

# Catalan & High Pyrenees

Saturday 23 – Saturday 30 June 2007

## Trip report

### Leaders:

Mike Lockwood

Fran Trabalon

### TRIP REPORT

*A good trip marked by the general abundance of all types of wild living beings, from plants through to butterflies and birds. The weather was kind to us, with none of the heat we've had in La Cerdanya in previous years, nor any afternoon storms.*

*Most of the expected bird species performed well, although the lack of Black Woodpecker in La Mata de València was a bit of a surprise. There were excellent views of Booted and Short-toed Eagles, a Lammergeier fly over and plenty of Citril Finches, Ring Ouzels and Red-backed Shrikes to keep the birders on their toes. The butterflies were probably somewhat affected by the drought and there was a scarcity of some species. However, the Apollos and Clouded Apollos more than made up for this.*

*The highlights must go to the alpine flowers, moss campion, alpine pasque flowers and, of course, the gentians. Personal highlights included the Booted Eagles from the road near Son, the butterflies on the last afternoon walking down from Llac de Sant Maurici and the wintergreens.*

### DAILY DIARY

**Saturday 23 June 2007**

**Barcelona-Prullans**

Everyone arrived safe and sound in Barcelona, and we sped northwards without halting to our hotel in Prullans. Once everyone had been installed in their rooms, we reconvened downstairs for refreshment and then went for a walk up on the dry hillsides behind the hotel. Our first sightings were the ubiquitous Collared Doves, and then we listened to a number of Nightingales and Serins. A small meadow by the side of the road provided our first butterfly sightings: Clouded Yellow and the soon-to-be ubiquitous Black-veined White.

Once out on the path proper we quickly found a Silver-studded Blue, but sadly no other blues 'mud-puddling' on a trickle of water flowing out of a pasture. Along the path familiar Speckled Wood (although in the more orangey European form) and Wall Brown appeared, along with Iberian Marbled White, Heath Fritillary and a quick Marbled Fritillary in the last rays of the evening sun. A final butterfly sighting was of a Chestnut Heath all but hidden in the grass.

On the way along we had a view in the scope of a Hoopoe in a tree and Stonechat and Red-backed Shrike perched on convenient bushes. The cliffs over the other side of the small valley below provided good raptor fare: first a Short-toed Eagle and then an Egyptian Vulture, often hard to find in La Cerdanya, and finally a Black Kite. All in all, a good crop for a first evening's walk.

The dry hillside was providing a number of flowers, although perhaps not as many as in a non-drought year. The spiky shrub of *Genista scorpius* was dominant, although in the meadows we noted large patches of erect clematis *Clematis recta*, seemingly untouched by the pasturing cows, and the gaudy flowers of Etruscan honeysuckle *Lonicera etrusca*. By the track we found two interesting shrubs/trees - amelanchier *Amelanchier ovalis* and St. Lucie's Cherry *prunus mahaleb* - and Pyrenean honeysuckle *L. pyrenaica*, growing out of a small cliff up to our left. Flowering plants by the wayside included the woody borage *Lithodora fruticosa* and the dark purple-blue flowers of *Vicia onychibryoides*, beautiful flax *Linum narbonense*, Buckler mustard *Biscutella laevigata* with its double shield-like seeds that give it its name, and mountain cornflower *Centaurea montana*.

**Sunday 24 June 2007**

**Coll de Pal**

We awoke to a day that promised to be fine and sunny, even if a few clouds appeared in the afternoon.

We headed back through the Túnel de Cadi that we had driven through the previous day to begin the drive up to Coll de Pal. Our first stop was a viewpoint, where we debussed briefly to stretch our legs and watched a Hummingbird Hawkmoth nectaring on viper's bugloss *Echium vulgare* and a Large Wall Brown on the slope below us. Little else was moving and so we moved on to the start of our morning's walk.

We parked by the road side and picked up a track entering the light pine forest. The wayside was colourful to say the least and dotted with the pink and white Mt. Cenis restharrow *Ononis cristata*, *Satureja alpina*, Montpellier milk-vetch *Astragalus monspessulanus*, horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, evergreen candytuft *Iberis sempervirens* and alpine skullcap *Scutellaria alpina*. On the first rock outcrop we looked up through binoculars at a few delightful clumps of *Ramonda myconi* and Pyrenean honeysuckle. Elsewhere we identified alpine gypsophila *Gypsophila repens*, livelong saxifrage *Saxifraga paniculata*, lady's-mantle *Alchemilla vulgaris* agg. and heart's-ease *Viola tricolour*.

The most colourful object of desire was, however, a couple of bright yellow and orange male Moroccan Orange-tips that flew gently along the track with us: other butterflies at this stage included Pearl-bordered Fritillary, de Prunner's Ringlet and a first Apollo, flapping by very leisurely.

Over the cliffs up to our right we had views of Common Buzzard, 3 adult Egyptian Vultures, about 20 Griffon Vultures, all rounded off with small groups of Crag Martin.

Once over a small ridge, we dropped down to an old mine, where Mike dragged everyone to see the delicate pink and purple flowers of the rock stork's-bill *Erodium petraeum* subsp. *glanulodum* that were growing on rocks here. A couple of Alpine Choughs appeared out of nowhere, but wouldn't come down to the biscuits we sacrificed.

