

Vercors

Sunday 7 – Sunday 14 June 2009

Tour Leader:

Mike Read

Daily Diary

Sunday 7 June

Our flight landed at Lyon – St Exupery airport on time and once we had secured the minibus hire, we were on our way towards the secret corner of France, the Vercors. A lunch stop at a motorway service station provided really good food (compared to UK service stations!) and as we sat outside enjoying our meal and the weather, we saw a few birds. A group of Common Swifts were feeding around some nearby trees and a few House Sparrows and Common Starlings flew around. A passing Common Kestrel drew our eyes to a flying Honey Buzzard and then a couple of Common Buzzards arrived from a more northerly direction and one passed quite close overhead.

After lunch we carried on along the motorway and saw a couple more Kestrels and then a distant White Stork was seen. Soon after this one member of the group saw a small group of egrets in flight and we can only suppose they were Cattle Egrets. We then made a slight detour to Grenoble – St Geoirs Airport which proved very worthwhile. From close to the end of the runway we could see 5 or 6 Common Kestrels, 7 or 8 Common Buzzards and at least 30 Black Kites. We watched these for some while before continuing on around the airport. Soon we had excellent views of 2 hunting male Montagu's Harriers and these were immediately followed by 2 female Hen Harriers. All 4 birds were seen at very close quarters for what are normally shy and suspicious species! As we headed on around, it became obvious that there were more than just 30 Kites present. We settled for 40 or more but in truth there were probably in excess of 55! A little further along the track we saw a Rabbit scamper off into some bushes and spook 2 Goldfinches. Then we saw a fine male Red-backed Shrike perched on the airport's boundary fence. Add in a couple more Common Buzzards, a few Carrion Crows and a flock of 6 plus Rooks and that completed our sightings here.

After seeing 2 more Black Kites, 3 more Common Buzzards and a few Common Kestrels, we left the motorway and began the climb towards Lens-en-Vercors and beyond that to La Chapelle-en-Vercors. Occasional White Wagtails flew up from the road in front of us and we also saw a few more Kestrels, many Pyramidal Orchids and some Large-flowered Butterworts.

Soon we arrived at the hotel with time to relax and unpack before running through the check-list and then heading in for a fine, French, 4-course meal to complete the day.

Monday 8 June

A look in the hotel grounds revealed Common Redstart and a Serin while overhead were a few Common Swifts. After breakfast we drove via St Martin-en-Vercors towards the Fret de la Loubiere. Before St Martin we saw 3 species of raptor these being Common Kestrel, Common Buzzard and a Black Kite. Where there were grassy banks, the winding road up through the forest was studded with an array of beautiful wild flowers (as are most places in the Vercors!) and we stopped at one place just to take in some of the species. Birds singing unseen in the trees included Wren, Common Chaffinch and Song Thrush while the masses of flowers included Whorled Solomon's-seal, Pale-flowered Orchid and Wood Cranesbill plus many more species besides.

After a quick visit to the supermarket in Lens-en-Vercors, we drove a short distance to search for birds in an area of damp meadows. Flowers again carpeted the scene and a pair of Whinchats were busily

feeding along a stream. Close to these birds, a Marsh Warbler was glimpsed and then another was heard at closer range. This bird was also glimpsed as it flew off to more distant bushes and at this location we also added a Grey Heron and a Black Redstart.

A narrow road near Engines took us to a viewpoint where we could see to the distant, snow-capped peaks of the Alps. As we began the drive, a group of 4 Mistle Thrushes flew up from a field and a Serin flew from a roadside bush. Once parked we began to see lots of flowers on rocky areas – some parts looking better than any man-made rockery. Here we found lots of Fairy Foxgloves, Panicle Saxifrage, Early Purple and Man Orchids plus lots more. Birds included constantly singing Garden Warbler, Crag Martins in flight as well as Kestrel, Wren, Coal Tit and Bonelli's Warbler. As we walked back to the vehicle a Short-toed Eagle flew around and drifted off northwards.

After lunch we headed over The Col de la Perin towards Autrans but unfortunately there were many children playing in an area we wanted to check for birds so we decided to head for the Gorges du Meauderet. Many White Wagtails flew up from the road as did one pair of Grey Wagtails and at one parking spot we saw a Dipper feeding in the river. With the Gorges de la Bourne closed for road works, we again had to drive through the Forêt de la Loubiere to reach St Martin and the route towards La Chapelle. However, just a few kilometres from our hotel we diverted on to a road that ran beside le Vernaison Riviere and on sighting some 'butterfly' type orchids, we stopped to check their identity. They turned out to be Lesser Butterfly Orchids but we were surprised to find what we would have missed if we had not stopped. Also here were Fly, Military, Birds Nest and Man Orchids as well as Broad-leaved (not yet in bloom) and Sword-leaved Helleborines and a tall orchid that we could not be sure of as we had no idea of the flower colour. The route back to the hotel from here took us past one more orchid species and that was Monkey Orchid.

