

Tour Report

France – Birds, Butterflies & Wildflowers of the Dordogne

15 – 22 June 2019

Woodchat shrike



Lizard orchid



Spotted fritillary (female)



River Dordogne near Lalinde



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Day 1: Arrive Bergerac; travel to Mauzac & short local walk

Saturday 15 June 2019

It was a rather cool, cloudy and breezy afternoon as the Ryanair flight touched down at Bergerac airport. Before too long the group had passed through security and we were meeting one another outside the arrivals building. There were only five people as two of the group had driven down directly to the hotel in Mauzac, from their home near Limoges in the department of Haute-Vienne immediately north of Dordogne. After a short walk to the minibus we were soon heading off through the fields towards Mauzac on the banks of the River Dordogne. A song thrush sang loudly as we left the airport and some of us had brief views of a corn bunting or two on the airport fence, whilst further on at the Couze bridge over the River Dordogne, several crag martins were flying. En route we also saw our first black kites and an occasional kestrel and buzzard. We were soon parking up at the Hotel Le Barrage where Amanda, the hotel manager, greeted us, gave out room keys and helped us with the suitcases. Here we also met the other couple who had driven straight to the hotel (and who'd already seen a barred grass snake along the riverbank). After everyone had settled in their rooms, Amanda provided tea and cakes in the restaurant for our introductory meeting. Here Corine and I introduced ourselves, an outline of what to expect on the holiday and our plans for the week ahead, whilst Amanda introduced the hotel and timetabling for meals.

Before dinner, we had a short circular walk beside the river and canal to familiarise everyone with the immediate local area. From the hotel it is only a short walk over the canal and up to the dam. There were many hirundines about overhead such as swift, house and crag martins and swallow. On the water we noted a mute swan with cygnets. Although there was disturbance from EDF work on the dam (constructing a fish ladder) we still found little egret, cormorant, grey heron and black kite. On the canal lock walls we saw wall rue and maidenhair spleenwort, whilst in the river and canal respectively were water-crowfoot and Azolla the red water fern. Further on some of us had brief views of a Bonelli's warbler in a treetop. In the marsh below the dam, Cetti's and melodious warblers plus nightingale sang and a white wagtail flitted about. By the fields and woods we heard cirl bunting, blackcap and short-toed treecreeper. Along the canal there was a family of great tits plus a black redstart showing nicely. Some butterflies briefly showed on the meadow and grassy areas: many meadow browns plus adonis and common blues, marbled white, small heath and speckled wood, whilst field crickets sang and a beautiful demoiselle damselfly flitted by the trees. A song thrush was singing strongly back near the hotel, as it had been for the May holiday. There were still plenty of pyramidal orchids in the grassy banks as well as showy plants like meadow clary, field scabious and mulleins.

Day 2: Trémolat, Bosredon & Pezuls

Sunday 16 June 2019

The early morning mist soon cleared as we set out to the viewpoint over the Cingle de Trémolat, a large meander in the river near Mauzac. A kingfisher had been seen not far from the hotel before I arrived. As we drove through Mauzac village centre we saw the house martins busy nesting under the low eaves of a traditional Perigordine house. As we approached the first stop a hare ran away off the road. Walking across the road from the viewpoint car park we heard goldfinch, greenfinch, blackcap and chiffchaff near the buildings plus several Bonelli's warblers in the oak forest as we admired the view. More difficult to hear were the high-pitched calls and song of firecrest and short-toed treecreeper.

After this brief introduction to the local landscape and birds we returned to the minibus to continue a few kilometres along the ridge to a large wooden cross that overlooks the river. As we emerged from the vehicle, cuckoo, woodlark and cirl bunting were singing. It was warming up now and black kites and buzzards were starting to rise on the first thermals. Butterflies started to emerge with many stunning male adonis blues and slightly duller common blue males. In addition, we found plenty of marbled whites and meadow browns, plus wall, small and holly blues, small and pearly heaths, mallow, Lulworth and red-underwing skippers, ilex hairstreak, and as we walked further down the track, marbled fritillary and a

