
Heart-flowered Serapias *Serapias cordigera*
Small-flowered Serapias *Serapias parviflora*
Tongue Orchid *Serapias lingua*
Yellow Ophrys *Ophrys lutea*
Dark Ophrys *Ophrys incubacea*

B. Orchids seen on the French Mainland

Large White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*
Elder-flowered Orchid *Dactylorhiza sambucina*
Man Orchid *Aceras anthropophorum*
Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*
Pale-flowered Orchid *Orchis pallens*
Lady Orchid *Orchis purpurea*
Lizard Orchid *Himantoglossum hircinum*
Yellow Ophrys *Ophrys lutea*
Woodcock Ophrys *Ophrys scolopax*
Late Spider Ophrys *Ophrys holoserica*
Early Spider Ophrys *Ophrys sphegodes*
Small Spider Ophrys *Ophrys araneola*
Bertoloni's Ophrys *Ophrys bertoloni*

C. Other notable plants seen on Corsica

Cytinus hypocistis (Parasite of *Cistus* spp)
Silene colorata
Kohlrauschia velutina
Mattiola sinuata
Astragalus massiliensis
Trifolium stellatum
Anthyllis vulneraria
Linum bienne
Linum maritimum
Tuberaria guttata

Ferula communis
Foeniculum vulgare
Cyclamen repandum
Pancreatum illyricum
Tragopogon porrifolius
Pinguicula corsica
Gagea fistulosa
Muscari comosum
Helleborus argentifolius
Gladiolus italicus
Allium roseum
Allium triquetrum
Asphodelus fistulosus

D. Other notable plants seen in the Alps

Helleborus foetidus
H. viridis
Caltha palustris
Anemone baldensis
Pulsatilla vulgaris
P. alba
Ranunculus alpestris
Draba azoides
Saxifraga oppositifolia
Vitaliana primuliflora
Primula marginata
Lathyrus vernus
Daphne mezereum
Eryngium bourgatii
Gentiana verna
Pulmonaria montana
Bulbocodium vernum
Crocus albiflorus

Top Six Birds of the Tour

(All photos were taken by Pete Morris on the tour and are available on the accompanying CD)



- 1st **CORSICAN NUTHATCH**
- 2nd **Rock Partridge**
- 3rd **Black Woodpecker (sorry, no photo!)**





4th Wallcreeper

5th= Marmora's Warbler

5th= Firecrest



And the best of the rest...



Other interesting sightings in Corsica included some smart Audouin's Gulls including a couple of ringed birds and the localized Italian Sparrow (*above*) and some excellent Red-footed Falcons (*below*) - the female is on the left and the male on the right.





Still on Corsica, other highlights included Corsican Finch (*top left*) and some smart Cirl Buntings (*top right*). On the mainland we were pleased to find an Ashy-headed Wagtail (*above right*), and in the Alps we found Citril Finch (*above left*), some fine male Red-backed Shrikes (*below left*) and some stunning Black Grouse at their lek (*bottom right*).





Also in the Alps were smart Bonelli's Warblers (*above*) and Rufous-tailed Rock (*above right*). On the final day we visited the excellent Crau where species included this first summer male Montagu's Harrier (*below left*), several Little Bustards (*below right*), and a fine Eurasian Hoopoe (*bottom*).





The variety of flowers, particularly orchids, was impressive. Here, in roughly the order we saw them (*left to right, top to bottom*) are Small-flowered Serapias, Tongue Orchid, Heart-flowered Serapias, Dark Ophrys, Lax-flowered Orchid, Pink Butterfly Orchid, Barton's Orchid, Green-winged Orchid and Long-spurred Orchid (all on Corsica).





Continuing on Corsica, we also found Small White Orchid and Milky Orchid. Species on the mainland of France included Pale Orchid, Lady Orchid (two examples), Man Orchid (just emerging), Early Purple Orchid, Small Spider Ophrys and Large White Helleborine.





Our final afternoon at Les Paluns Reserve was a real *Ophrys* bonanza, though identification was far from straightforward, especially as they are known to frequently hybridize! Here are Woodcock Ophrys (three examples), Yellow Ophrys, Early Spider Ophrys, Late Spider Ophrys and the spectacular Berteloni's Ophrys (three examples).





Other spectacular flora in Corsica included the splendid lily *Pancratium illyricum* (above left) and the endemic Corsican Butterwort, an insectivorous species (above right). In the Alps the spring was late after very heavy overwinter snow as can be seen here below the Col de la Cayolle!





La Mère Eglise overlooked our lovely hotel in the Alps where Pasque Flowers battled against the late frosts. The cool weather kept butterfly numbers down, but we did see a few including (clockwise from top left) Common Blue, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Spotted Fritillary (two examples) and Glanville Fritillary.