Tuesday 9 June

After heavy overnight rain with thunder and lightening the birds seemed a little 'late up' for our pre breakfast walk. However we did manage to see Common and Black Redstarts, 3 Serins, a family of recently fledged Great Tits, a Marsh Tit, Blackbird, Greenfinches and Goldfinches.

After breakfast under cleared skies we drove to the Col de la Machine where our birding was somewhat hampered by the local fire service practising cliff rescue techniques! However we did manage to see more Black Redstarts, House and Crag Martins, Common and Alpine Swifts and 5 Common Buzzards. From there we drove to Font d'Urle where we were greeted by a number of Alpine Choughs. In the end we reckon we saw perhaps 50 of these lovely birds and a couple of their Red-billed cousins. As we wandered up towards the Port d'Urle, the display of flowers typified the diversity and beauty of an Alpine Meadow. Frog, Pink Globe and Elder-flowered Orchids were soon identified, bright yellow Globe Flowers were abundant and there were occasional groups of Trumpet Gentians, Heartsease and Horned Pansies, 2 or 3 species of Saxifrage and dainty clumps of Ciliate Rock Jasmine. There were a few Northern Wheatears about and as we looked towards the Chough breeding cave we could see the first of 2 Alpine Marmots. At the Port itself we noted at least a dozen Griffon Vultures drift past.

We walked back to the car park and headed for a couple of picnic tables for a good lunch. This was followed by a drive to the Vassieux Memorial where the group were allowed a little time to wander among the well-tended graves for some silent reflections on the brutality of war. At this location we saw a couple of male Red-backed Shrikes and a brightly coloured male Yellowhammer and we also heard a Common Quail and a couple of Skylarks singing. As we drove to and beyond Vassieux we did manage to see 3 Skylarks and a couple of Common Buzzards that were wandering about on the ground.

From here we drove to the vulture feeding station seeing little as we went but as we turn into the side road, a pair of Woodlarks flew up from the road and one conveniently perched in a pine tree. A couple of White Wagtails fed close to a lone horse in the field and at times they perched on its back presumably hoping that they could catch some of the pestering flies. Griffon Vultures were somewhat scarce to begin with. There were 7 or 8 in the cage (injured birds?) and just a couple outside. However as time went on, more and more Vultures gathered. Perhaps they were anticipating a free meal! In the

end, we must have seen at least 30 Griffon Vultures, 2 Black Kites and, most exciting of all, the species with the largest wingspan of any European bird, a Black Vulture. This was a new species for a *Travelling Naturalist* group in the Vercors.

During the drive back to la Chapelle, we saw Lizard, Pyramidal, Man and Late Spider Orchids before we reached the Col de Rousset. As we drove through St-Agnan-en-Vercors we had really close views of a Short-toed Eagle and there was a Common Buzzard on a telegraph pole.

Wednesday 10 June

Common Swifts were quite numerous as we walked through la Chapelle to begin our pre breakfast walk. A couple of Serins were seen as was our first European Robin of the trip. Blackcap and Garden Warblers were both heard as was a Common Quail as we stood studying a male Red-backed Shrike. Monkey Orchid was amongst the numerous flower species seen and a group of 7 Mallards flew low over the valley. Our bird list for this walk was completed with Common and Black Redstarts.

After breakfast we drove to the Reserve Naturelle des Hauts Plateaux for a mornings walk. Birds were singing as we disembarked from the minibus and these included Blackcap, Song Thrush and Mistle Thrush. As we began walking a Griffon Vulture passed high overhead but soon our heads were bowed as we took in the myriad of flowers. Various orchids lined the track sides along with Whorled and Angular Solomon's-seals, Seven-leaflet Bittercress and the beautifully scented Garland Flower. As we reached the more level ground, a grassy area opened before us and here we saw a couple of Crested Tits, Tree Pipits, a pair of Bullfinches and a Willow Tit or two. Drifts of pink Thrift stood proud of the grasses that were host to masses of Yellow Rattle while above all of these rose Great Yellow Gentians which were still to bloom. Other flowers noted here included Rock Cinquefoil, Wild Tulip and Alpine Lady's Mantle. Just as we were about to begin the walk back towards the vehicle, some calling alerted us to the presence of a couple of Common Crossbills. After some persistence, brief but good views were obtained of these two birds and we then walked back for a well-earned lunch.