possible lesser purple emperor which refused to land! A couple of moths caught our eye: hummingbird hawk-moth, several burnet moth species including *Zygaena fausta* and a small yellow geometer moth, *Rhodostrophia calabra*. Amongst the grasses we found orange and blue (and perhaps white) featherleg damselflies and there were also dragonflies: emperor and yellow clubtail, as well as a smart blue broad-bodied chaser by a large puddle in the track and, a little further on, a scarce chaser amongst brambles. Other invertebrates also caught our eyes: Asian and European hornets, violet carpenter bee, striped shield bug, firebug, rose chafer, bee-fly and another darker chafer, *Oxythyrea funesta*. Until 60 years ago, sheep grazed these limestone slopes but now bushes and trees are taking over. However, there is still much open space which is very colourful at this time of the year. Between the junipers and groups of downy oak we saw wayfaring tree, horseshoe vetch, common rockrose, needle sun-rose, French broom and Pyrenean flax. Corine continued with the group along the track towards her house at Bosredon, whilst I returned to the minibus to drive it around to meet the group for lunch.

We had a picnic lunch sitting out on the terrace at Corine's home amongst the limestone grassland and downy oaks. A turtle dove, woodlark, Bonelli's warbler, golden oriole and perhaps two hoopoes sang as we sat relaxing and chatting, surrounded by wildflowers such as cut-leaved selfheal, fairy flax, stiff eyebright and long-stalked crane's-bill. Later we had a guided tour of the terrain including the vegetable/flower garden. There were signs of pine marten, wild boar and badger here – as one would expect of a naturalist's garden in the wild Dordogne countryside! Butterflies were good here also and in addition to those seen earlier we noted Berger's clouded yellow, comma, great banded grayling, speckled wood and small/Essex skippers. On the track we found a small pincertail dragonfly. In the meadow grew musk thistle, quaking grass, stemless thistle and slender bedstraw and there were plenty of great green bush-crickets plus violet carpenter bee and two species of ascalaphids or 'owflies': *Libelloides coccajus* and *L. longicornis*, the latter quite scarce in Dordogne.

We left Corine's home, which had felt like paradise, and travelled the short distance to the tiny hamlet of Pezuls. Here we explored a small area of long-abandoned vineyard terraces above the settlement now planted with 'truffle' oaks and Byzantine hazels also inoculated with truffle mycelia (*Tuber melanosporum*). Birds were much quieter now; there was a cirl bunting singing much of the time though we didn't see it. Butterflies were active, with Berger's clouded yellow, wood white, ilex hairstreak, small blue, red-underwing skipper, spotted fritillary and sooty copper amongst the commoner species. Another yellow clubtail dragonfly was a nice find. Nearby some of the group saw a roe deer. Orchids like greater butterfly, pyramidal, bee and red helleborine were still in full bloom. Notable **amongst the** many plants were yellow vetchling, Cypress spurge, wall germander and scorpion vetch, and the tiny orange grass pea.

Next we headed to the adjacent valley to search for some wetland orchids. Unfortunately, we found only the seed pods of lax-flowered orchids in the mint-smelling meadow but several butterflies were flying, including marbled fritillary and black-veined white and possibly the rarer wetland specialist lesser marbled fritillary. As we gathered back near the minibus a tree pipit sang from some nearby treetop and a crested tit called from the pines with other small birds. Back at Mauzac a female Cleopatra appeared briefly in the garden of the hotel.

Late in the evening some of the group went out along the river with a bat detector. They found six species: common and Kuhl's pipistrelles, common and greater noctules, western barbastelle and parti-coloured bat.

Day 3: Forêt de la Bessède

Monday 17 June 2019

With a sunny and warm forecast, we drove out eastwards towards the Bessède forest, south of the River Dordogne. On route Corine saw a road-kill pine marten, sad to see but the number recorded like this in Dordogne suggest a high population. We parked up by a forest track in the north of the forest and set off for a short walk along the ride between bushes of common gorse and alder buckthorn, while on the verges were tormentil, wood anemone, heath lobelia and viper's grass. A cuckoo was singing not far away. In the scrubby heathland we could hear a couple of melodious warblers and, eventually, one posed nicely in the

