

Les Cévennes

Saturday 29 May – Saturday 5 June 2010

Leader:

Mike Lockwood

As usual the Cévennes made this an easy trip to lead and to be on – an abundance of flora and fauna at every turn. The very late spring meant that the early orchids such as yellow-edged fly and lady orchids were excellent, although only one of our lady slipper's was fully out and we couldn't find any bee orchids. On the other hand, the late season meant that the Clouded Apollos were not flying yet and many butterflies were just about to fly as we left. Nevertheless, we had good views of interesting species such as Marsh Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy and Green-underside and Chequered Blues.

The birds performed well as ever, and we had cracking views of Ortolan Bunting, Stone Curlew and, above all, Black Vulture – the vulture feeding frenzy on the last day being especially memorable.

Apart from the food, my best memory will be the vultures flying low and feeding on a carcass at Nîmes le Vieux on the last morning, the Stone Curlew, seen and heard, the strange Quail call and the “best water-hole in the world”, which as always produced a magnificent natural spectacle that kept us hooked for a happy couple of hours up on the Causse Noir.

DAILY DIARY

Saturday 29 May

Montpellier Airport – Florac – Coll de Rey

Weather: warm, but gradually clouding over.

After a slightly slow journey from the airport (Saturday morning traffic, queue at airport), seeing on the way Black Kite as the only outstanding bird, we arrived in Florac at about 2 o'clock and headed straight off to the main park for our picnic. As we had the van full of all our bags, we had to do the short walk around the park in two groups. We visited the source of the Pêcher, where a lot of the rain from the Causse Méjean surges out after filtering through the sponge-like limestone rocks underneath. Flower-wise we noted the omnipresent meadow clary *Salvia pratensis*, knotted geranium *Geranium nodosum* and yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*, as well as on the road into the park, a group of five lizard orchids not yet in flower, which gave us a first clue that the season was late. Walking back to the car-park, each of us all had good views of a male Serin as it fed on a wall. Anne-Marie reported a pair of Firecrests.

We headed back to the hotel, dumped our bags and drove off up to Col de Rey, just on the edge of the limestone. Here we parked the van and had our first orchid wander – in all 14 species, including very splendid burnt tip *Orchis ustula*, military *O. militaris*, monkey *O. simia* (just one), lady *O. purpurea*, early purple *O. mascula*, green-winged *O. morio* and fly *Ophrys insectifera* orchids and a single sword-leaved helleborine. Elsewhere in the dry meadows, Glanville and Knapweed Fritillaries took the last of the afternoon sun, accompanied by many Little Blues, an Adonis Blue and the odd Small Heath. A single Berger's Clouded Yellow was also reported.

Over the pines beyond the road we had good views of two (perhaps three) Short-toed Eagles, as well as a group of three ravens. In the bushes next to the meadows we located both Crested and Great Tits. After a quick chat with a local, it was time for home and for our first wonderful, multi-course meal at the hotel.

Sunday 30 May

Florac – Causse Sauveterre – road to La Fage – Combes de Cade – El Briançon – Castelbouc

Weather: squally

Our first full day dawned rather overcast, but we headed anyway up to Causse Sauveterre for our habitual stop at the site where a few of the wonderful yellow flowers of *Adonis vernalis* usually hang on into late spring. We parked and crossed the road and found a couple of the adonises (adoni?) still in flower, although rather rain-beaten and not at their best. In the same area we found for the first time many of the typical limestone flowers that were to become so familiar over the following days – Montpellier milk-vetch *Astragalus monspessulanus*, the bugle *Aguja genovensis*, mountain kidney-vetch *Anthyllis montana* and *Coronilla minima*. Elsewhere there were many burnt-tip and military orchids, stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus* and our first lesser butterfly orchid *Platanthera bifolia*.

Back at the van we watched as a pair of Crested Tits rather agitatedly visited repeatedly the same tree, where they probably had a nest. Skylarks sang and Anne-Marie spotted a Yellowhammer.

The weather wasn't improving, and so we pushed along past Coll de Miramat up towards the contact area between the limestone and granite, obvious as where the cropland changed to rough grazing. We debussed on the road to La Fage and wandered through fields full of pheasant-eye's narcissus *Narcissus poeticus*, great swathes of which painted part of the meadow white, with a supporting cast of aconite-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus aconitifolius* next to the stream, red campion *Silene dioica*, our first heath spotted orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata* and masses and masses of mainly yellow elder-flowered orchids *Dactylorhiza sambucina*. Birdwise, we had a quick view of a Tree Pipit and could hear more Yellowhammers and Skylarks. A raptor that turned out to be a Honey Buzzard glided over in the distance. Ray photographed a Common Frog.