Our late and leisurely lunch was enjoyed by everyone and afterwards we set off for the Col de Vassieux. The drive through typically stunning scenery took in many more Alpine meadows full of flowers and occasional birds. And once parked, we sauntered up towards the viewpoint past massed Wood and Dusky Cranesbills with the song of a Tree Pipit to accompany us. As the view opened up below us, we were able to look down on a hunting Short-toed Eagle. The bird hovered frequently and at one point stood out well against a grassy field in the distance. It was a memorable sighting. It was a memorable moment until a Common Kestrel seemed to take exception at the Eagle's presence and began to dive at it. Soon the eagle was a speck in the distance. Also a long way off was the vulture restaurant that we had visited the previous day but through the telescope we could make out perhaps 20 Griffon Vultures and a passing pair of Common Ravens. By now time had drifted away from us so we crossed the Plain de Vassieux and headed back to the hotel.

Thursday 11 June

We set off towards Chichilianne via the 'long route'. Driving through the Forêt de Lente we headed along between tall forests of conifers and beech trees. Occasional birds flitted across in front of us with the main species identified being Jay because of its white rump. Others noted included Wood Pigeon, Common Buzzard, Song and Mistle Thrush. The overnight rain had dampened the ground sufficiently for clouds to rise from the warm ground and at the Col de la Bataille the cloud swamped us and made any attempt at wildlife viewing impossible. We pressed on through the tunnel and came out into clear weather; what a change in just 100 metres or so!

Near Plan-de-Baix we paused to search a meadow for flowers and butterflies and were successful on both counts. Toothed Orchids were mostly over but a few still held open blooms and there were some Adonis Blues among the many butterflies seen. Birds noted here included Kestrel, Buzzard, Black Kite and Yellowhammer. Best of all was a fine adult Egyptian Vulture that flew around for some time giving us excellent views. We decided that a celebration cup of coffee was in order so we drove on to

Beaufort sur Gervanne and sat in the shade of a grape vine and watched the Swifts and House Martins zooming around the rooftops.

We then drove around some nearby farmland where we noted numerous birds. These included 2 Short-toed Eagles, Red-backed Shrikes, 2 Common Kestrels and at least 4 Rock Sparrows. Most impressive here though were the masses of butterflies to be seen on one particular field of lavender; there must have been approaching 1000 Painted Ladies, 200 Large Whites and a few others too. We then moved to a nearby hillside for lunch. Here we heard Bonelli's Warbler and Blackcap calling and occasionally saw the Short-toed Eagles again. Also noted in this area were many orchids including Red Helleborine, Lizard, Bee and Late Spider Orchids and Violet Limodore.

From Beaufort we took a 'B' road towards Die and this route seemed to be lined with orchids for most of the way. These were mostly Fragrant, Pyramidal and Lesser Butterfly but there were also a few more Red Helleborines glimpsed. Near Die we took a minor road where we heard a Nightingale occasionally singing down by the river and a pair of Common Stonechats were perching on trees and overhead wires.

We now began the climb towards the Col de Menée and ventured off into the Archiane Valley. On reaching good views to the Cirque, we paused and watched for a while. Alpine Swifts made the House Martins look quite small as both species constantly wheeled about overhead. A Blackcap sang occasionally, a Common Buzzard crossed the valley and then rose up on a thermal leading our eyes to a couple of Griffon Vultures passing high above the ridge. We then drove on up to the Col de Menée and down through the forest to Chichilianne reaching our hotel in good time.

Friday 12 June

During the pre breakfast walk we managed to see a few birds including Great, Marsh and Blue Tits (the latter feeding young in a nest) as well as Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Black and Common Redstart and a distant Griffon Vulture drifting over the top of the plateaux ridge. High on some grassy slopes we managed to find 4 Chamois as a Cuckoo gave its distinctive call. Most noticeable were the masses of bright red Common Poppies that adorned the roadside fields and gave the whole scene a memorable appeal.

Later, on the way to the Col de Prayer we found a good number of Common Spotted Orchids and we heard Cuckoo and Bonelli's Warbler singing. At the col itself, we searched for various things and were rewarded with good views of Crested Tit, Serin, a male Red-backed Shrike and a female Black Redstart with at least 3 young. We also heard a Black Woodpecker calling. Flowers here were abundant throughout most of the meadow areas and included masses of Yellow Rattle and a few Broad-leaved Marsh Orchids. Just beyond the tunnel at the Col de Menée a shepherd was attending his flock and the guard dog seemed a little less than welcoming so as there were no visible birds except a couple of Ravens, we headed on to the Vallée de Combeau. A good group of Ladies Slipper Orchids was our first good find and, along with a quantity of Military Orchids, there were some present at our lunch spot too. The nearby pond held a few Trout but these were not on the menu. The hot sunny weather seemed to be keeping birds fairly quiet but just before we set off for higher ground, 3 Common Buzzards were seen soaring over the slopes and one was carrying a captured meal, a snake. A couple of Griffon Vultures also drifted across the valley. As we motored on up through the valley we were again aware of the masses of flowers spread out in the superb Alpine meadows with one roadside sighting being of a Yellow Bellflower.