Around the next corner, now on a north-facing slope, we came to a small rock outcrop on our right, which provided more good views of *Ramonda myconi*, as well as a chance to observe close up brittle bladder fern *Cystopteris fragilis*, rock valerian *Valeriana montana*, reddish saxifrage *Saxifraga media*, the basal rosettes of Pyrenean saxifrage *S. longifolia* and in a very shady crevice, the delicate yellow flowers of yellow wood violet *Viola biflora*. Growing in the grass around the rock we noted a golden-drop *Onosma tricosperma*, a single flower of *Androsace villosa*, stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus* and, through the scope at the base of the cliffs behind, the bright pink flowers of round-leaved restharrow *Ononis rotundifolia*.

Half of the group spent 10 minutes or so searching for a Ring Ouzel on the edge of the forest and were rewarded with brief but close view of a pair of these fine birds.

After refreshments we continued on to a look-out point – Mirador del President – where we marvelled at the view over to the cliffs of Serra de Moixeró and enjoyed the view in the pleasant sunshine. From this magnificent viewpoint we hoped to see one of the local Lammergeiers, but only Griffon Vultures appeared, omnipresent, in front of us. A number of Citril Finches fed on the ground nearby and small groups of Crossbills flew over the pine forest without stopping. We were surprised to see a Cuckoo fly over the pines below us.

Mike went back to get a van, while the group continued with Fran through the forest to be then picked and whisked off to the lunch site, where some sat within the shade, some without. The dry calcareous meadows here held a few yellow and mauve alpine asters *Aster alpinus* and a couple of spring gentians *Gentiana verna* found by Anne. Fran found a Chamois on the cliffs beyond the road, which we all viewed through the scope, which set us up for our afternoon activity: the walk from Coll de Pal itself (2,090 m) up to Comafloriu, another marvellous viewpoint.

We debussed at the Coll and proceeded to begin our gradual stroll uphill across the short grass dotted with gentians: a few spring gentians, but far more trumpet gentians *Gentiana acaulis* just hanging on and the more purpley-blue Pyrenean gentians *Gentiana pyrenaica*. Other flowers littering the grass here included one-flowered fleabane *Erigeron uniflorus* and alpine clover *Trifolium alpinum*. Few butterflies were flying, just Small Tortoiseshell and a number of ringlets identified as de Prunner's Ringlet.

In these alpine pastures, Water Pipit and Northern Wheatear were the commonest birds and their song accompanied us up to the first rise. Just beyond this point, Fran spotted another Chamois up to our right,

motionless, not over bothered by our presence. We reached the edge of Comafloriu one by one and prepared to relax, but were awoken by Fran's call of Lammergeier from behind us. We quickly reconvened by his side and some of us had quick views of this magnificent vulture as it cruised the ridge of Puigllançada in the distance. It disappeared, alas, instead of coming closer, as we hoped.

Having rushed back to see the Lammergeier, we decided that it was time to start back anyway and without further ado we wandered back towards the vans, enjoying the Water Pipits, Northern Wheatears, Skylarks, Kestrel and many Griffon Vultures, as we went. However, just as we were getting near the vans, Mike spotted a male Rock Thrush on the rocks away to our right. Fortunately, the group was sufficiently close together for all to get a view of this brilliant bird through the scope. An excellent way to end a first day.

Our final stop before reaching home was a small cliff-face where we photographed clumps of soft snapdragon *Antirrhinum molle*.

The day didn't finish here, as we decided that it was a fine night for an evening wander. We took the vans down to the nearby town of Bellver de la Cerdanya and wandered around the back streets in search of Scops Owl. Nevertheless, first we heard a Little Owl before we all heard somewhat in the distance an insistent Scops Owl. A Midwife Toad also called and so we were able to compare the calls of these two rather similar sounding creatures.

### **Monday 25 June 2007**

### **Estanys de la Pera & meadows above Lles**

A pre-breakfast stroll produced Golden Oriole, Nightingale, Black Redstart, Crag Martin, White Wagtail, Spotted Flycatcher and a Rock Sparrow around the village.

Our main destination today was the group of lakes known as Els Llacs de Pera, a pair of glacial lakes high up amid the granite rocks on the north side of La Cerdanya. After a photo stop for a cow-shoeing contraption and a meadow, where we looked at cornflowers *Centaurea cyanus* and spreading bellflower *Campanula patula*, we drove through the little village of Aransa and parked at a picnic spot high up in the pine forest at about 2,100 m. From here our target was the lakes, and our route more or less followed a broad track. However, we spent most of the time off the track examining the spring flowers growing amidst the pines.

The first grazed area and a dampish gully held cuckoo flower *Cardamine pratensis*, common butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, Pyrenean gentians familiar from the previous day and marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*. In drier areas we found Pyrenean lily *Lilium pyrenaicum* about to flower, Pyrenean lousewort *Pedicularis pyrenaica*, alpine toadflax *Linaria alpina*, pyramidal bugle *Ajuga pyramidalis*, the low pink alpine lychnis *Lychnis alpina*, mountain dog-daisy *Anthemis cretica* and a wonderful understory of alpenrose *Rhododendrum ferrugineum*. Other floral highlights included fine patches of trumpet gentians, in much better condition than the previous day's, tight pin-cushions of moss campion *Silene acaulis* (the Formula 1 flower!), a few Pyrenean buttercups *Ranunculus pyrenaicus* hanging on and the wonderful sulphur-yellow alpine pasque flower *Pulsatilla alpina* subsp. *apiifera*.

