

Les Cevéennes

10 – 18 June 2006

Leader

Mike Lockwood

Trip Diary

An excellent trip all round, only slightly marred by the good weather! The drought, with days of drying wind from the south, meant that a number of flowers were somewhat past their best and we had to search rather harder than expected for orchids in good nick. Nevertheless, the compensation came in the form of excellent numbers of butterflies and no weather problems, and in the end we found enough in flower to keep the botanists more than happy.

Personal highlights include the second *lavogne* on the transfer day, the meadows at the foot of Mt. Aigoual and, of course, the beaver outings. The butterflies were wonderful and I wish we could have had a few more days there! In terms of individual species, I was pleased to find the marsh cinquefoil and that we all got to see the lady's slipper orchids.

And of course, the night I slept in the minibus in Florac was unforgettable.

10 June Montpellier airport – Meyrueis

An uneventful trip from the airport, broken by a stop just after Le Viaduc de Millau (which we could only photograph from the van) for melon and then at Le Belvédère des Vautours, the vulture viewpoint, where we watched a few distant Griffon Vultures and Alpine Swifts, as well as a Swallowtail and Black-veined White in the car-park.

11 June Nîmes le Vieux

For our first full day we drove east from Meyrueis up to Coll de Perjuret, the one point at which the massive limestone plateau of Le Causse Méjean is not surrounded by sheer cliffs. From here we headed up onto the rolling expanses of the *causse* and onto the hamlet of L'Hom.

We picked up the trail around the extraordinary rock chaos of Nîmes le Vieux, starting on the southern side and following the trail backwards so as to get the best of the rock flora without having to do the complete circuit. Our first find (if you exclude the cow-shoeing contraption) was a male Red-backed Shrike on the bushes just below the path; other birds during the first section of the walk included various Red-billed Choughs, Griffon Vultures drifting over and a male Montagu's Harrier, that appeared quite close by and then glided off away beyond the village.

The ground cover was dominated by the attractive pink and yellow alpine aster *Aster alpinus*, white *Helianthemum nummularium* and common *H. apenninum* rock-roses, the low-growing pale purple thistle *Carduncellus mitissimus* and white flax *Linum suffruticosum*, with on the rocky outcrops the long-winded Chaenorhinum *Chaenorhinum organifolium* and the ferns wall-rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria* and maidenhair spleenwort *A. trichomanes*.

Butterfly-wise, there were Painted Ladies in abundance and the first of the many 'blues' we were to find: Silver-studded and Adonis Blues and Brown Argus.

Away up to our right we had fun with the scope watching a couple of male Rock Thrushes on the tops of the rock pinnacles that wouldn't keep still (the Rock Thrush, that is).

By now it was getting quite hot and so we decided to head for the pinnacles with the best of the rock-loving flora and then short-cut back across the 'chaos' to the return path and back quickly to the village. The tallest and shadiest of the rocks held delightful clumps of the endemic (to this part of southern France) *Saxifraga cebennesis*, fairy foxglove *Erinus alpinus*, kerneria *Kerneria saxatilis*, and after a bit of searching alpine mezereon *Daphne alpina*.

On our way back down to L'Hom and lunch, we had excellent views of a Glanville Fritillary through the telescope, and of other butterflies such as Escher's Blue, Large Wall Brown and Clouded Yellow. Also on the way down we listened to a Whitethroat in the bushes by the village and had a quick view of a Rock Sparrow on a fence.

We drove away from the village in search of shade, stopping by the roadside to view a few 'weeds': Venus' looking-glass *Legousia speculum-veneris*, cornflower *Centaurea cyanus*, a golden-drop *Onosma fastigiatum* and a sight that was to become commonplace over the days, hordes of Black-veined Whites nectaring on viper's bugloss *Echium vulgare*.