Once parked we began a walk up to even higher ground. The winding road gave a good walking surface and a gentle slope and we frequently paused to look at flowers and the scenery. Early Purple and Elder-flowered Orchids were frequent while Woodruff was seen right on the track side. Finches were frequent with Chaffinches, Goldfinches and Greenfinches being the most numerous but also seen here and on the higher ground were Crossbills, Serins and a lone Citril Finch. Again, Crested Tits were very visible and somewhat confiding and there were occasional Tree Pipits too.

We eventually returned to the vehicle and made our way back to our hotel in good time to prepare for our evening meal.

Saturday 13 June

A circular walk (well more rectangular really) before breakfast produced many of the same species as yesterday but a useful addition was a Nuthatch which was well seen. After breakfast and a brief visit to Clelles for some shopping, we headed to Tresanne where we took a walk in search of wildlife. In some beech woodland we found Broad-leaved, Large White and Red Helleborines as well as tiny Coralroot Orchids. A Robin was encountered and a Common Buzzard flew overhead calling. Further on there were banks of various orchids and during a second walk we saw Swallowtail butterfly and Great Spotted Woodpecker and heard yet another Black Woodpecker calling. Deep in some woodland we found many Ladies Slipper Orchids but sadly most had finished blooming. Lady and Spitzel's Orchids were also present as were many Round-leaved Wintergreen plants. On the way back to the vehicle we glimpsed a Bonelli's Warbler and a rare, brown form of Cuckoo flew across the field in front of us.

We drove the short distance to the Col de Prayer for lunch in the shade of some pines and once more saw the local Crested Tits. We heard another Black Woodpecker calling but still could not actually see it! Beyond one of the high ridges a number of Griffon Vultures were descending presumably to feed.

Later, on the approach to Gresse en Vercors we paused to photograph what were perhaps some of the best flowering Alpine meadows that we had seen to date. While we were stopped a Common Buzzard flew across the valley at fairly close range. Soon we were driving up the narrow road that led to the Pas de Serpaton. On reaching the car park we began a walk up the final part of the slope as 3 more Common Buzzards were seen. A couple of Alpine Marmots called in alarm but despite searching we could not find any. However, Red-backed Shrikes were quite numerous and we even managed to notice where a pair were nesting in a bramble bush. The flowers were quite glorious as were the views east towards the Grand Veymont and the rest of the Hauts Plateaux ridge while in the opposite direction the Alps rose up in snow-capped majestic splendour. Fabulous!

In the end we just had to drag ourselves away and we headed back down the road, found a new location for Spitzel's Orchids and then paused in Gresse where ice creams helped to cool us a little. We then drove back to Chichilianne in readiness for our evening meal.

Sunday 14 June

We left the hotel just after 9a.m. having seen groups of Common Swifts overhead and a male Black Redstart on the TV aerial. Soon we began to head for a group of lakes near Grenoble. Flowers lined the early part of the journey with many wild orchid species seen where the roadside banks had not been mown. Once on to the peage we lost much of the flora but the scenery back to the main Vercors ridge was still as stunning as ever.

Just a little to the north-east of Grenoble we turned on to a side road and were soon disembarking beside some former gravel pits that were now mostly used as fishing lakes. A Black Kite soared overhead and a Reed Warbler sang in dense vegetation nearby. A couple of Nightingales could be heard singing and we eventually managed brief glimpses of one of these. On the bank of one lake a Grey Heron, the first of 3 birds, stood patiently waiting for a passing fish while overhead a couple of European Bee-eaters flew around and landed in the top of a dead tree. More of these colourful birds were seen a little later. As we strolled around there were plenty of the more common species to be seen and these included Starling, White Wagtail, Chaffinch, Blackcap, Coot and Blue Tit. We stood overlooking one lake and eventually a male Little Bittern flew into some waterside willows. Unfortunately not everyone had seen the bird but after some searching it was seen again. We moved to some tall trees by the lakes and here we found a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a little later we saw a Green Woodpecker feeding down on the ground. A few Marsh Frogs and a few dragonflies including Black-tailed Skimmer and Red-veined Darter completed our watching here and soon we were on our way towards Lyon.