As we trooped up the track as the day warmed up and we rested at two lakes with the thought of lunch in mind. The first lake had patches of water crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis* (but no dragonflies) and the hillsides were speckled yellow with flowers of wood treacle-mustard *Erysimum sylvestris* subsp. *pyrenaicum*. We cut a corner on the final bend and flopped down gratefully next to a stone mountain hut with fine views back down the valley we had just climbed. Our rest was disturbed by a sighting of two Grey Partridges, now very rare in the Pyrenees, and other birds such as Grey Wagtail, Ring Ouzel, Citril Finch, Crossbills and both Alpine and Red-billed Choughs.

After a well-earned rest we began a wander through the pastures north of the lake. Most of the many Pyrenean buttercups had gone over, but we found a few entire-leaved primulas *Primula integrifolia* hanging on next to a small stream, along with more moss campion and spring and trumpet gentians, one-flowered fleabane, an amplexicaule buttercup *Ranunculus amplexicaulis*, and on a small cliff next to the path the delightful pincushions of *Androsace vandellii* and white musky saxifrage *Saxifraga moschata*.

However, the sighting of the afternoon was a very compliant Alpine Marmot that sat on its rock next to the track and provided excellent views for all. All of us were surprised at its size, remarking that it was badger-sized and not more cat-sized as most had imagined.

From here we dropped down in fairly brisk fashion back to the car, with stops to watch Crested Tit, and a Long-tailed Blue. A Dipper was surprised by the group in a small stream on the way back to the car park.

We had made fairly good time coming down and so we moved on to some damp meadows above the village of Lles. First stop brought a Bog Fritillary, here in one of its very few Pyrenean stations, but little else in a meadow that was not quite 'ripe' yet. At lower altitudes, there were likewise few butterflies except Silver-studded Blues and the obligatory Black-veined Whites. The birds spotted here included Yellowhammer, Serin and Raven.

Plant wise, the lower altitude and south-facing orientation meant that there a fair few new plants on display: the two-toned blue false sainfoin *Vicia onobrychioides*, *Euphorbia serrata*, beautiful flax, winged greenweed *Chamaespartium sagittale*, heath spotted orchid *Orchis maculata*, Carthusian pink *Dianthus carthusianorum*, agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria* and yellow woundwort *Stachys recta*.

And with that we called it a day and headed for home via the nearby town of Bellver, where a number of people stopped to buy maps and souvenirs.

## **Tuesday 26 June 2007      Meadows above Grèixer, river Ridolaire, & gravel pits at Sanavastre**

After breakfast, we went east to the small village of Grèixer, perched high above the plain of La Cerdanya on the shaly soils of the northern part of the valley. Once off the main road, our first stop was a typical panic stop and a rush to get the scopes out as a smart pale phase Booted Eagle flew low over the road, turned back towards us and then disappeared.

Once parked beyond Grèixer, our morning here consisted largely of walking along a dirt track up into the hills and back again amidst scrub composed largely of clumps of Pyrenean broom *Genista purgans* and broom *Cytisus scoparius*.

The scrub was good, however, for birds, with Red-backed Shrike and Rock Thrush for starters. A Short-toed Eagle circled obligingly overhead for a while, before disappearing over the hillside. A little further on we had good views through the scope of both a family of Southern Grey Shrikes (a new breeding site for the area), and a Tawny Pipit well-spotted by Jim. We had also good views of two Hoopoes.

The butterflies took some time to get on the wing: at first, Meadow and Knapweed Fritillaries, Large Wall Brown, Iberian Marbled White and the inevitable Black-veined White. In the first gully, rather dry, we found a slightly gone-over bug orchid *Orchis coriophora* and a number of bluebell-like (but brown) dipcadi *Dipcadi serotinus*, as well as Pearly, Chestnut and Small Heaths. Further along, flowers included peach-leaved bellflower *Campanula persicifolia* and the instantly recognisable small yellow foxglove *Digitalis lutea*.

Our first blues were to be Small and Silver-studded, followed by Sloe Hairstreak, Bath White and Queen of Spain Fritillary. A good start to the morning! Examining the scrub area we found Subalpine Warbler (rare in the area in previous years – see previous trip reports - global warming??) and Common Whitethroat; and up high a trickle of Griffon Vultures appeared that quickly turned into a flood. In all we counted over 30 Griffons flying in from the west, generally in singles, that were obviously heading for a point on the hillside below us, where there must have been a dead animal of some description. Later in the morning most were in the air again, rising high on the thermals (thermicals??), having either been disturbed from the carcass or having found that the hoped for dead cow was merely a dead dog! Also in the air in the morning were Raven, Black and Red Kites.

As the day started warming up even further we found a fresh Purple-shot Copper, which allowed itself to be photographed well, and then Spanish Purple Hairstreak, Large Skipper and Grayling just as we reached a shady bend in the track with a greater degree of humidity. Here we found a good number of fritillaries, including our first False Heath and Green Fritillaries, the latter one of the very few of the large *Aryginis* fritillaries we were to see in the whole trip. Still to come were a pair of mating Purple-

shot Coppers, Wood White, another Apollo to add to those of the first day, Scarce Swallowtail, Berger's Clouded Yellow and Spotted Fritillary.