top of a tree and we all saw it well through the scope. We also had nice views of stonechat and linnet. Dartford warbler called and occasionally sang but from deep cover. One or two of us were lucky enough to catch fleeting glimpses of this often secretive bird. An occasional black kite flew overhead and then there were three birds together on a thermal. It was difficult to be certain of their identification but all three were of a similar size but with different underwing margins, one or two suggesting booted eagle, a species which we saw here earlier in the spring. However, there was no difficulty identifying a female hen harrier which performed nicely for everyone, even landing several times on treetops for us to view her through the scope. Further on it was quieter amongst the sweet chestnuts and maritime pines (where we found European wild pear, an uncommon species) with smaller birds about but not showing. These included long-tailed tit, nuthatch, crested tit, firecrest and short-toed treecreeper, although we did see chiffchaff and mistle thrush. The only butterflies were a red admiral and a small white with the day-flying moth common heath also on the wing. We continued along the forest track in the minibus and eventually reached the main road where we drove to a small roadside pond. Here we were mainly exploring for wildflowers but green frogs were calling and there was a nice variety of dragonflies: emperor, orange and blue featherlegs, plus winter and azure damselflies and fleeting views of what were probably black-tailed skimmer and broad-bodied chaser. Other interesting invertebrates were great green bush-cricket, European hornet, a crab spider, Musumena, and two species of funnel-web spiders. The flowers we saw included marsh helleborine on the edge of the pond, and in the water, common club-rush. The grassy area around it was full of flowers like zigzag clover, hastate-leaved selfheal, heath spotted orchid and Irish fleabane.

By now it was time to head for lunch so we drove east through the forest to Molières, a pretty little bastide (13th century fortified town from the Hundred Years War). As we approached some of us were lucky to see a hoopoe fly up from the roadside. During our pleasant lunchtime in the village we saw sparrowhawk, kestrel, green and great spotted woodpeckers, black and common redstarts and serin. Common wall lizards were evident around the buildings in the village and common swallowtail flew past just before we left.

For the afternoon we returned to the south side of the forest – comprised mainly of sweet chestnut, mixed with English and Pyrenean oaks and hornbeam – where the woodland mixes with a variety of small meadows. Birds here included green woodpecker, chiffchaff, Bonelli's and melodious warblers and nuthatch. This is always an interesting area for butterflies, in particular. As we stepped out of the minibus we saw our first brimstone – the first of many. There were several ringlets along the woodland edge and also a lot of heath fritillaries here. One of the first butterflies to settle nicely for us was a stunning Queen of Spain fritillary. A lesser purple emperor flew past us as we walked to a clearfell area with many roadside flowers such as *Knautia dipsacifolia* (a purple scabious), zigzag clover, wild strawberries, slender St-John's wort, common columbine and cow wheat. A little further on, the butterfly landed on a log leaning against a huge log pile. It was joined by a large tortoiseshell a few feet away – quite a sight for the butterfly lovers! We continued along the road where we found many more butterflies including wood and black-veined whites, orange tip, ilex hairstreak, large skipper, comma, peacock, marbled, knapweed and silver-washed fritillaries, pearly heath and speckled wood. At the furthest point from the vehicle we found three lesser purple emperors on an animal scat with an occasional white admiral and heath fritillary. We walked back past the minibus to the road junction where we had fine views of a high brown fritillary, form cleodoxa, washed with yellow on the underside. Amongst the trees some of us had brief views of the rare woodland brown, but it would not settle and disappeared into the forest. Of the day-flying moths we noted hummingbird hawk-moth, common heath and five-spot burnet. Along the ditch we found some dragonflies: beautiful demoiselle, large red damselfly and downy emerald, whilst a praying mantis flew over.

We made a final stop upstream of Lalinde on the River Dordogne where the river islands, woodlands, extensive water crowfoot beds and rafts of mute swans make for a beautiful, classic rural scene. There was the usual mix of grey heron, little egret, plus grey and white wagtails along with ten nests of cormorants in a large white willow clearly visible, many with large young. Above us a few black kites and a kestrel completed the picture. As the warm sunny weather reached 30°C in the late afternoon, it was time to return to the hotel.

The morning started cloudy but warm with a good forecast for sunny weather to come. Today we were heading south-east to the Causse de Daglan, concentrating on butterflies and wildflowers. Our first stop was some marshy fields near Veyrines de Domme. Birds calling or singing included mistle thrush, middle spotted woodpecker and Bonelli's warbler. With the cool cloudy weather there was little insect activity though a great green bush-cricket did a fly past for us. The meadow was very rich in flowers. Because of its vulnerability we did not enter it, but from the fence line we saw several orchids: fragrant, robust marsh and marsh helleborine. Other plants were *Trifolium patens* (a small yellow clover), meadowsweet and common valerian. When we returned to the bus, David spotted an unusual plant under some trees. Later on, Corine confirmed she had found knotted crane's-bill, a plant until now known from only one site in Dordogne!