Lunch was calling so we returned towards Coll de Miramat and headed into the woods towards a Natura 2000 site known as Combe de Cades, a couple of wet valleys on the contact zone between the granite and limestone bedrocks. After lunch, with a snowy mesphil *Amelanchia ovalis* tree shining in the pines, we walked down a track through the woods, before cutting into the meadows – here cut late in the year to preserve the flora. After stopping to listen to a Nightingale in the scrub, we entered the meadows, noting at first star of Bethlehem *Ornithogalum umbellatum*, Carthusian pink *Dianthus carthusianorum*, with its multiple flower-head whose flowers bloom one-by-one, a yellow haze of Pyrenean broom *Genista purgans*, more pheasant-eye's narcissus.

Further on we ran into a real flush of orchids, with the first few bug orchids *Orchis coriophora* just coming into flower, and an abundance of green-winged orchids *O. morio*, and broad-leaved *Dactylorhiza majalis* dotting the little bog ahead of us. Also here we looked at red pasque flower *Pulsatilla rubra*, tassled hyacinth *Muscari comosum*, heart's-ease *Viola tricolour*. Len photographed two massive mating snails, and we all admired a female field cricket. Anne-Marie spotted a green Forester Moth.

Back at the van we continued on towards Les Bondons, the pimple-shaped hills created when the giant Gargantua emptied his clogs!!!. However, after the slightly damp morning and with only the prospect of a frog orchid, we decided to stay dry in the van and carry on down to the river Briançon where there is an interesting small schist cliff (the third rock type of the day) with interesting flora. First up was a cliff full of creeping snapdragon *Ansarina procumbens*, well in flower, along with forked spleenwort *Asplenium septentrionale*. Our first butterfly of the day immediately caught our attention – a solitary Chequered Blue that proceeded to show itself well, first on a rock and then on a stem, for the photographers. Speckled Yellow moths flew. Further down the track, the cliffs sported the southern French endemic mignonette *Reseda jacquinii*, common foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, an ox-eye daisy *Anthemis saxatilis*, and houseleeks not quite in flower. Also here, a Cinnabar Moth spotted by Pam.

Down towards the bridge and resting on grass stems, we were able to get good close-up views of Mazarine, Common, Osiris and Little Blues, and a Glanville Fritillary. Don found a hawkmoth on a foxglove, which turned out to be a Willowherb hawkmoth, a rare species.

Our final destination of the day was Castelbouc, where like in the park at Florac, the rain that falls on the limestone plateau emerges from a cliff in spectacular fashion. We first stopped to view a Dipper and Grey

Wagtail from the bridge over the river Tarn. Up by the village, two Crag Martins flew around the stone houses that cling to the cliff. On the cliffs themselves there were lots of delightful cushions of *Saxifraga cebennensis*, endemic to southern France, and the dainty little *Chaenorhinum origanifolium*. We strolled along the stone street, past a massive bread oven and took the path out of the village where we stopped to look back and admire the houses. Here we had our only patch of sun in the whole day, which quickly brought a few Griffon Vultures over the other side of the river, one of which gracefully glided over our heads. Also here we noted Green Woodpecker, Long-tailed Tit and Spotted Flycatcher. Just as we were returning, one vulture flew low over the opposite hillside and it turned out to be a Black Vulture, the best bird of the day. Back at the van a pair of Red-billed Choughs appeared, closely followed by a large group of Jackdaws, producing momentary confusion. A Grey Heron flew over and stood on a rock halfway up the cliff, where there were also two domestic horned goats.

And from here it was home.

Monday 31 May

Florac - Vall de – Pont de Montvert - Coll de Finiels – Mt Lozère – Florac – River Tarn – Florac

Weather: squally; windy up high.

The day dawned dull and overcast again, but we decided that it was best not to change plans and so headed up to the granite wastes of Mt. Lozère as planned. First stop was a small valley to the town of Pont de Montvert, where we debussed for a stroll. From the bridge next to our parking spot there were numbers of the large umbellifer molopospermum *Molopospermum peloponnesiacum* and Pyrenean leek *Allium victorialis* lining the river below (but not quite in flower), along with aconite-leaved buttercup. Further down the road we noted clumps of white large-flowered sandwort *Arenaria grandiflora*, great yellow gentians *Gentiana lutea*, which here are usually more advanced than anywhere else, and *Potentilla rupestre*. The meadows next to the road were full of pheasant's-eye daffodil in as much abundance as we had seen it the day before.