After a false start, we headed down a track to the right and ended up in the shade of a grove of trees next to a babbling brook, where we rested awhile. A Wryneck called from a tree, although we only managed to see a Golden Oriole as it flew from one ash to another. Marbled Fritillaries basked in the sun on the blackberries. Frances caught sight of a Fallow Deer on the bank above us, which sloped off before any one else could see it!

Fran volunteered to go back for a van to avoid having to retrace our steps. We gave him a fair start, but still managed to walk about halfway back before he came to rescue us and so whisk us off to our luncheon engagement next to river Segre.

Lunch was taken on the banks of the river, next to a small chapel, Santuari de les Quadres. Short-toed Eagles and Black Kites performed well as we sat and ate.

After lunch we drove off to one of the many small streams – el Ridolaire - that flow down to the main river Segre, and which has traditionally been a good sight for mud-puddling butterflies. After an enjoyable ride through the cornfields of the lower valley, we reached our allotted parking place only to find that there was no strategic puddle for the blues to come down to. Undeterred, we set off along the path in the woods in a bid for a quiet and sunny meadow Mike knew of in the woods. Along the way, there were common spotted orchids *Orchis maculata* in the shade of the trees, as well as lots of columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*. A White Admiral showed well at head height above the track and there were plenty of Wood Whites. In the meadow at the end of the track, we wandered freely and found Amanda's Blue, Red-underwing Skipper and Scarce Swallowtail.

Back at the bus we had a quick look from the bridge at a small group of puddling butterflies on a small patch of wet sand below: Common, Amanda and Mazarine Blues, amongst others.

By now it was getting late and it was time to head off for our date with the Bee-eaters at the gravel pit at Sanavastre. We spent 15 happy minutes or so watching their antics, along with Rock Sparrow, Yellow Wagtail, and a Hobby crossing the fields very fast behind us. We searched a nearby field for Stone Curlew without success before moving on past the Bee-eater colony and out into the cornfields, where we found a house being built on one of the Stone Curlew's favourite fallow fields! No joy there, but we all heard a Quail calling distinctly from a field next to the track.

### **Wednesday 27 June**

### **Coll de Cantó – Espot - Son**

We set off bright and early for Espot and the Aiguestortes i Llac de Sant Maurici National Park and made our first stop at the Port de Cantó, a high pass lying at 1700 m a.s.l. Here we wandered through the pastures coloured yellow with winged greenweed and common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* and dotted with heath spotted and burnt-tip *Orchis ustulata* orchids. The butterflies gradually began to spread their wings and we recorded our first Glanville and Meadow Fritillaries and Adonis Blue. A Black Kite and a few Griffon Vultures (which we were only looking at by now in case they were Lammergeiers) circled in the rising thermals. Perched on the rose bushes there were the inevitable Red-backed Shrikes and Mistle Thrushes made their presence known.

From the pass we headed straight off down to the town of Sort, and then up the river Noguera Pallaresa and on to Espot at the entrance to the National Park. We debussed, went up to our rooms and reconvened to head off for our picnic in a meadow along the minor road between Espot and Son. We stopped at a site where Mike knew there were a few examples of savin *Juniperus sabina*, a sprawling shrub that is far commoner in the Alps than the Pyrenees. After a lazy lunch in the shade, here we also discovered swallow-wort *Vincetoxicum hirundinicum*, false sainfoin and Carthusian pink, and on a small rocky crop just below the road, cobweb houseleek *Sempervivum arachnoideum* with its white cotton-like threads around its basal leaf rosette, hoary cinquefoil *Potentilla argentea* with leaves white-hairy beneath and Pyrenean pink *Dianthus pyrenaicus*. Butterfly-wise the meadow held our old friends Silver-studded Blue and Black-veined White in profusion.

The idea in the afternoon was to potter along the road stopping at the many viewpoints that look down on the Noguera Pallaresa far below and over the pine forest above. The first stop was for a Honey Buzzard, which by the time we all got our binoculars on it had turned into a Common Buzzard.

However, we all agreed that this was a different bird. Fran spotted a Goshawk above the forest behind us and we all had reasonable views. A little while later along the road we had good views of a male Rock Bunting in a tree by the roadside. A ringlet butterfly appeared on which we were able to see a pale line on the underside of the hindwing that separates the female Piedmont from the very similar de Prunner's Ringlet that we had been seeing up to now. Great delight was caused by a white crab spider eating a hairstreak in the road-side verge. A second stop produced more raptors: first a Short-toed Eagle showing well, then 2 Egyptian Vultures cruised over quite low, and finally a Sparrowhawk. Passerine-wise (a neologism!), Woodlarks sang and a Rock Bunting perched obligingly in a bush.

We reached the village of Son and turned up towards the large education centre that has been set up there by a Catalan NGO environmental foundation. We parked and wandered gently along a track between the forest and a number of meadows. Our first sightings were greater meadow-rue *Thalictrum aquilegifolium* and fragrant orchids *Gymnadenia conopsea* in a wet patch, and then the first of a number of greater butterfly orchids *Platanthera clorantha* along the edge of the woods. However, the most exceptional find was a group of St. Bruno's lily *Paradisea liliastrum* in an adjacent meadow, a white lily whose Latin name really does do justice to the flower, along with the tall stalks of white asphodel *Asphodelus alba*.

The forest held a number of birds: Goshawk (briefly), Great Spotted Woodpecker, Mistle and Song Thrushes, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Dunnock, Coal Tit, Crossbill and an old friend, the Citril Finch.