We moved on to the main morning site on the hill beyond Veyrines de Domme. As we walked up the track with a tall hedge of hawthorn, blackthorn, common whitebeam (unusual here) and wild privet, we saw buzzard, woodlark, tree pipit and cuckoo. Calling and singing were turtle dove, cirl bunting, long-tailed tit, Bonelli's and melodious warblers, chiffchaff and blackcap. Butterflies were quiet at first, but the ones we did find roosting were quiet and easy to photograph such as a nice spotted fritillary. However, before long the sun appeared and insect activity responded. There was a great range of species flying including swallowtail, black-veined, wood and large whites, clouded and Berger's clouded yellows, Cleopatra (up to five), adonis and common blues, lesser purple emperor, woodland and great-banded grayling, Essex/small skipper and pearly heath. Perhaps most exciting to see was a good number of the dark male great sooty satyrs for which the site is very important, and also several blue-spot hairstreaks. Day-flying moths included the burnet *Zygaena fausta*, clouded buff, *Rhodostrophia calabra*, five-spot burnet, hummingbird hawk-moth and common heath. Other interesting invertebrates were bee-fly and a pretty black and red frog hopper, *Cercopis*. On this limestone slope with scree in some places, the southern exposition permits the growth of sun-loving species such as lavender and false lavender, Pyrenean and upright yellow flax, different rockroses and needle sun-roses, Cantabria morning glory, dwarf spurge and also the minuscule small hare's-ear.

As we left in the minibus, some of us had reasonable views of a pair of honey buzzards going up on thermals nearby as the weather warmed up. Next we drove to our picnic lunch stop in the pretty village of Daglan down by the River Céou. Driving into the village, a southern white admiral flitted along beside us briefly. As it was by now sunny and very warm we found some shady picnic tables. As usual there was plenty of interesting wildlife about. Two honey buzzards showed very well and we were able to see the detail of their barred tails and wings. As usual several black kites and buzzards passed overhead. During lunchtime we heard green and middle spotted woodpeckers and golden oriole, and we saw white wagtail, nuthatch, black redstart, greenfinch and goldfinch. Best of all, perhaps, was a pair of serins and a cirl bunting through the scope. Whilst searching for wildflowers Corine saw a raven high up near the crags. We saw green frogs well through the scope. By the river we found beautiful and western demoiselles, blue featherleg and blue-eye damselflies. There was also an emperor hawking over the river. In the grass, little spots of iridescent blue were the tiny blue chafer *Hoplia coerulea*, a stunning insect.

With the temperature rising over 30°C we went to the valley near Montalieu where we could find shade but also some interesting wildlife. The only notable bird here was a firecrest singing in the woodland. However, there were several interesting butterfly species such as black-veined white, brimstone, small blue, white admiral, silver-washed and heath fritillaries amongst the commoner ones. Two larger orange fritillaries were probably high brown and marbled. Other insects included beautiful demoiselle, rose chafer and European hornet. Along the path bastard balm, sweet spurge and pale swallow-wort grew under the hornbeam trees.

It was a cloudy but warm morning as we set off for a day on Faux Plateau, an area of dry farming south-east of Bergerac. We drove up the Couze Valley a short way, before turning right and rising through the downy oak woods to the low plateau of farmland and woods. Soon afterwards we were driving through arable fields and the village of Naussannes. We stopped on the roadside to view the kestrels in their nestbox on an old barn. It was good to see two downy young. Continuing through the fields we started to see a few corn buntings on the wires, a very common species here. After parking along a track off the road, we disembarked and scanned the fields. Birdwatching can be very productive here and indeed woodlark, skylark, corn and cirl buntings were all singing, some giving good views. A flock (or 'charm') of goldfinches flew past and into a nearby tree. Before long we also heard cuckoo, whitethroat and melodious warbler. As we walked along the track we looked out for birds of prey and found the usual buzzards and black kites. A hobby posed nicely for us on a tree and before long we saw the first of two black-winged kites, superb birds. On the hedgerows we had good views of a pair of red-backed shrikes, corn bunting, stonechat and melodious warbler. Away in the fields a stone curlew briefly called, as did a golden oriole in a distant wood. Butterflies included many small whites but also clouded yellow, marbled white and meadow brown. On the flower heads we found another white crab spider, *Musumena*. As we walked back to the minibus two honey buzzards showed well overhead.