Lunch was taken under a downy oak, one of the few patches of shade in the area, and was enlivened by another Montagu's Harrier, Griffon Vultures and the sound of Ortolan Buntings. Butterflies included a Twin-spot Fritillary just below us and a Wood White. In terms of the flowers, Carol spotted the large bi-coloured vetch *Vicia onobrychioides* and we looked at a patch of great feather grass *Stipa pennata* waving in the wind, one of the most famous images of the *causses*.

After lunch we walked through the meadows towards the cliffs at the edge of the *causse*. We spotted straight away Esper's Marbled White, one of the classic butterflies of the area, and watched Northern Wheatear and Ortolan Buntings. We also had our first view of an Ascalaphid, a fast-flying relative of the Ant-lions that hunts flying insects over flowery meadows, and some of the Chimney sweeper moths we were to see every day. At the cliff edge we headed for the shade of a pine plantation, where we watched a tailless Scarce Swallowtail, Purple-shot Copper and Queen of Spain Fritillary, and a Cardinal (without its robes!) flew by at great speed.

The way back from the woods brought us our first orchids: Greater Butterfly, with the odd one in good condition and a few burnt out burnt-tip orchids. Other flowers included more alpine mezereon on a small rock outcrop, false vetch *Astragalus monspessulanus* and stinking hellebore.

Just before we reached the van again we had good views of a Tawny Pipit on roadside wire.

On way home we stopped for a male Rock Thrush on a rock and then a Northern Wheatear. A little further down the road, we listened to a Quail in the meadow, and on the road back we counted the Black-veined Whites on the vetches, reaching a maximum of 10 per clump.

12 June Mont Aigoual

Today our principal destination was Mt. Aigoual, the granite massif to the south of the *causses*. Our first stop was in a boggy meadow dotted with many heath spotted orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata*, ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, aconite-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus aconitifolius*, spigal *Meum athamanticum*, lots of *Valeriana*

tuberosa and a small patch of arnica *Arnica montana*. Birdwise we were limited to the trip's only Coal Tits.

A little further along the road we entered into a second larger meadow coloured by stands of plantain-leaved thrift *Armeria alliacea* (= *A. plantaginea*), with in more shady parts spotted deadnettle *Lamium maculatum*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, heartsease *Viola tricolor*, a few clumps of peasant's-eye daffodil *Narcissus poeticus*, red campion *Silene dioica*, and some of the stout denizens of the riverside megaforb communities: great yellow gentian *Gentiana lutea*, white false helleborine *Veratrum album* and Austrian leopardsbane *Doronicum austriacum*. A Speckled Wood posed well on a cedar branch.

Further along by river, we found a Clouded Apollo, an uncommon species that flies on the edges of beechwoods; other butterflies here included Queen of Spain and Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, Mazarine Blue, Orange-tip and Purple-edged Copper, as well as a Wood Tiger and a Forester moth. Once at the end of the meadow Carol spotted the leaves of May lily *Maianthemum bifolium* and on the way back Sheila found a small frog orchid, our only one of the trip.

Our next stop was Col de la Serreyrède, surrounded by beech forests and with a good shop for buying local produce! Here we had a look at a sunny patch of brambles next to the shop and information centre and had good views of a number of Clouded Apollos, and a Heath Fritillary. We then plunged into the beech forest itself, with an understorey of red campion *Silene dioica* and purple lettuce (not out yet) *Prenanthes purpurea*, greater wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* and common Solomon's seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*. A little way down the path we found an attractive clump of May lily perfectly in flower and a stream decorated with aconite-leaved buttercups. From here the choice was to drop steeply down to a meadow or to retreat to the van and lunch: we wisely chose the latter option.

Lunch was taken near the summit of Mt. Aigoual, in the shade of some rather stunted pines and beeches that are a reminder of the fearsome winds that can sweep across this summit in winter: the record stands at a gust estimated at 360 km/hour!!