Just as we arrived back at the vans and in the same wet-patch as before, we found a number of small flowers we had missed before: large-flowered butterwort, familiar from els Llacs de la Pera, the delicate pink flowers of a single bird's-eye primrose *Primula farinosa* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*. And from here it was back to our new home in Espot.

After dinner we drove up to the limits of the National Park and walked up into the forest along the road we would travel by taxi on the final day. The woods were very silent except for a single distant Tawny Owl and a deer of some description in the car-park. The best sighting of the excursion was a single glow-worm shining brightly from the roadside verge.

## **Thursday 28 June**

## **Espot – Mata de València**

Today we headed off to the wonderful Mata de València, the largest European silver-fir forest in the Iberian Peninsula.

We retraced our steps along the road to Son and decided to stop at the two view points to see if any more raptors would appear as on the previous day. At the first such stop we had views of Griffon Vulture behind us on the ridge and a close view of a Short-toed Eagle hovering. The second stop once again provided Short-toed Eagle but also a couple of pale phase Booted Eagles that proceeded to 'interact', probably as a territorial dispute as both birds then disappeared off in different directions.

Once at La Mata we parked up and headed up into the gloom of the forest, monospecific in terms of trees to an extreme. The shady understorey was populated at first by fine specimens of greater butterfly orchids, but as we entered more fully into the heart of La Mata the understorey became dominated by plants such as wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* (leaves only), violets *Viola* sps. woodruff *Galium odoratum*, red campion *Silene dioica*, hepatica *Hepatica nobilis*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and lots of regenerating silver fir seedlings, with wood cranesbill *Geranium sylvaticum* and stinking hellebore where a little more light reached the forest floor. More rarely we found large-flowered butterwort, nodding wintergreen *Pyrola secunda*, nettle-leaved speedwell *Veronica urticifolia* and a 'horizontal' bird's-nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* (but we found more vertical ones later on, Jill!).

As we moved from clearing to clearing, we began to add to our butterfly list: male Orange-tips, Wood White, Small Blue, Piedmont Ringlet, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and a couple of delightful Duke of Burgundy Fritillaries. We could hear plenty of birds high up in the firs, although very few apart from Coal Tit and Goldcrest ever showed themselves.

Our progress was gentle to say the least as we mooched slowly up to the largest of the clearings that was to be our lunch spot. On the way our first Clouded Apollos, easily confused with the numerous Black-veined whites that were also on the wing, appeared in a large clearing where we all slumped in the

shade. Here too we noted Idas Blues, amongst the butterflies, and arnica *Arnica montana* and hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale*. A little further on, a rock chaos held white musky saxifrage and lots of holly fern *Polystichum lonchitis* and the amount of alpenrose and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* in the area became apparent.

Lunch was taken in the shade overlooking the river Cabanes with its water avens *Geum rivale* and a large clearing with a backdrop of cliffs. We took it easy, trying a local cheese and a cool white wine that Fran and Mike had carried up in their rucksacks. Behind us in the woods there were stands of evergreen candytuft, rock cinquefoil *Potentilla rupestre* and the round-leaved restharrow we had seen on the first day. The highlight of the day was about to occur: Fran finally spotted a reasonably close Lammergeier, which proceeded to head towards us from the mountains opposite and slowly cruise above our heads and away over the forest behind us. Good views were had by all.

We started our way down and heading straight into an area of limestone rock chaos with many new plants for the day growing in the cracks of its rocks: reddish saxifrage, more in flower than on day 1, the minute blue-green leaves of the pin-cushions of blue saxifrage *Saxifraga caesia*, a member of the cabbage family kerneria *Kerneria saxatilis*, limestone oak fern *Gymnocarpium robertianum* and more moss campion. Once into the ever-thickening silver fir forest we found a few tufts of leafless-stemmed globularia *Gloularia nudicaulis* in flower, the leaves of a lungwort *Pulmonaria affinis* and radish-leaved bittercress *Cardamina raphinifolia* in the wet flushes.

We continued down through the forest, with an ever-impooverished understorey with, stopping to admire (if that is the correct word) the feathers of a Great-spotted Woodpecker, probably captured by a Goshawk, and more Coal and Crested Tits, Goldcrest, Treecreeper and Mistle Thrush. We made better headway on the way down and enjoyed the quiet solitude of the forest, recording few other new species. Towards the end of the walk we noted the red-blue spring vetchling *Laythrus vernus* as well as yellow pea *Laythrus laevigatus*.

When the group arrived to the hotel, and as we were convivially enjoying a drink in the hotel gardens, Fran spotted a pair of Golden Eagles flying high up along the ridge of the mountain behind the hotel. We rushed to get the scopes and in the end all had the chance to see one of these magnificent raptors perched in a dead tree.

## **Friday 29 June**

### **Espot – Llac de Sant Maurici – Estany de Ratera**

On our final full day we took a 4-wheel drive taxi up to El Llac de Sant Maurici, deep in the heart of the National Park, and then on beyond to the Estany de Ratera. After a slightly rough ride, we debussed and walked along a broad track towards a viewpoint that provided fabulous views over El Llac de Sant Maurici and Els Encantats. These famous twin peaks overlook the aforementioned lake and with binoculars you can just about see two small rock pillars at the base of the 'V' between the two peaks, which are meant to represent two hunters who were thus petrified by the powers that be, having laughed at a group of pilgrims on the annual procession to the church of Sant Maurici.