Next we headed for the silo south of Faux. There are always interesting birds around the silo itself and this time did not disappoint. There was a rock sparrow up on the electric wires nearby. A quail was calling from the fields and there were stonechats and a black redstart about. We walked through the little wood and watched a Bonelli's warbler briefly, while near the farm we had nice views of a crested lark and turtle dove. Walking back to the minibus we spotted another black-winged kite and honey buzzard amongst the buzzards and black kites. Best of all was a female hen harrier quartering the fields south of the main road. With the sun now out, butterflies were more active here and included the beautiful black-veined white.

Lunch was spent at the pretty medieval village of Issigeac in our favourite little auberge. With the swifts screaming around the old 12th century church and chateau, we greatly enjoyed our lunchtime. Meanwhile common wall lizards scuttled about on the old stones. After a bit of sightseeing around the old streets and lanes, we started the afternoon at the nearby reservoir Lac de la Nette. This artificial lake was constructed in the nineties to regulate the amounts of water available for agriculture and the water level in the Dropt river. We walked along a path by the lake where we could see on one side the remnants of the old hillocks of chalky white limestone with typical grassy vegetation with junipers. There were many ascalaphids hunting over the grass in the bright sunshine as the field crickets sang. We found bee orchids in rather good shape, considering it was so late in the season, and also some beautiful dark purple-red ploughshare orchids, besides blue lettuce, dwarf blue thistle, Pyrenean flax, to mention a few. As usual there were great crested grebes and coots out on the water. As we walked along the bank some of us had great views of a kingfisher. Melodious warbler and blackcap sang from the scrub whilst a white wagtail posed nicely by the water. Green frogs made their wonderful cacophony (which they call song!) and we started looking at the butterflies. With a nice mix of limestone grassland and woodland habitat, species included Berger's clouded yellow, wood white, adonis blue, comma, silver-washed fritillary, lesser purple emperor, southern white admiral, pearly heath, speckled wood, wall brown and Lulworth skipper. Day-flying moths included six-spot burnet and the burnet *Zygaena fausta*. Dragonflies were abundant with two emperors including a female egg-laying, the scarce lesser emperor, western clubtail, black-tailed skimmer, red-veined and ruddy darters and finally common blue and blue-tailed damselflies. Along the track we disturbed green tiger beetles, cicadas called from the trees and we found the scarce ascalaphid or 'owl fly', *Libelloides longicornis*. As we drove back up the track from the reservoir, we noted some stunning white roses on the bank. They were one of the many different species that can be found in Dordogne: field rose, a low, creeping species.

With a little more time we returned across the plateau to the valley of the Couze stream at Couze village to walk around an old water mill. As we arrived a middle spotted woodpecker was calling. We walked over a

little bridge amongst the water mills and heard grey wagtail. At the second bridge there was a juvenile dipper right in the middle of the river on the natural weir looking rather grey and speckled. By contrast soon afterwards a very smart bright adult appeared just beyond – lucky us! All the while one or two grey wagtails flitted about across the water, animating the scene.

Day 6: Causse de Terrasson & Cabant Hill

Thursday 20 June 2019

Today for our farthest destination of the week we headed up the Vézère Valley through the Cretaceous limestone of central Dordogne to the area around Condat. This is a landscape of older Jurassic limestone plateaux and hills in the eastern part of Dordogne. As we drove the clouds cleared and the sun came out. After an hour we arrived on a wide plateau with a low, rather sparse vegetation which was now in full bloom. As we emerged from the vehicle high on the stony hills there were plenty of birds calling or singing including kestrel, circl bunting, stonechat, black redstart, whitethroat, skylark, woodlark, golden oriole and turtle dove with some occasionally showing themselves. There were also several black kites and buzzards overhead. As the sun appeared butterflies moved and we found a variety of species, notably swallowtail, Berger's clouded yellow, Cleopatra, blue-spot hairstreak, great banded grayling, pearly heath plus red-underwing, Essex and Lulworth skippers. There were virtually no grasses, except some miniature annual species such as fern grass and stiff brome. Common ball flower, mountain inula, Cantabria morning glory, musk mallow, rough marsh-mallow and wall germander, in different shades of pink and purple, made a colourful tapestry. There were some man orchids still in flower, and even a fly orchid. Between them grew the rare Galium parisiense, a bedstraw with long stalks, so thin the plant is nearly invisible; to see its very tiny flowers and fruits we needed a magnifying glass! When walking back to the minibus we found a sweet briar, a rosebush with downy leaves strongly smelling of apple, and Etruscan honeysuckle, also sweet smelling but different.