(<http://www.meteo.fr/meteonet/decouvr/balade/aigoual/plus.htm#4>)

After lunch we poked around in the woods and found the last reasonable red-coloured elder-flowered orchid *Orchis sambucina* and wild tulip *Tulipa australis* in flower, as well as Alpine trefoil. Further down, on the road we stopped in a clearing, found an attractive pink *Dianthus sylvatica*, another Clouded Apollo (fast become anything but uncommon on Mt. Aigoual) and a reasonably fresh yellow-coloured elder-flowered orchid. In the woods we marvelled at the carpets of leaves of the wood anemones *Anemone nemorosa* (one still in flower!) and found a few leaves of herb Pairs *Paris quadrifolia*.

The day's final stop was in a marshy valley just below the hamlet of Cabrillac. We mooched around the meadows, full of spiked rampion *Phyteuma spicatum*, great yellow gentian, Nottingham catchfly *Silene nutans* and plantain-leaved thrift. Many butterflies were rushing around in the heat: Piedmont Ringlet, vast numbers of fritillaries (Meadow, Knapweed, Niobe, Dark Brown, Peal-bordered and possibly a Tintania's, which as Mike was just about to photograph was disturbed by a Dark Green Fritillary) and Sooty, Small and Purple-edged Coppers in the meadows. Alongside the stream, a Camberwell Beauty gave us quick views and we chanced upon our first odonata: Large Red Damselfly and Beautiful Demoiselle. We also found an Ant-lion, which we first confused with a damselfly

Once we had toured the meadows we wandered along the road, spotting a group of 3 Honey Buzzards away to the north and walking under a Tree Pipit and his tree. Further down the road we recorded our first Stonechat and found a dead High Brown Fritillary in the road.

13 June Le Rozier

This was the day that the heat really rather beat us.

Our first destination before breakfast was a *lavogne* –a water hole– up on the Causse Noir, 10 minutes from the hotel. It produced a couple of Hoopoes, one singing its heart out on a bare branch, 2 Linnets and 2 Serins, all to a background of Nightingales. As well, on the way back we found a sleepy Esper's Marbled White and noted military orchid and white helleborine by the roadside.

Back in Meyrueis, we headed west down the valley of the river Jonte to Le Rozier, where we drove up a track on the hot south-facing slope above the village. We started a short but steep walk up a track through Mediterranean shrubs and trees such as turpentine tree *Pistacia terebinthus*, Mediterranean buckthorn *Rhamnus alaternus*, Saint Lucie's cherry *Prunus mahaleb*, Montpellier maple *Acer monspessulanum*, Osyris *Osyris alba* and *Dorycnium pentaphyllum*, the latter providing nectar and shade for Spanish Gatekeepers and a Blue-spot Hairstreak.

Our aim was to first head along the south-side of the cliffs, looking up at the vultures on the cliffs above. However, we quickly found it too hot. Stopping in the shade, we noted a Black Kite, a couple of Red-billed Chough, Crag Martin, a family group of Peregrines and Mike noticed a male Blue Rock Thrush high up on the cliff tops.

We retreated to the shade of a small plateau, and rested under a sessile oak and watched awhile a Southern White Admiral and the vultures before heading into the shadier woods on the north-side of the ridge. Here the Scots pine had an attractive understorey of bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* and Carol pointed out the abundance of blue flowers: blue aphyllanthes *Aphyllanthes monspeliensis*, peach-leaved bellflower *Campanula persicifolia* and chicory *Cichorium intybus*, to name but a few.

Despite being much on the north-face of the ridge, it was still very hot and the woods were dry and rather dusty. We had lunch by the remains of a building next to a cliff, with a small spring with Fire Salamander larvae; a Sparrowhawk very obligingly flew close by. On the way back we found just a couple of somewhat gone-over pale-green wintergreens *Pyrola clorantha*, noted the leaves of hepatica *Hepatica nobilis*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* (here native) and the large seed-pods of a leguminous bush, bladder senna *Colutea arborescens*. Most spectacular of the flowers was *Laserpitium siler*, an exuberant umbellifer that grows in great clumps on these dry limestone hillsides.