Up high in the granite wastes of the park there were few butterflies flying so early in the day and so we were able to concentrate fully on birds and plants. Birds observed here were another Golden Eagle and many Griffon Vultures, as well as Citril Finch, Gray Wagtail and Crested Tit.

Plant-wise, near the view-point we found sesamoides *Reseda sesamoides*, growing in a sprawling rosette, more of the splendid yellow form of the alpine pasque flower we had seen on day two, white asphodel, mountain houseleek *Sempervivum montanum*, oak fern *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* and false medlar *Sorbus chamaemesphilus*, an alpine shrub that would have had a glorious array of flowers a couple of weeks before.

We stopped for a break next to the meander of one of the mountain streams heading into Llac de Ratera, where Mike hoped to find White-faced Darter. There were none on the water but one flew by quickly and was gone before any one really had time to see it.

From Ratera we picked up the track that we had driven up in the taxis and enjoyed the extraordinary views down to Llac de Sant Maurici and Els Encantats. The understorey of the pine forest was largely made up of bilberry and bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*, whilst in more open areas we came across a

small yellow stonecrop *Sedum alpestre* in amongst the rocks, the strangely named baldmoney *Meum athamanticum*, lots of common rock-rose in full flower, livelong saxifrage *Saxifraga paniculata*, knawel *Scleranthus perennis*, a small low-growing plant found on tops of boulders, the wildly named umbellifer *Molopospermum peloponnesiacum* and wood treacle-mustard. In the streams next to the track there was abundant starry *Saxifraga stellaris* and water *S. aquatilis* saxifrages.

Lunch was taken in the shade just below the dam of Llac de Sant Maurici, where we dozed off as Citril Finches flew around us.

Our final activity of the day was to walk back down to the car-park where we had left the vans that morning. Our first find was lesser wintergreen *Pyrola minor*, the second wintergreen of the trip. Clustered bellflowers *Campanula glomerata* appeared along with radish-leaved bittercress and the huge leaves of Pyrenean valerian *Valeriana pyrenaica*. We headed for the small church of Sant Maurici and sat looking across an attractive wet flush where we had the day's best butterfly moment to date: we found Pearly Heath, Large Skipper, Amanda's and Mazarine Blues, Duke of Burgundy, False Heath and best of all, a number of Geranium Argus nectaring on the wood crane's-bill, which also happens to be the food plant of their larvae. Also here a few of us had a quick view of a Red Squirrel.

Once we left the steps of the church, a little way below as the streams crossed the path we chanced upon Escher's and Adonis Blues, as well as Sooty Copper. The wet patch itself was populated by broad-leaved marsh orchid *Orchis majalis*, radish-leaved bittercress, marsh marigold, a few bird's-eye primrose (in somewhat better condition than the single plant of the previous day), Tofield's asphodel *Tofieldia calyculata*, alpine bartsia *Bartsia alpina* and Pyrenean lousewort.

From here the path entered into the fir forest with the babbling river Escrita below us to our right. We found evidence of the presence of Black Woodpecker on the fallen trees and added to our wintergreen list with the finding of both pale-green *Pyrola clorantha* and one-flowered *P. uniflora* wintergreens. We reached and collapsed into an open pasture and, between dozing, we spotted a number of Clouded Apollos flying flow and fast. From here on the pastures were more open and we observed many more butterflies, especially the grizzled skipper-type species that we could not identify without anatomical dissection, Mazarine Blues and Peal-bordered Fritillary. On a rocky outcrop next to the path we found our final flower of the day, globe-headed rampion *Phyteuma hemispaericum*.

We reached the vans almost altogether, which is how it should be, and drove off back to our hotel well pleased above all with the stunning scenery we had been lucky to witness at its best.

## **Saturday 30 June**

## **Espot – Pessonada – Terradets - Barcelona**

With a reasonable amount of time in hand, we were able to make a couple of profitable stops on the way from Espot to Barcelona Airport. First we headed up to the sunny (and hot!!) olive groves near the village of Pessonada for a taste of more Mediterranean flora and fauna. In the end, the heat beat us rather and we spent most of our time sheltering under the trees. The butterfly watchers, however, did find Blue-spot Hairstreak, Great Banded and Woodland Graylings and Spanish Gatekeeper.

Our second stop for an early picnic was slightly more agreeable, as we sat in the shade next to a large metallic structure that served as a fountain and watched the Griffon Vultures, Short-toed Eagles and Alpine Swifts fly above the high cliffs that surrounded us.

And from here, tired but happy, as they say, we arrived back at the airport in time to embark for London.