Next we drove on to Aubas and the scrubby causse and woodland on the hillside nearby. A picnic table under the trees was ideal for us and during lunch we heard short-toed treecreeper, Bonelli's warbler plus green and middle spotted woodpeckers. All around us were downy oak and both domestic and wild service trees, Mediterranean buckthorn, butcher's broom, and crested cow-wheat, a hemiparasitic plant that grows only in this part of Dordogne.

After eating we visited the viewpoint looking out across the Vézère Valley and its chateaux which had several black kites wheeling around it. Returning to the grassland we disturbed a few woodlarks, a chiffchaff sang from the trees and a raven and mistle thrush flew over. Butterflies were rather scarce but we did see more blue-spot hairstreaks as well as ilex hairstreak, adonis blue, grayling and wall. Interesting day-flying moths included Mother Shipton and feathered footman, and there were several bee-flies and crab spiders (Musumena). Plants were particularly interesting and we found thin green sprouts of good-smelling Hyssop-leaved Siderites Sideritis hyssopifolia subsp. guillonii, not yet in flower, terebinth (turpentine tree), Montpellier milk-vetch Astragalus monspessulanus, and a broomrape parasitising wall germander, probably Orobanche teucarii – all plants we had not seen before and typical for this kind of Jurassic limestone hill.

The temperature was going up when we left for the next site on the other side of the Coly Valley – a track going uphill from a small long-abandoned quarry at the bottom of the valley near the main road. It was disappointing to discover that a small part of the site has been planted with truffle oaks, but there was still much to see. Along the path we saw stinking hellebore, yellow and spiny restharrow, lady's bedstraw and hairy vetchling which gave touches of colour amongst the trees and grasses. Butterflies were abundant and included black-veined white and peacock, plus marbled, Weaver's and spotted fritillaries, wood white, pearly heath, Lulworth skipper and there were various burnet moths including six-spot. On the track we saw small pincertail dragonfly.

In the evening some of the group went up to Cabant hill near my old house to look for nightjars. They were successful, with several singing birds 'churring', including one very close, with some of the group seeing two birds very well. A tawny owl was also calling. They took a bat detector out and found soprano pipistrelle and European free-tail bat. Later along the riverbank at Mauzac they recorded common, soprano and Kuhl's pipistrelles, lesser noctule, western barbastelle, parti-coloured, serotine and European free-tail bats.

Day 7: Rouffignac Cave, Les Eyzies & Plateau de Faux

Friday 21 June 2019

The wet weather forecast we were promised duly arrived and it was raining steadily when I arrived at the hotel. It was a perfect day for a cave visit, so after a chat with the group we decided to go to the cave at Rouffignac with its prehistoric drawings and engravings as well as other impressive features. By afternoon we hoped that the worst of the rain would be over so that we could visit some interesting wildlife sites. Unfortunately, two of the group were again unable to join us but Corine agreed to stay with them and do at least a short walk around the woods near my old house above Mauzac. As we travelled towards Le Bugue a couple of turtle doves flew over a nearby field. Near Pezuls there was a beautiful spread of greater butterfly orchids. Further on some of us briefly saw a great spotted woodpecker and later a hoopoe, as we did also in the afternoon.

We arrived at the cave in good time and I went to buy tickets for the group, which left us with 30 minutes or so to look around the displays and shop and to soak up the atmosphere of this special place. The visit is an hour long and by small electric train; the cave system is a constant 13°C throughout the year. We were fortunate enough to have an English language guide (the first time for me). As a senior member of staff he was a very experienced and knowledgeable, which added greatly to our enjoyment.