At the first service area on the motorway we paused for our picnic lunch and after that we headed to Grenoble Airport to see if there was a similar quantity of birds present as there had been a week earlier. What a difference a week makes! There were perhaps just 10 or 12 Black Kites to be seen along with 4 Common Kestrels, 3 Common Buzzards, 1 female Hen Harrier and a single Corn Bunting. Presumably last week was closer to when the grass surrounding the runways had been cut and therefore there was more food available to the kites etc. Also, today the weather was much hotter and maybe this too was keeping the bird numbers down.

After a while we headed back to the motorway and continued the journey towards Lyon. During a stop for coffee at a service station we glimpsed our only Sparrowhawk of the tour with a bird, carrying prey, dashing off into an area of bushes. We then completed the journey to Lyon airport, got ourselves checked in for the flight and headed through to the departure lounge. Our flight departed on time and soon we were landing at Heathrow, collecting our baggage and bidding farewell before heading homewards.

SPECIES LIST:

BIRDS

Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Heard near Vassieux on 9 th and during the pre breakfast walk the following day
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	A flock of 7 were seen in flight during the pre breakfast walk on 10 th and a single bird was noted near Grenoble on 14 th
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	A single bird seen on a nest during the drive from Lyon on 7 th and also 2 were on a nest at the same location on 14 th and there were probably 3 more birds nearby
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1 on 7 th during the journey from Lyon and 1 at Lens-en-Vercors the following day
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	A single male was well seen near Grenoble on 14 th
Cattle Egret	<i>Bulbulcus ibis</i>	4 birds seen in flight during the journey from Lyon on 7 th were most probably this species
Common (Eurasian) Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Noted every day with the most being on 7 th when we saw at least 8 at Grenoble airport and another 6 or more during the journey to the Vercors
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	Single birds noted on 7 th on the way to the Vercors and on 11 th during our move from la Chapelle to Chichilianne
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	At least 35 seen at Grenoble airport on 7 th with a few more that day during our journey to the Vercors. Also seen on 8 th (1 bird), 9 th (2), 11 th (3), and a few on 14 th
Eurasian Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Noted every day from 9 th in varying numbers
Black/Monk Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	A single bird below the Col de Rousset was the first sighting of this species for a <i>Travelling Naturalist</i> group in the Vercors
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	A single bird near Beaufort sur Gervanne was the first sighting for a <i>Travelling Naturalist</i> group in the Vercors
Short-toed (Snake) Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	The first was near Lens-en-Vercors on 8 th and the species was noted on the following 3 days
Hen (Northern) Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	“ females at Grenoble Airport on 7 th and a single one there on 14 th
Montagu’s Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	2 males near Grenoble Airport on 7 th were seen at very close range

Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Just a single sighting on the way to Lyon on 14 th
Common (Eurasian) Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Noted every day
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	At least 6 seen at the gravel pits near Grenoble on 14 th
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>	Seen on 11 th in Beaufort and Die and on 14 th in Grenoble.
(Common) Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Seen every day in small numbers
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decacoccto</i>	Seen on 5 days
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	The only bird we saw was one of the rare brown birds near Trezanne on 13 th . However, we did hear the species quite frequently on 4 other days.
Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>	At least 10 at the Col de la Machine on 9 th and a further 4 later that day. 8 on 11 th at the Cirque d'Archiane and a few also seen on 12 th .
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Seen every day.
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	At least 10 seen at the lakes near Grenoble on 14 th .
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Our first was near Tresanne on 13 th and then the following day we saw 2.
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	Heard at the Col du Prayer on 12 th and then in 3 different locations on 13 th but sadly we did not see this large woodpecker.
(European) Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridus</i>	One seen around lakes near Grenoble on 14 th .
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	First seen near Grenoble Airport on 7 th then encountered on a further 5 days.
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Seen every day except 7 th .
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Seen every day.
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	2 or 3 seen at the Font d'Urle on 9 th .
Alpine (Yellow-billed) Chough	<i>Pyrhocorax graculus</i>	At least 50 at the Font d'Urle on 9 th and also seen on 12 th in the Valley de Combeau.
(Western) Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Seen on 6 days.
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Seen on the first 3 days and also on 14 th .
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Seen every day.
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Small numbers seen on 6 consecutive days from 8 th .
Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>	1 on 9 th during the early walk at la Chapelle then seen on 11 th at Archiane and on 12 th at Chichilianne.
Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>	Heard on 10 th during our walk at the Hauts Plateaux reserve.
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	Heard on 3 days then seen on 12 th & 13 th .
(European) Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>	2 on 10 th at the Hauts Plateaux then seen on 12 th at the Col de Prayer (1) and during our walk at the top of the Vallée de Combeau (3)
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Seen every day from 8 th .
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Seen on 5 days.
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>	At least 6 on 8 th near Lens-en-Vercors then seen on a further 3 days.
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Seen every day.
(Common) House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Seen every day except 8 th .
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	2 on 9 th near the vulture feeding station below the Col de Rousset then a single bird seen the following day.
(Eurasian) Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Noted every day from 9 th .
(European) Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	1 seen and another heard near Lens-en-Vercors on 8 th .
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	Just seen on 14 th at lakes near Grenoble.

Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Heard on 3 days at various locations including the Col de Prayer on 12 th .
Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	First heard on 8 th near Lens-en-Vercors and then encountered on 12 th and 13 th .
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Noted every day from 8 th but only seen on 13 th and 14 th .
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	Heard on 8 th near Lens-en-Vercors and on 9 th & 10 th near La Chapelle.
(Eurasian) Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	The first was during the pre-breakfast walk on 13 th and another was seen the following morning just before we left the hotel.
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Seen on 7 th on the way towards the Vercors then on 11 th during the move to Chichilianne and then on then on the last 2 days.
(Common) Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Seen every day except 7 th .
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Seen or heard every day.
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Seen every day except 7 th .
(European) Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	A single bird seen during the pre-breakfast walk on 10 th and at the lakes near Grenoble on 14 th . Also heard on 2 or 3 other locations.
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Heard near Die on 11 th and en 2 heard (with one of these glimpsed as it flew) at the lakes near Grenoble on 14 th .
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Seen every day in a wide variety of locations and habitats.
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	Seen every day except 14 th .
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	2 seen on 8 th near Lens-en-Vercors.
Eurasian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	2 seen on 11 th near Die.
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	At least 2 males seen at the Font d'Urle on 9 th and a single bird seen on 11 th during the journey to Chichilianne.
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	Just a single sighting on 8 th in the Gorges du Meauderet.
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Noted every day.
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	At least 4 near Beaufort-sur-Gervanne on 11 th and then one or two seen in Clelles on 14 th .
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1 on 8 th in the Gorges du Meauderet and also noted on 10 th as we drove through the valley towards the Hauts Plateaux reserve.
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	First encountered on 10 th at the Hauts Plateaux and at the Col de Vassieux and then noted on the next three days.
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Seen every day except 7 th .
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	Seen in small numbers on 8 th , 9 th , 10 th and 12 th with most sightings on the first 3 dates at the Hotel Bellier.
Citril Finch	<i>Serinus citronella</i>	Just a single bird seen briefly on 12 th during our walk at the top of the Vallée de Combeau.
(European) Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Seen every day except 7 th .
(European) Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Seen every day.
Common (Red) Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	2 seen during the Hauts Plateaux walk on 10 th and at least 3 on 12 th at the top of the Vallée de Combeau.
(Eurasian) Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Heard on 9 th and then glimpsed on 10 th and also encountered on 12 th and 13 th ; a difficult bird to observe.
Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	Just a single bird seen near Grenoble airport on 14 th .
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citronella</i>	2 on 9 th , 2 on 11 th and 2 on 12 th .

MAMMALS

Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>
Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>
Eurasian Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>
Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>

One distant individual seen on the Grand Veymont on 10th and then 4 seen before breakfast on 12th.

Alpine Ibex	<i>Capra ibex</i>
Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>

2 seen in the Foret de la Loubier and another near Lens-en-Vercors all on 8th.

Alpine Marmot	<i>Marmota marmota</i>
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At least 2 Font d'Urle on 9th and also heard calling at the Pas de Serpaton on 13th.

Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>
Coypu	<i>Myocastor coypus</i>
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
Blue (Mountain) Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>

1 seen during the drive to the Vercors on 7th.

AMPHIBIANS

Alpine Newt	<i>Triturus alpestris</i>
Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>
Common Tree Frog	<i>Hyla arborea</i>
Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>
Marsh Frog	<i>Rana ridibunda</i>

Just see at the lakes near Grenoble on 14th.

REPTILES

Snake spp

One seen in the distance – in the talons of a buzzard on 12th in the Vallée de Combeau – species unknown!

BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machon</i>
Apollo	<i>Parnassius apollo</i>
Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crategi</i>
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Small White	<i>Artogeia rapae</i>
Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>
Pale Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias hyale</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>
Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>
Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>
Green-underside Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>
Adonis Blue	<i>Lysandra bellargus</i>
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>
Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Cynthia cardui</i>
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Clossiana euphrosyne</i>
Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>
Almond-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia alberganus</i>
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Parage aegeria</i>
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>

Dingy Skipper
Small Skipper

Erynnis tages
Thymelicus flavus

DRAGONFLIES

Black-tailed Skimmer
Orthetrum albistylum
Broad-bodied Chaser
Scarce Chaser
Lesser Emperor
Blue Emperor
Broad Scarlet
Common Darter
Ruddy Darter
Banded Demoiselle
Western Demoiselle
Coenagrion lindenii
Azure Damsel
Common Blue-tail
Common Winter Damsel
Large Red Damsel

Orthetrum cancellatum
Orthetrum albistylum
Libellula depressa
Libellula fulva
Anax parthenope
Anax imperator
Crocothemis erythraea
Sympetrum striolatum
Sympetrum sanguineum
Calopteryx splendens
Calopteryx xanthestoma
Coenagrion lindenii
Coenagrion puella
Ischnura elegans
Sympecma fusca
Pyrrhosoma nymphula

FLORA

Juniperus communis
Betula pendula
Acer campestre
Acer pseudoplatanus
Tilia europaea
Buxus sempervirens
Polygonum bistorta
Lychnis flos-cuculi
Silene nutans
Silene vulgaris
Silene dioica
Silene latifolia ssp alba
Helleborus foetidus
Trollius europaeus
Caltha palustris
Clematis vitalba
Aquilegia vulgaris
Fumaria officinalis
Papaver rhoeas
Chelidonium majus
Alliaria petiolata
Cardamine heptaphylla
Saxifraga exarata
Saxifraga granulata
Saxifraga paniculata
Rubus fruticosus
Rosa canina
Sanguisorba minor
Geum rivale
Geum urbanum
Fragaria vesca
Alchemilla alpina
Alchemilla vulgaris
Sorbus aucuparia
Sorbus aria
Crataegus monogyna
Robinia pseudacacia
Trifolium pratense

Common Juniper
Silver Birch
Field Maple
Sycamore
Lime
Box
Bistort
Ragged Robin
Nottingham Catchfly
Bladder Campion
Red Campion
White Campion
Stinking Hellebore
Globeflower
Marsh Marigold
Traveller's Joy
Common Columbine
Common Fumitory
Common Poppy
Greater Celandine
Garlic Mustard
Seven-leaflet Bittercress
White Musky Saxifrage
Meadow Saxifrage
Paniculate/Livelong Saxifrage
Bramble/Blackberry
Dog Rose
Salad Burnet
Water Avens
Herb Bennet/Wood Avens
Wild Strawberry
Alpine Lady's Mantle
Lady's Mantle
Mountain Ash/Rowan
Whitebeam
Hawthorn/May
False acacia
Red Clover

Tetragonolobus maritimus
Anthyllis vulneraria
Hippocrepis comosa
Onobrychis vicifolia
Geranium pratense
Geranium sylvaticum
Geranium dissectum
Geranium robertianum
Euphorbia cyparissias
Urtica dioica
Viscum album
Rumex acetosa
Fraxinus excelsior
Ligustrum vulgare
Malva moschata
Malva sylvestris
Helianthemum nummularium
Viola cornuta
Viola tricolor
Bryonia cretica
Hedera helix
Angelica sylvestris
Anthriscus sylvestris
Pyrola rotundifolia
Loiseleuria procumbens
Primula veris
Armeria alpina
Convolvulus arvensis
Gentiana lutea
Gentiana acaulis
Vincetoxicum hirundinaria
Echium vulgare
Symphytum officinale
Cynoglossum officinale
Lamium purpureum
Melittis melissophyllum
Thymus serpyllum
Linaria vulgaris
Linaria alpina
Erinus alpinus
Verbascum nigrum
Veronica chamaedrys
Veronica persica
Melampyrum pratense
Rhinanthus alectorolophus
Globularia cordifolia
Globularia nudicaulis
Pinguicula grandiflora
Orobanche caryophyllacea
Galium verum
Asperula taurina
Crucia laevipes
Lonicera xylosteum
Sambucus ebulus
Sambucus nigra
Anagallis arvensis
Lonicera periclymenum
Phyteuma nigrum
Phyteuma orbiculare
Campanula glomerata