Birdwise not much was happening, but as we lounged around next to the van we watched a pair of Coal Tits entering the nest in a wall. Mike and Sue spotted Common Crossbills flying over as they returned to pick up the van.

As a short squall began we headed off to the town of Pont de Montvert – historically famous as the site of the beginning of the revolt of the Camisards in 1702 and a stopping-off place for Robert Louis Stevenson on his travels through the Cévennes on a donkey. Here we had coffee and then admired the river with its Crag Martins and a number of Pyrenean leeks actually in flower.

The weather had improved marginally and so we decided to risk it and head up towards Mont Lozère, the highest peak in the region, to explore the grassy granite meadows there. First halt was just above the village of Finiels, where we stopped and from the verge admired a male Red-backed Shrike, Kestrel, Yellowhammers, Stonechat and a Tree Pipit on the roof of a hut and then on a rock right in front of us. Over to the other side of the road a male Montagu's Harrier cruised along over the pines and we got a reasonable idea of its buoyant flight and narrow wings that separate this harrier from the Hen Harrier (which also breeds here).

We crossed Coll de Finiels (1,541 m) and continued down the north face of the slope a little way and stopped for a rather windy photographic session of the myriad of spring pasque-flowers *Pulsatilla vernalis* that were on show. Elsewhere, a single patch of red pasque flowers – a different variety from the one we saw on the first morning on the limestone – also caught our attention, along with the last wood anemones *Anemone nemorosa*, a number of wild daffodils *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* still in flower and an understory dominated by bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*. The sun shined in the valley below and the appearance briefly of three Griffon Vultures gave us hope that the weather might be changing somewhat. As it was lunchtime we turned around, spotting a quick Citril Finch on the way and headed off for our picnic spot on the road to Villeneuve above Pont de Montvert.

At lunch we had views of Linnet, Skylark and Tree Pipit, as well as a Black Kite that ranged around the moorland in front of us. Best of all, however, was a female harrier – probably a Hen Harrier – that came

right up to the van before turning away low over the moors. From here we carried on upwards, enjoying the great swathes of the two daffodils and the contrasting blue patches of wild pansy *Viola tricolor* subsp. *alpestris*. Other flowers included a few heath spotted orchids, marsh marigolds *Caltha palustris* and bistort *Polygonum bistorta* just coming into flower.

We continued further up into the moors, stopping just past the semi-abandoned village of L'Hôpital, a site once occupied by the Knight Templars, and then on to Mas Camargues, a National park ecomuseum. In the wind we found only Yellowhammer, but more great views of the pansies and daffodils and in the little beech wood, the day's only butterfly – a rather cold Green-veined White – as well as many beech shoots, which puzzled more than one of the group.

By now, it was time to return home. We stopped only just below the village of Villeneuve, where we were able to catch a quick view of a single male Whinchat in the telescope.

After dinner we went off with Didier on our now annual Beaver hunt. We arrived at the lake slightly later than we would have liked, and the bats were already flying. We scanned the water for any sign of large rodents, but were forced to accept that there were no Beavers on display. We listened to the bat detectors for a while, concluding that there were at least three species present – possibly four -, including Daubenton's, a horseshoe and a.n.other. (Lesser Horseshoe and Whiskered Bats according to subsequent analysis by Ray)

Tuesday 1 June

Roc des Hourtous – Castelnou – Lavogne – Meyrueis

Weather: dry with sunny spells.

We got away from Florac towards 10.00, after visiting the town to buy books and to try and get Mike's credit card back from the cashpoint machine (it was in his wallet all the time!) and climbed up out of the Tarn valley and onto the limestone plateau of Le Causse Méjean. We pressed onto our main stop of the day, Roc des Hourtous, an excellent viewing platform over the Tarn Valley, where Didier was already waiting to show us the path through the woods to the lady slipper orchid *Cypripedium calceolus* site.

The woods were packed with an immense profusion of orchids: right next to the road we had our first good collection of man orchids, where butterflies such as Escher's Blue (female egg-laying on Montpellier milkvetch), Common Blue and Glanville Fritillary were already flying. On the way along the path we had brief looks at our first White Helleborines *Cephalanthera damasonium*, bird's-nest *Neottia nidus-avis*, fragrant orchids *Gymnadenia conopsea* and yellow-edged fly orchid *Ophrys aymoninii*. Bonelli's Warblers and Woodlarks sung from the pines as we made good time towards the path down to the lady slippers.