Back at our small plateau, we rested awhile again and were rewarded with views of a male Subalpine Warbler singing from a dead tree just in front of us.

From here we walked slowly back to the van and adjourned to Le Rozier for well-deserved refreshment.

The last part of the day was along a shadier track next to the river Jonte. We watched a fresh Large Tortoiseshell enter a hole on the side of a house to begin its summer-autumn-winter 'hibernation', and then picked up a path that took us down to the banks of the river. Here we looked for dragonflies and found Beautiful Demoiselle and then a hook-tailed dragonfly *Onychogomphus forcipatus*, which obliging sat on Carol's hat and chewed away at its latest capture. On the damp sand by the river we also spotted an Escher's and a Little Blue and a Dipper and a couple of Grey Wagtails flew past.

The woodland understorey was dominated by knotted geranium *Geranium nodosum*, and here we also found bloody cranesbill *Geranium sanguineum*, common twayblade *Listera ovata*,

rampion bellflower *Campanulata rapunculus*, bastard balm *Melittis melisophyllum* and a martagon lily *Lilium martagon* not quite in flower.

The last part of the excursion was down a track through a delightful patch of downy oak forest, complete with Marbled and Silver-washed Fritillaries, Spotted Flycatcher and two smart Red Helleborine *Cephalanthera rubra*.

After dinner we drove up onto the Causse Méjean to listen primarily for Stone Curlew: alas we only heard Skylark, Tawny Pipit and Yellowhammer, and found roosting Esper's Marbled Whites in the grass. While driving home we saw a Natterjack Toad and a Nightjar on the road.

14 June Causse Méjean - Florac - River Tarn

On our transfer day we first headed with the loaded van up onto the Causse Méjean and to a *lavogne* near the village of Drigas. Here we found Niobe, Knapweed and High Brown Fritillaries and Amanda's Blue at the water's edge, but sadly no Apollo, and Broad-bodied Chaser and Common Blue Damselfly, with a Red Backed Shrike and Linnets in the background.

Then we moved onto a second small *lavogne*, this time close to the village of Hures and with more emergent vegetation. For some this was the highlight of the trip as we were welcomed by a wealth four-winged fauna. At first, the most eye-catching were the hundreds of 4-spotted chasers in constant motion over water, but mixed in there were also the odd Black-tailed Skimmer, Broad-bodied Chaser and Emperor Dragonfly. As well there were hundreds of Azure Damselfly and a *Lestes viridis*.

Just as we were leaving, Mike caught sight of a harrier on the hillside beyond the *lavogne*. On close inspection it turned out to be a male Hen Harrier, which was soon joined by a juvenile bird. After watching the 'pair' for a while, we saw how the male dropped a prey item to the floor for the young bird to catch for itself.

Butterfly-wise we were able to compare at close-range many of the blues and fritillaries that we had already come across as they sat mud-puddling at the water's edge in front of us. We were able to use blades of grass to point out spots on the underwing that are important for identification. We thus got to grips with Silver-studded, Amanda's, Mazarine and Escher's Blues, and Knapweed, Spotted and Meadow, High Brown and Niobe Fritillaries. In the background a Corn Bunting 'sang' from a bush and Griffon Vultures flew over.

Continuing on from this delightful site, we had a quick stop to look at the Przewalski horses breeding in captivity in a fenced-off area of the *causse*. At a further stop we admired a Red Kite (NOT part of any release programme!) and then just as we approached the local airstrip, a lark standing in the middle of the road stopped us in our tracks. It turned out to be one of the few Calandra Larks in the area, and we had good looks through the windscreen.