**BIRDS, CATALAN & HIGH PYRENEES, JUNE 2007**

Species	23/6	24/6	25/6	26/6	27/6	28/6	29/6	30/6	
Grey Heron				2				2	At gravel pit and on way to airport
European Honey Buzzard					1				Quick view between Espot & Son
Common Buzzard		2		1	1				Occasional
Lammergeier		1				1			One poor view Puigllançada; one good view over head Mata de València
Eurasian Griffon Vulture	14	20		50	10	10	10	6	Regular sightings of large groups
Egyptian Vulture	1	3			2	2		1	Surprisingly regular sightings in La Cerdanya and Aigüestortes
Booted Eagle				1		2			1 pale phase La Cerdanya, 2 pale phase near Son
Short-toed Eagle	2			2		1		2	Frequent over open areas
Golden Eagle						2	2		High up over Aigüestortes
Red Kite	2			1	1				Around rubbish tip near Prullans and valley near Aigüestortes
Black Kite				1	1			2	River valleys
Goshawk					1	1			Forests in Aigüestortes
Sparrowhawk						1			Road to Son
Common Kestrel	1	2		2	1	1	1		Common
Common Quail				h					Heard near gravel pit
Red-legged Partridge				h					Heard above Grèixer
Grey Partridge			2						Llacs de la Pera
Tanwy Owl						h			Heard in forest above Espot
Scops Owl		h							Heard in Bellver
Little Owl		h							Heard in Bellver
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	x	x		x	x	x	x		Everywhere
Wood Pigeon	2			2		x		x	Common
Eurasian Collared Dove	x	x	x	x					In Prullans but not Espot
Common Cuckoo				1	h				Heard twice
Alpine Swift								10	Font de les Bagasses, lunc on way home
Common Swift		x	x	x	x	x	x		Everywhere
European Bee-eater				20				6+	Gravel pit near Sanavastre
Eurasian Hoopoe	1			2					Around Prullans
Eurasian Wryneck				h					Heard above Grèixer
Great Spotted Woodpecker	h	h		2	1	1	1		Common
Green Woodpecker						1			Common
Wood Lark	h			h		1			Not uncommon in open areas
Eurasian Sky Lark		5		2	1				Not uncommon in open areas

European Crag Martin	3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Common
Barn Swallow	2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Common around villages
Common House Martin	3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Common around villages
White Wagtail			2	x		1	1		Not rare
Yellow Wagtail				5					Fields near Sanavastre
Grey Wagtail			1			2	2		Rivers
Tawny Pipit				1					Above Sanavastre
Water Pipit		5	5						Alpine pastures
Red-backed Shrike	2	2		2	1	1			Common in open areas with rose or juniper bushes
Southern Grey Shrike				3					Family group above Grèixer
White-throated Dipper			1				1		Rivers
Hedge Accentor (Dunnock)		2	2	x	x		1		Open upland areas with scattered trees and bushes
Rock Thrush		1		2					Male at Coll de Pal and above Grèixer
Common Blackbird	2			2	1	1	1		Common
Ring Ouzel		2	4						Coll de Pal and Llacs de la Pera
Mistle Thrush	h	1			1	1	1		Common
Song Thrush			h		1	1	1		Common in Aigüestortes area
European Robin		h		h	h	h	h		Common in forests
Common Nightingale	2h			h	h	h			Singing every morning near Prullans and Espot
Black Redstart	1	1			x	x	x		In villages
Common Stonechat	1			2					Open areas
Northern Wheatear		5		3	2				Common up high
Common Chiffchaff	2h			h	h	h	h		Frequently heard in forests
Western Bonelli's Warbler		1							Uncommon
Blackcap	h	h		h	h	h	h		Abundant
Subalpine Warbler	1			4					In scrub on south-facing slopes above Prullans and Grèixer
Common Whitethroat				h					Above Grèixer
Goldcrest		h			h	2	h		Common in forests
Spotted Flycatcher			2						In Prullans
Long-tailed Tit				5					Woods in Segre valley
Marsh Tit				x					Woods in Segre valley
Coal Tit	h		6	x	x	x	x		Very common in pine forests
Crested Tit			2			3	4		Common in pine forests
Great Tit	x			x	x	x	x		Abundant
Blue Tit	2			x					Abundant
Treecreeper			1			1			In high-level forests
Eurasian Jay			2	x	x	x	x		Common
Black-billed Magpie			2	x	x				Common in areas near villages or cultivation
Red-billed			50+		30+	50+	20+	10+	Abundant up high

Chough									
Alpine Chough		2	60+						Abundant in La Cerdanya; probably more mixed in with Red-billed Chough
Carrion Crow				2			1		Common
Common Raven	2		2	2	2	2			Common
Golden Oriole				2				2+	Around Prullans
Common Starling				x					In Segre valley bottom
Yellowhammer			1	1					Up high in open areas
Rock Bunting	2		2	2	1	1	1		Widespread
Cirl Bunting								h	In olive grove on way home
Corn Bunting				4					In valley bottom
Common Chaffinch	1		x	x	x	x	x		Everywhere
Eurasian Serin	2		x	x	x	x	x		Everywhere
Citrl Finch		6	6	x	x	x	x		Common in pine forests
Siskin						x	x		Up high in pine forests
European Greenfinch			1						Near Prullans
European Goldfinch	4		3						Prullans
Eurasian Bullfinch						h	h		Forests in Aigüestortes
Common Linnet	2		6		4	4			Open areas
Common Crossbill		6	10	10	4	4	3		Common in pine forests
House Sparrow	10		x	x	x	x	x		Common
Eurasian Tree Sparrow				x					Segre valley
Rock Sparrow	h		1	x					Prullans
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>93 species</b>								

**OTHER VERTEBRATES**

Species	23/6	24/6	25/6	26/6	27/6	28/6	29/6	30/6	
<b>MAMMALS</b>									
Red Fox			1						In meadows above Lles
Chamois		2							Coll de Pal
Red Squirrel							1		Below Llac de Sant Maurici
Marmot			4						Llacs de la Pera
Roe Deer					2				Near Espot
Fallow Deer				1					Above Grèixer
<b>REPTILES</b>									
Common Wall Lizard		X		X	X	X			As common as its name implies
Montpellier snake					1				1 at traffic lights (Fran's van) on roadworks on way to Mata de València.
<b>AMPHIBIANS</b>									
Common Frog			X						Estanys de la Pera