Once we started to drop down on the north face of the slope we began to notice rarer flowers such as lily-in-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*, yellow flax *Linum campanulatum* and, best of all, a few *Gentiana clusii* subsp. *costei* just still in flower on a couple of rocky overhangs. Once down the path, with the aid of the rope skilfully tied to the pines by Didier, we stood and admired the lady slippers for a while. We then began the slow ascent to the top again. We rested for a while and then continued back along the same path as before, but in rather more relaxed fashion. We noted butterflies such as Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, Berger's Clouded Yellow, Wood White, Glanville and Knapweed Fritillaries, Common Blue, male and female Orange-tip and Dingy Skipper, as well as Mother Shipton moths. Also flying in the meadows were a number of Aesclaphids, a relative of the ant-lions that hunts other insects on the wing. We all photographed a shiny green beetle that turned out to be a Rose Chafer.

Orchid-wise, we were especially interested in a group of very sturdy monkey orchids that, on closer examination, proved to have a bit of military in them, and a couple of man orchids that definitely had of lot of monkey or military in them!

Back at the van, we loaded up and drove off to the viewing point fully expecting to find the bar open – but *helas!* – it was closed and so we were forced to have a picnic under the pines, when we had been promised a picnic with tables, beer and coffee!

After lunch and once Didier had returned with the bags, we looked at the view down to the river Tarn, over 500 m below. A Red Kite flew over. We then had to bid farewell to our gallic guide and so headed off

towards Meyrueis. First stop was a lay-by just above the viewpoint over the Tarn at Chateau de Blanquefort. Here we were immediately rewarded with views of Red-billed Choughs entering their nests, and Griffon Vultures and Short-toed Eagles directly overhead. Some of us decided to wander down the road towards the *chateau*, leaving the photographers behind. By the roadside Sue noted our first violet limodore *Limodorum arborivum* orchids, not in great shape, and we all admired a large Pyrenean bellflower *Campanula speciosa* just the wrong side of bush overlooking a rather steep slopes. Elsewhere, there was an excellent clump of yellow flax, Etruscan honeysuckle *Lonicera etrusca*, the small umbellifer *Athamanta Athamanta cretensis* growing out of the rock and swathes of blue aphyllanthes *Aphyllanthes monspeliensis* in the verge. Over head there were increasing numbers of vultures, but only Griffons, Jackdaws and Choughs.

Back at the bus, we reloaded and headed of towards Meyreuis, stopping at the “second-best” *lavogne* in the area. We parked next to a group of 441 military orchids and wandered down to the limpid waters on what was a now rather cool afternoon. Still, the morning had obvious brought out a number of dragonflies, and we were able to get close views of a number of Common Blue Damselflies and, more notably, several Four-spotted Chasers that were resting on the bushes around the pool. Few birds or butterflies – other than the ubiquitous Little Blue – were in evidence and so we decided to call it a day and head for our hotel over the steppe-like landscape of the southern half of the Causse Méjean.

Wednesday 2 June

Causse Méjean: Hures, Nivelier, Drigas

Weather: showers at first, then sunny intervals with wind

Today was a day for the birds, and with this aim in mind we drove up to the Causse Méjean and soon stumbled upon our first bird of the day: an excellent male Ortolan Bunting singing from a bush by the side of the road. We all had views from the van, and then got out and all got views through the ‘scope. At the same site we also had our first Tawny Pipits, as well Red-billed Chough, Skylark and Northern Wheatear.

A little further on towards Hures, we stopped by the side of the road to examine a *lavogne* and Mike immediately heard a Stone Curlew. It flew over the road, circled awhile and landed in a field about 50 m away and we were all able to get great views of this leggy bird through the telescope. At this same site, the water hole had loads of tadpoles, probably Natterjack Toad, and was full of the water crowfoot *Ranunculus trichophyllus*. Also growing by the water in the dried mud was a *Rorippa* sp, that defied recognition. On a little rock outcrop Sue found the delicate pink flowers of garland flower *Daphne cnoerum*.