Soon we were travelling down through the galleries, which make up part of an ancient underground river system now dry. On each side of us were hard red iron-stained flint bands standing out against the softer whiter limestone rock and several smaller channels disappeared away to our right and left. Above us were occasional vast shallow circular holes which the ancient river had carved out. After a while we saw our first signs of prehistoric man's activities – engravings. These were of mammoths for which the cave is particularly noted. A little further on we reached the first monochrome drawings made with manganese dioxide, firstly woolly rhinoceros but soon afterwards mammoths. In one example, two lines of these great beasts face one another. The Cro-Magnon artists made great use of the texture of the rock surface to complement their art. Throughout the cave there are also more abstract simple designs either engraved or painted. In one section we were shown graffiti from the 18th century. Fortunately, these have little affected the prehistoric art. Next we passed ancient hibernating bear pits (which pre-date man's activities in the cave at 18,000 years BP), moulded out of sediment debris. After a kilometre we stopped at the final chamber. Here we disembarked from the train and were shown a rock ceiling with over 60 paintings of the fauna, created around 14,000 years BP. These were animals that the Cro-Magnon people clearly knew well such as bison, ibex, mammoth, woolly rhinoceros and some beautiful horses. From the quality of the paintings one could see that they were true artists. Beyond this chamber the cave disappeared down an inaccessible swallow-hole where a few more prehistoric images have been recorded including a rare human form. As the guide stressed, we can never know why prehistoric people entered the cave to make these paintings and engravings, but if we look carefully we can discover interesting details and so appreciate their knowledge of these animals and their skill as artists.

After the visit it was time to head for Les Eyzies and lunch. The temperature outside the cave had risen by now to 15°C and the rain was reduced to drizzle. We stopped at the Grand Roc site with the restaurant tucked under the base of the cliff. I dropped the group near the door and went to park in the car park. During lunch I informed the group that I had just heard from a friend that a great bustard had been seen in the early morning on the Faux Plateau by the silo we had visited. Everyone was keen to try for the bustard, so rather than several walks in the Beune and Vézère Valleys as planned, we decided to return to Mauzac and drive on to Faux.

We had a quick look around the cliffs at Grand Roc and noted a few jackdaws and crag martins, as well as hearing goldfinch, chiffchaff and black redstart. Returning to the hotel around mid-afternoon, Amanda kindly provided an early teatime with cakes to sustain us for our bustard hunt at Faux. Soon afterwards we were back in the minibus and heading for Faux.

By now the rain had stopped and the weather was improving, with a brighter sky and even some blue patches showing through. We arrived at the silo and first scanned the general area – especially to the south where the bird had last been seen. Two rock sparrows were up on the wires above us by the electric posts. We heard quail and saw a red-legged partridge on a hay bale showing nicely through the scope. A skylark was singing high above us and buzzard, black kite and kestrel were active. As I scanned the fields with the scope the great bustard flew into my field of view. It was an amazing sight, like a giant goose! The rest of the group watched it flying, through their binoculars, and were duly impressed. It dropped into the crops beyond the rise and disappeared. Just afterwards some local birdwatchers including two from the LPO (French RSPB equivalent) turned up and we swapped news. As we stood talking and watching, we saw up to four black-winged kites, a female hen harrier and finally three stone curlews with two quite close and showing well through the scope. Just at this moment a peregrine and a hobby attacked some doves and pigeons in a nearby field, another spectacular sight. The final high point of this extraordinary birding hour or so was a beautiful male hen harrier quartering the fields to the north as a black-winged kite flew in front of it, providing an excellent comparison of these two somewhat similar grey, white and black raptors.

After all this concentrated birding excitement, a nice peaceful location with a variety of wildflowers and butterflies seemed like a good plan. Corine knew just such a place nearby. We said goodbye to our birding friends and drove eastwards towards Beaumont and a small unspoilt limestone hilltop with a ruined windmill tower. Here the ground was covered in colourful plants like pink Cantabrian morning glory, dwarf blue thistle, yellow mountain inula, a white sandwort *Arenaria controversa*, pale purple blue lettuce and red scarlet pimpernel (or the red version of blue pimpernel), to be certain of your identification you need a microscope!

A notable bird here was a middle spotted woodpecker calling from the woods. Butterflies were becoming active with the brighter and warmer weather. Here we saw wood white, adonis and common blues, marbled white, meadow brown, small heath and finally a beautifully fresh knapweed fritillary posing for photos. Hummingbird hawk-moth and the burnet *Zygaena fausta* were also present.

Day 8: Leave hotel; Tuilières Dam & Bergerac pastures, river; airport

Saturday 22 June 2019

After a wet day most of yesterday, the weather had improved. We had breakfast at the normal time and so were ready to leave soon after 9.30am to travel to Bergerac for a last look at the local wildlife, before the short drive to the airport for the mid-afternoon flight. Amanda provided packed lunches for those who required them, then we said our goodbyes and were ready to depart.