Lunch was had under a pine and then we headed onto Florac. To our surprise the hotel seemed to be shut for the afternoon, although we were still able to leave our bags before heading off to the river Tarn at the medieval village of Castelbouc nestling under the sheer cliffs of the Tarn gorge. Walking through the village we spotted lots of harebells *Campanula rotundifolia* on a cliff, along with clumps of white sedum *Sedum album* and *Saxifraga cebennensis*. From the village, we took a path alongside the river in the shade, although it was rather too hot for most living creatures. The dragonflies were limited to a number of *Platycnemis acutipennis* and a *Gomphus* sp. or two by the river. The commonest butterflies nectaring on the wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare* were Marbled Fritillary and Ilex Hairstreak.

Flowerwise, in the woods we found one good red helleborine and a number of knotted geranium, as well as a sycamore-like tree that Doug explained was in fact a Norway maple *Acer platanoides*, separable from its more familiar congener by the white latex that exudes when you break off a leaf.

15 June North Causse Méjean

Few other places in Europe offer Black Vulture, Beaver and lady's slipper orchids – but that is what we found on this memorable day.

Our first stop was a typical urgent roadside halt for an overflying bird. Fortunately, the bird in question -a Black Vulture- behaved and allowed us all to get out of the van calmly and compare it close-up in flight with a Griffon Vulture and a much smaller Black Kite.

We continued on to meet Didier. We had a quick look from the viewpoint down to the river Tarn 600 m below, before heading off along through the pine forest along the edge of the Causse Méjean. Our first stop was to look at the attractive yellow flax *Linum campanulatum* in the understorey and a number of slightly dried-up bird's-nest orchids. Then we began to drop on an ever-steeper path that headed down into the forest and to one of only two known populations of lady's slipper orchids between the Alps and the Pyrenees! The path was somewhat steep, but Didier had rigged up a rope that enabled us to slide down through the trees to the first of the orchids. Some stayed next to the first -and best- of the orchids, which, it must be said, had been a lot fresher the previous week. The more intrepid ones got further down the slope and in total counted 45 orchids. All agreed it was well worth the struggle, although it was a bit disappointing to have found the orchids rather less than at their best. Also in the understorey we found more yellow flax, lots of lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*, scented Solomon's seal *Polygonatum odoratum* and a solitary sword-leaved helleborine *Cephalanthera longifolia*. On the small rock outcrops Carol found kernera and fairy foxglove.

Once back up and after a well-deserved rest, we strolled back through the woods and found some good fragrant orchids *Gymnadenia conopsea*, remarked that the spotted orchid on the limestone (cf. day 3) here is common heath spotted *Dactylorhiza fuchsia*, and identified *Imula montana* and the dioecious (plants are all male or all female) honewort *Trinia glauca* as two of the commoner plants on the dry limestone pavements of the *causes*. We also had good views of a pair of Woodlarks in a field and of a male Green Lizard with a bright blue throat.

After lunch in the shade (to the sound of Bonelli's Warblers) we had a quick look at the cliffs and found a single Pyrenean Bellflower *Campanulata speciosa* and a female Green Lizard (without the blue throat).

On way back towards Florac we stopped at a concrete *lavogne* that, although not comparable to the previous day's water-holes, still produced a Sloe Hairstreak, High Brown Fritillary, Essex Skipper, two Grass Snakes and a Broad-bodied Skipper. Shortly, we stopped at another look-out point on the road where the cliffs were decorated with great clumps of snow in summer *Cerastium tomentosum* and a few plants of *Saxifraga continentalis* (= *S. tridactylites*) and the southern French endemic *Hormatophylla macrocarpa*.

We dropped down to the river tarn at the rather touristy town of Sant-Eminie and headed for some superb lizard orchids *Himantoglossum hircinum* that Mike had located the week before. Our last stop was the town of Florac itself to buy books.

However, our day wasn't finished yet and after dinner we piled back into the van with Didier and headed off from Florac to one of the Beaver lodges that are scattered along the rivers of the Cévennes. This particular lodge is very accessible and provides an ideal viewpoint to watch the Beavers at their most active at dusk. We stood on the side of a small dam and with the scope and binoculars all had good views of what turned out to be three different Beavers, swimming with branches in their mouths and coming quite close to investigate what we were doing.