Hoping that this luck would continue, we proceeded onto the regular Rock Thrush site (despite the fact that a colleague in the hotel had not seen it here), and after viewing a distance Prezewski’s Horse, Mike spotted a male Rock Thrush on the same wire as it is normally on. It flew off but was relocated and we all had views of its splendid red, white and blue coloration. We drove the van a little further on and had even better views of this male as it approached its nest with food in its beak. Seeing that it was feeding young, we left quicker than we might have and continued on to just past Niveliers. Here we had a quick stop to try and see Orphean Warbler: we could hear it, but the wind in the pines prevented us from hearing it clearly and probably kept it low down in the vegetation. Don spotted a male Red-backed Shrike, which was soon joined by its mate. We watched them ounce on unsuspecting invertebrates in the grass below and return to the bush with veritable beakfuls.

After such a busy morning, we repaired to lunch in the nearby village, enjoying the much promised cold drinks and coffees.

After lunch we set off along the track towards the ‘Roman spring’, stopping in just a short while for a Rock Sparrow singing from a wire, and for another chance at the Orphean Warbler. This time – at least – we saw it after hearing it loud and clear: a male flew out of a bush, perched on a nearby tree but then scuttled back to the depths of the bush before most of us could get our binoculars on it. Don also pointed out another bird on a bush, which turned out to be a Cirl Bunting, although it disappeared before we could all have a decent view.

We continued up the track to just beyond the quarry to the gate overlooking the part of the Causse reserved for the Przewalski's horses. From here we turned left towards the Roman spring and suddenly, in the lee of the hill, orchids started to appear in profusion: hundreds of military, groups of yellow-edged fly orchids, stands of burnt tip and numerous military x lady hybrids. On the rock there was fairy foxglove *Erinus alpinus* and matted globularia *Globularia cordularia*. Five of us got to the spring in the end and saw the first of the 17 steps leading down into the pool of water, where there were a considerable number of large tadpoles swimming. In this little oasis there were Adonis, Provençal Short-tailed and Little Blues, Glanville Fritillary flying.

We all returned to the van at our own pace, and decided that we still had time for a stop on the way back to Meyrueis. We aimed to stop a Drigas to visit another water hole, but a shout from Pam of "What's that?" alerted us to a male harrier close to the road. Getting out we were all able to have good views of a male Hen Harrier cruising over the *causse*. Soon we started to see vultures flying over and eventually a group of 80+ built up over the valley below; we waited to see if a Black Vulture would fly in, but were disappointed to see only Griffons. A Tawny Pipit, Corn Buntings and a Short-toed Eagle kept us on our toes, before the day's final bird – a female Montagu's Harrier - swept over the hill before us and disappeared into the distance.

With that we headed back to Meyrueis having had an excellent birder's day.

Thursday 3 June

Mont Aigoual – Col de Perjuret

We started the day with a quick jaunt up to the limestone cliffs just above Meyrueis, where we parked and strolled down the narrow tarmac road. It was quickly apparent that here the flora was more advanced, as we found our first pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* in full flower, pastures full of yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, yellow mats of *Genista hispanica*, meadow clary, blue aphyllanthes, accompanied by box *Buxus sempervirens*, snowy mesphilus and flowering ash *Fraxinus ornus*. A new plant for us was a golden-drop *Onosma fastigiatum*, growing by the wayside. Birdwise we could hear Bonelli's Warblers around us and got a quick glimpse as one flew over; subsequently we had telescope views of Tree Pipit on a wire and a Black Kite flew over as the first raptor of the day.

The butterflies were responding well to the sun: Clouded Yellow and Berger's Clouded Yellow, Green-underside, Adonis and Common Blues and, best of all, a number of Marsh Fritillaries.

Now it was time to head off to the other great granite mountain of the region, Mont Aigoual, which rises up to over 1,500 m south of the Causse Méjean and is generally reckoned to be one of the windiest places on Earth and one of the wettest in France!! Visit <http://www.aigoual.fr/> for information in English. First stop was a meadow near the river Bonheur, where we admired the great yellow gentians not quite in flower, Pam pointed out *Arabis brassica* (which Mike identified from a photo once at home) and another Black Kite passed low over head. Doreen found a dun beetle trying – and succeeding! – to roll a piece of dung 10 times larger than she was. A Short-toed Eagle passed low overhead giving us the week's best views.

From here we headed for the National Park information centre at Coll de Serreyrede, where we headed for our normal Clouded Apollo site. However, despite the perfect weather conditions they weren't to be seen. We wandered in the beech woods for a while, noting common Solomon's seal *Polygonatum multiflorum* and red campion, as well as a female Orange-tip and a Green-veined White.