**DAILY BUTTERFLY LOG; CATALAN PYRENEES; JUNE 2007**

Species	23/6	24/6	25/6	26/6	27/6	28/6	29/6	30/6	
<b>HESPERIIDAE</b>									
Large Skipper				x			x		Here and there

Small Skipper				x				River Ridolaire
Southern Tufted Skipper				x				River Ridolaire
Dingy Skipper							x	Scarce except above Espot
Red-underwing Skipper				x				One above Grèixer
<i>Pyrgus</i> sps.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Very frequent
<b>PAPILIONIDAE</b>								
Apollo		x		x	x	x	x	Two near Son
Clouded Apollo						x	x	Mata de València and frequent above Espot
Swallowtail		x		x				Widespread and infrequent
Scarce Swallowtail		x		x				Widespread and frequent
<b>PIERIDAE</b>								
Wood White				x	x	x	x	Frequent at almost all altitudes
Berger's Clouded Yellow				x				Above Grèixer
Clouded Yellow	x		x	x	x	x	x	Abundant
Brimstone				x			x	Frequent at lower altitude
Bath White				x				Somewhat infrequent
Orange Tip		x			x	x	x	Common everywhere
Moroccan Orange Tip		x		x				Near Coll de Pal & river Ridolaire
Large White		x	x	x	x	x	x	Regular, rarely abundant
Small White		x		x	x	x	x	Ubiquitous
Green-veined White		x						Rare
Black-veined White	x		x	x	x	x	x	Very common
<b>LIBYTHADIAE</b>								
Nettle-tree Butterfly							x	In olive grove on way home
<b>NYMPHALIDAE</b>								
White Admiral				x				Once along river Ridolaire
Red Admiral			x					Only at Estanys de la Pera
Painted Lady			x	x				Surprisingly uncommon
Large Tortoiseshell				x				
Small Tortoiseshell		x	x	x	x	x	x	Regular
Dark Green Fritillary				x				Surprisingly rare
Marbled Fritillary	x			x		x		As common as Dark Green and High Brown Fritillaries normally are!
Bog Fritillary			x					Above Lles
Queen of Spain Fritillary		x	x	x	x	x	x	Regular
Pearl-bordered Fritillary		x			x	x	x	Mainly high altitude
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary			1			x		At altitude
False Heath Fritillary				x		x	x	Quite common – seen regularly
Knapweed Fritillary				x	x	x		Quite common
Spotted Fritillary					x			Only on road to Son
Heath Fritillary	x			x				Surprisingly infrequent
Meadow Fritillary					x	x		Widespread but occasional
Grayling				x				Near Son
Rock Grayling	x			x				At lower altitudes
Woodland Grayling							x	In olive grove on way home
Great Banded Grayling	x						x	In olive grove on way home
Spanish Gatekeeper							x	In olive grove on way home
Speckled Wood		x						Infrequent in woodland
Wall Brown		x					x	Locally frequent
Large Wall Brown			x	x				Locally frequent
Small Heath			x					Rare
Pearly Heath				x		x	x	Common
Chestnut Heath	x			x	x			Surprisingly common in damp grassy sites
De Prunner's Ringlet		x	x	x	x	x	x	Locally abundant at mid-altitude
Piedmont Ringlet					x			Coll de Pal
Meadow Brown	x			x				Common at lower altitudes

Iberian Marbled White	x			x					Common at lower altitudes
<b>RIODINIDAE</b>									
Duke of Burgundy						x	x		Edge of mixed woodland
<b>LYCAENIDAE</b>									
Spanish Purple Hairstreak				x					Above Grèixer
Green Hairstreak						x	x		At altitude
Sloe Hairstreak				x					Above Grèixer
False Ilex hairstreak				x					Above Grèixer
Blue-spot Hairstreak								x	In olive grove on way home
Purple-shot Copper				x					Above Grèixer
Sooty Copper							x		Aigüestortes
Geranium Argus							x		Damp meadows in Aigüestortes
Little/Small Blue						x	x		Surprisingly common at altitude
Long-tailed Blue			x	x					Meadows
Idas Blue				x		x	x		River Ridolaire and Aigüestortes
Silver-studded Blue			x	x	x	x	x		Abundant everywhere
Mazarine Blue				x		x	x		Frequent around Aigüestortes
Amanda Blue				x			x		River Ridolaire and near Son.
Turquoise Blue				x					River Ridolaire
Adonis Blue					x		x		Only in Aigüestortes and Coll de Cantó
Common Blue	x			x			x		Not common
Escher's Blue				x			x	x	Above Grèixer and Aigüestortes
<b>TOTAL</b>									<b>72 SPECIES</b>

#### OTHER INVERTEBRATES

Species	23 /6	24 /6	25/ 6	26/ 6	27/ 6	28/6	29/ 6	30 /6	
<b>DRAGONFLIES</b>									
Broad-bodied Chaser				X					River Ridolaire
Red-veined Darter				X					Above Grèixer
White-faced Darter							X		Estanys de Ratera

#### DAY-FLYING MOTHS

Speckled Yellow

One of the few day-flying moths we identified – lack of time!

Hummingbird hawkmoth

Common

Crab spider

Eating a hairstreak on road near Son.

Mike Lockwood, June 2007

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