16 June Mont Lozère

Today it was back to the granite as we drove all but up to the summit of Mt. Lozère.

We started by driving up through Pont de Montvert of Robert Louis Stevenson fame and botanised the fields above the village of Finials. Here the pastures were ablaze with heartsease, bistort *Polygonum bistorta*, globe flower *Trollius europaeus*, spiked rampion, the last few pheasant-eye's daffodils and the bright yellow winged greenweed *Chamaespartium sagittalis* and Pyrenean broom *Cytisus purgans*. The boggiest places were decorated with starry saxifrage *Saxifraga stellaris*, heath spotted orchid (*D. maculata* on the granite), tormentil, petty whin *Genista anglica*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* and a cotton-grass (probably *Eriophorum vaginatum*), whilst the roadsides held striped toadflax *Linaria repens*.

Amongst the cows in the pastures we had good views of a male yellowhammer, heard Red-legged Partridge and had quick views through the telescope of a male Rock Bunting that was unfortunately rather too silhouetted. Early butterflies included lots of Piedmont Ringlets, a Purple-edged Copper, a typical denizen of these bistort-filled meadows, and a male Mazarine Blue.

We carried on up to Coll de Finiels, where we examined a rather dry peat bog with *Genista anglica* and the attractive golden cinquefoil *Potentilla aurea* and then entered the high pastures with a few clumps of pheasant's eye daffodil, radish-leaved bittercress *Cardamine raphanifolia* in the streams, and Piedmont ringlets.

Lunch was taken once again in the shade overlooking the high 'moors', rather drier than normal, before dropping back down the road to pick up a narrow road towards Mas Camargue, still on the south-facing slopes of Mt. Lozère.

Here the meadows were if anything even more spectacular than in the morning, and although we didn't add any more species of flower to our list, the sight of the meadows was one for sore eyes. A few new species of butterfly appeared, including Green Hairstreak, Peacock and Brimstone, and we also stopped to watch a large Striped Hawkmoth nectaring on a lilac bush.

Our antepenultimate stop dropping further back down Mt. Lozère was at a wetter roadside patch with marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris* and then a sudden burst of 3 Whinchats, 6 Griffon Vultures, a Black Kite and a Short-toed Eagle that morphed into a hovering Buzzard: in retrospect the eagle disappeared just as the buzzard appeared and there were in fact two different birds.

Our penultimate stop was just beyond Pont de Montvert, on a stream heading southwards into the thick beech and European silver-fir forests. Here we found an understory of Alpine leek *Allium victorialis* and finally some molopospermum *Molopospermum peloponnesiacum*, an umbellifer that is as imposing in real life as it is in name, worthy of a photograph. Walking up through the woods we also found large-leaved sandwort *Arenaria grandiflora*, greater wood-rush and the leaves of purple prenanthes.

Lower down the meadows were attractively splashed in deep pink by the flowers of *Silene viscaria* and walls alongside the road had lots of *Saxifraga continentalis*. Butterflies here included Peacock, Large Skipper, Sooty Copper, Black-veined White, Cleopatra, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Tortoiseshell and Piedmont Ringlet.

Our final stop was the beaver site again, where we entered the woods behind the lodge and had a close-up look at the collection of half-knawed and fallen trees that litter the bank near the beaver's lodge we had visited the previous night.

17 June Les Bondons

We started our final day with a pre-breakfast stroll into the park behind the *chateau* in Florac. Despite a few drops of rain (the only drops of the whole trip) we heard our first Greater Spotted Woodpecker, got close-up views of 5 Serins on the path, saw a number of Spotted Flycatchers and had views of the Grey Heron colony.