Dragon's-teeth
Common Kidney-vetch
Horseshoe Vetch
Sainfoin
Meadow Cranesbill
Wood Cranesbill
Cut-leaved Cranesbill
Herb Robert
Cypress Spurge
Stinging Nettle
Mistletoe
Common Sorrel
Ash
Wild Privet
Musk Mallow
Common Mallow
Common Rockrose
Horned Pansy
Heartsease
White Bryony
Ivy
Wild Angelica
Cow Parsley
Round-leaved Wintergreen
Creeping Azalea
Cowslip
Mountain Thrift
Field Bindweed
Great Yellow Gentian
Trumpet Gentian
Swallow-wort
Viper's Bugloss
Common Comfrey
Hound's Tongue
Red Deadnettle
Bastard Balm
Wild Thyme
Common Toadflax
Alpine Toadflax
Fairy Foxglove
Dark Mullein
Germander Speedwell
Common Field Speedwell
Common Cow-wheat
Greater Yellow Rattle
Matted Globularia
Leafless-stemmed Globularia
Large-flowered Butterwort
Clove-scented Broomrape
Lady's Bedstraw
Southern Woodruff
Crosswort
Fly Honeysuckle
Dwarf Elder
Elder
Scarlet Pimpernel
Common Honeysuckle
Black Rampion
Round-headed Rampion
Clustered Bellflower

<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>	Harebell
<i>Dipsacus fullonum</i>	Teasel
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> group	Common Dandelion
<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>	Ox-eye/Moon Daisy
<i>Carduus nutans</i>	Musk Thistle
<i>Cirsium palustre</i>	Marsh Thistle
<i>Centaurea montana</i>	Mountain Cornflower
<i>Tragopogon pratensis</i>	Goatsbeard
<i>Aphyllanthes monspeliensis</i>	Aphyllanthes
<i>Colchicum autumnale</i>	Autumn Crocus
<i>Anthericum liliago</i>	St Bernard's Lily
<i>Allium ursinum</i>	Ramsons
<i>Lilium martagon</i>	Martagon Lily
<i>Erythronium dens-canis</i>	Dog's Tooth Violet
<i>Ornithogalum umbellatum</i>	Star of Bethlehem
<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i>	Angular Solomon's Seal
<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	Lily of the Valley
<i>Narcissus poeticus</i>	Poet's/Pheasant's-eye- Narcissus
<i>Aceras anthropophorum</i>	Man Orchid
<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>	Pyramidal Orchid
<i>Epipactis helleborine</i>	Broad-leaved Helleborine
<i>Cephalanthera damasonium</i>	White Helleborine
<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>	Sword-leaved Helleborine
<i>Cephalanthera rubra</i>	Red Helleborine
<i>Coeloglossum viride</i>	Frog Orchid
<i>Corallorhiza trifida</i>	Coralroot Orchid
<i>Cypripedium calceolus</i>	Lady's Slipper Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>	Common Spotted Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>	Heath Spotted Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza majalis</i>	Broad-leaved Marsh Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza sambucina</i>	Elder-flowered Orchid
<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>	Fragrant Orchid
<i>Himantoglossum hircinum</i>	Lizard Orchid
<i>Limodorum abortivum</i>	Violet Limodore
<i>Listera ovata</i>	Twayblade
<i>Neottia nidus-avis</i>	Bird's-nest Orchid
<i>Ophrys apifera</i>	Bee Orchid
<i>Ophrys fuciflora</i>	Late Spider Orchid
<i>Ophrys insectiflora</i>	Fly Orchid
<i>Orchis mascula</i>	Early Purple Orchid
<i>Orchis militaris</i>	Military Orchid
<i>Orchis morio</i>	Green-winged Orchid
<i>Orchis pallens</i>	Pale-flowered Orchid
<i>Orchis purpurea</i>	Lady Orchid
<i>Orchis simia</i>	Monkey Orchid
<i>Orchis spitzelii</i>	Spitzel's Orchid
<i>Orchis tridentata</i>	Toothed Orchid
<i>Platanthera bifolia</i>	Lesser Butterfly Orchid
<i>Traunsteinera globosa</i>	Pink Globe Orchid

The Vercors never fails to produce a good holiday. Last year the weather was poor, this year it may have been too warm for the wildlife as birds were very quiet on some of the afternoons. However, we did manage 82 species which is good for a mountain area, and we did add 3 new species for the Travelling Naturalist in this location. They were Cattle Egret, Black Vulture and Egyptian Vulture. We have now seen four species of vulture here over the years.

The flowers were quite literally stunning. The season was a little ahead of previous years (perhaps by as much as 2 weeks) and this was due to a warm spell in May. However, we still managed to find plenty of blooming plants

(as in 'they were in bloom'!) to keep us occupied and the leader confused! It really was great to be back at this lovely location once more despite the absence of our local guide Bruno Veillet. His guiding from previous tours was still lodged in the back of my mind somewhere and, with a little help from John on one or two occasions, we never did get actually lost.

I hope that like me, you thoroughly enjoyed this spectacular location and I sincerely hope we meet up again on a future tour.

Mike Read

Mike Read, June 2009

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