We called in at Tuilières Dam at the downstream end of the canal which joins the River Dordogne again at Mauzac by our hotel. We walked along the river frontage high above the old towpath. Several grey wagtails were flitting about between the rocks in mid-stream and the bank. As usual there were feral pigeons around the buildings. By the impressive flight of locks (no longer in use) we watched the sand martins flying to and fro between the river and their nesting tunnels in the soft rock bands where the limestone had been cut for the canal. A kingfisher called from the river but went unseen, as did a middle spotted woodpecker calling in the trees beside us.

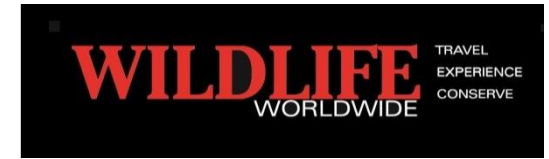
Next we continued to Bergerac and an interesting area of damp pastures to the west of the town. Here the farmer, hunting ministry and the LPO work together for the conservation of this no-hunting 'sanctuary' site. Many birds were singing as we walked along a track lined by old English oaks including fan-tailed and melodious warblers, short-toed treecreeper, turtle dove, green woodpecker and, briefly, a golden oriole.

Star of the show, however, was a male woodchat shrike sitting calmly on a vineyard post not far away and looking great through the scope. Not bad either was a pair of red-backed shrikes seen further across the other side of the vineyard soon afterwards. Kestrel, black kite and buzzard were also noted, as was a male stonechat. This is not an exceptional flower site by Dordogne standards, but there was enough to see: a ragged robin hybrid (probably with a champion), corky-fruited water dropwort, meadow vetchling and a lot of cow parsley.

As we were on the west side of Bergerac, I thought it might be interesting to visit the Dordogne River at Prigonrieux where there is a slipway and easy access to the water. Apart from beautiful views of the river there was a mute swan holding territory on the river just upstream making passing canoeists very aware that they were not welcome! In the trees we heard blackcap and a party of long-tailed tits, while beneath amongst the herbs we saw speckled wood, small white and peacock butterflies. On the river's edge we saw a smart male white wagtail plus various dragonflies and damselflies including beautiful and western demoiselles and blue-eye. Demoiselle wings were scattered along the track here, perhaps the remains of a white wagtail meal. Tall flat-sedge (a type of galingale), large stands of hedge mustard and the invasive floating water primrose grew here abundantly.

Four friends in the group now said their goodbyes as they were spending the rest of the day together, whilst the rest of us drove to the barrage at Bergerac to eat lunch at the picnic tables. We didn't have much time to explore but it was an attractive spot to eat before heading to the airport. Here we said our goodbyes as two of the group met friends for an extended holiday in Dordogne, leaving only one of the group to take the scheduled flight.

Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	BIRDS	AVES								
2	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		✓				✓	
4	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>							✓	
5	Common quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>					✓		✓	
8	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>					✓			
10	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
12	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
14	Black-winged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>					✓		✓	
15	European honey buzzard	<i>Pernis apivoris</i>				✓	✓			
18	Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓	✓				
19	Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			✓		✓		✓	
20	Black kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>								✓	
24	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>						✓			
25	Eurasian stone curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>						✓		✓	
29	Feral pigeon (domest.)	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				✓					
31	Common wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	European turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Common cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
37	Tawny owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>							✓		
40	European nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>							✓		
42	Common swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
43	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓				✓	✓		
44	Eurasian hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓					✓	
47	Middle spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓					✓	
50	European green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			✓	✓			✓		✓
51	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Eurasian hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>						✓		✓	
53	Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>								✓	



76	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Western Bonelli's warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
79	Melodious warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
80	Zitting cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>						✓		✓
81	Eurasian blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
82	Common whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			✓		✓	✓		
83	Dartford warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			✓					
84	Common firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
85	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
86	Eurasian nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓	✓				
87	Short-toed treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	✓	✓				✓		
88	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	Common blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓					✓	
91	Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
93	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
94	Common nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	✓				✓			
95	Black redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Common redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		✓	✓					
97	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>			✓		✓	✓		✓



98	White-throated dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>					✓			
99	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
101	Rock sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>					✓		✓	
103	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>					✓			
104	White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
107	Tree pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓		✓	✓			
108	Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
111	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓	✓				
112	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓					
113	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
114	European serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			✓	✓				
115	Corn bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>					✓			
117	Cirl bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		