For the day's main activities we drove up briefly over the Causse Sauveterre (to the north of the Causse Méjean we had already visited), down to Coll de Miramat and then on to the area of contact between the granite and calcareous grasslands at the western end of Mont Lozère. Unfortunately, one of the best meadows for arnica, etc. had been grazed and so we drove on a little further to try and find a similar meadow but failed. We stopped and had good views of Red Kite, Whinchat and lots of cows.

We headed back towards Les Bondons, a pair of prominent hills that legend has it were formed when the giant Gargantua sat on a nearby hill and emptied his clogs of all the sand he had picked up walking across the *causses*.

As we walked along a track towards Les Bondons we were delighted to see corn cockles *Agrostemma githago* in the fields and Carol explained that they were in fact poisonous to cattle. On the way we had excellent views of 2 hovering Short-toed Eagles, our best views to date, and heard Quail from quite near in the neighbouring fields. Below Les Bondons themselves, we found many of the same plants as we had got used to on the calcareous grassland, as well Osiris Blue and Knapweed Fritillary amongst the butterflies. On the way back to the van, 6 Griffon Vultures flew up on the thermals and glided close by and we spotted a Honey Buzzard a little way over toward Mt. Lozère to the north. On the road next to the van, there was an Amanda's Blue on the edge of a puddle.

We drove down to a stream to find shade for our picnic and as we ate Mike found Sloe Hairstreak, Purple-shot Copper and Marbled Fritillary nectaring by the roadside. After lunch we looked at the flora on the small schist cliffs next to the road, our only contact with the flora of this rock type. Here we found forked spleenwort *Asplenium septentrionale*, the ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum monspeliense*, *Centaurea pectinata*, the attractive pink Sweet William catchfly *Silene armeria* and the leaves of creeping snapdragon *Antirrhinum ansarina*. And Mike very nearly found an Asp Viper, which was hiding next to a fern as he reached in to touch ...

From the bridge over the river we spent a long time looking at a male Southern White Admiral basking on the vegetation below. With the sun somewhat hidden, he was content to bask and we had time to get the scope out for all to have excellent views.

Our final halt was back and beyond Florac in a damper valley on the limestone just along from the village of Sant Laurent de Trèves. Here in a wet flush with lots of the alkaline-loving cotton-grass *Eriphorum angustifolia*, we found excellent fragrant and broad-leaved marsh orchids *Dactylorhiza majalis*, here fully sized unlike many of the orchids we had seen the

previous days thanks to the additional moisture. Carol then found a small bug orchid *Orchis coriophora* and Mavis noted our only Wood Pigeon.

We carried along the track, hearing Cirl Bunting for the first time and noting a couple of Escher's Blues in a puddle. Carol noted that in a bank next to the track were growing both herb Robert *Geranium robertianum* and Little Robin *G. purpureum*, as well as dovesfoot cranesbill *Geranium molle*.

As we headed towards the beech wood, we noted yellow foxglove *Digitalis lutea*, spurge laurel *Daphne laureola*, bushes of wild gooseberry *Ribes uva-crispa* and bastard balm. Once in the woods, we poked around the rock outcrops finding abundant limestone oak fern *Dryopteris robertianum* and then on the way back Mike spotted a chrysalis of a Large Tortoiseshell suspended in the gloom. Other butterflies included Large Wall Brown and a Grayling on the track. We sat to rest, watching a Red Kite and a Common Buzzard behind us for a while.

Our last visit was to the dinosaur footprints behind the village of Sant Laurent, where a trail and information panels explain not only the interesting footprints but something of the local geology.

18 June Florac – Le Petit Camargue – Montpellier Airport

As the flight was not until 15.00 we had time for a quick visit to the most western part of the Camargue, the so-called Petite Camargue that more or less borders onto Montpellier Airport. Despite the heat, we time to view the Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, Shelduck, Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns and Black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls in the marshes opposite the track.

Lunch was taken in the shade to the sound of Nightingales.

And then it was goodbye at the airport and a really successful –if somewhat hot- trip.

Mike Lockwood

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