We pushed on towards the summit, and stopped just below for a picnic with marvellous views towards the north-west. We enjoyed our white wine before exploring the nearby meadow with many wild tulips *Tulipa australis* not quite open, wood anemone, elder-flower orchid and a couple of large fungi. We spotted a female Swallowtail egg-laying and proceeded to capture photographs of its egg.

From here we headed to the summit where we all enjoyed the meteorological displays in the weather station that is generally reckoned to be one of the windiest places on Earth. On the way down we stopped by the road to admire the swathes of perfectly in flower elder-flowered orchids in both colours, and – finally – a group of tulips well open.

Next stop was off the granite and back onto the limestone at Coll de Péjuret. Here we wandered amidst the military orchids and found two early spider orchids *Orchis speghodes* just holding on, as well as many early purples and greater butterflies and, best of all, our first two frog orchids *Coeloglossum viridis*. Also photographed was a very fresh Duke of Burgundy butterfly that might just have emerged that day.

We chose to take the long road home along the edge of the *cause* and were well rewarded by quick but close-up views of a male Montagu's Harrier. Back at Meyrueis, we met up with Sue and Don who had decided to stay behind and went to visit the garden of our host, Madame Stella, who very proudly showed us her ornamental and vegetable garden overlooking the local river.

Friday 4 June

Meyrueis – Le Rozier – Causse Noir – Meyrueis

Weather: Warm and sunny all day

For our last full day we started out by driving down the gorge of the river Jonte and parking near the vulture look-out point to gaze the skies for a while. First stop was the Belvédère des Vautours <http://www.vautours-lozere.com/>, a viewing point below the cliffs lining the river Jonte that is home to the largest vulture breeding colony in the region. Our first sightings as we checked out the vultures were a group of three Alpine Swifts high up above the cliffs in front of us. A few more vultures came into view, and we checked all to see if there were any Blacks amongst the Griffons, but alas no. We had more luck with a Red Kite flying over, a Kestrel and then a Honey Buzzard that performed well, dropping quite low in front of us before mixing with – and being dwarfed by – the Griffons.

Next stop was above the village of Le Rozier, where we drove up a steep track in search of flowering lizard orchids. We were disappointed to find that none had started to flower, although we unrolled one flower-to-be to have a quick look at its tail-like lip. We walked up the track noting the many thermophile Mediterranean shrubs such as turpentine tree *Pistacia terebinthus* (scrunching leaves to smell the 'turps'), Etruscan honeysuckle, Saint Lucie's cherry *Prunus mahaleb*, Montpellier maple *Acer monspessulanum*, wild jasmine *Jasminum fruticans*, the small white flowers of *Dorycnium pentaphyllum* and Mediterranean buckthorn *Rhamnus alaternus*. Seeing that there were no lizards in flower, we turned back, but before some of us had excellent views of brilliant blue male Southern White Admiral. On the way down we had quick views of a Subalpine Warbler and Len was able to make out its white moustache and pinkish chest.

We jumped back in the bus and dropped down to the other side of the river, where we parked next to a small oak wood where we were expecting to find a new orchid for the trip. At first our search was fruitless – fine clumps of woodcock orchids, two or three splendid violet limodores, white and sword-leaved helleborines, lots of lesser butterfly orchids, but none of our target species. Further up the track, a Golden-ringed Dragonfly cruised over a small patch of meadow.

Then Don saved the day and found a small group of red helleborines *Cephalanthera rubra* just coming into flower, far less advanced than in a 'normal' year.

On the way back to the van we had time to spot a Bonelli's Warblers – probably a female being courted by two males revealing themselves by their short 'woep' contact call. A little further down we spotted another Southern White Admiral, while Mike and Sue came across birthwort *Aristolochia clematitis*, a plant used historically as an abortive and which in Britain is often found ruined convents despite being non-native!, up a grassy track and the year's first Pearly Heaths.

It was time to head up into the Causse Noir and to our wonderful picnic spot, although on the way through we stopped at a *toit cîterne*, a building that is basically a roof designed to capture water. Three Short-toed Eagles flew over as we arrived, and in the woods around this strange building (where Sue had a bath) we found lots of yellow flax and white-leaved helleborine, as well as the not-out flowers of broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, our final and 30th orchid of the trip.

Lunch beckoned and so we headed on for the *lavogne* on the Causse Noir – a wonderful little spot, with permanent water filled with water crowfoot and packed with dragonflies and butterflies. Add to that a shady place for a picnic and good access from the road and you have a dream site for a final day picnic.

We found the water hole alive with male Broad-bodied Chasers disputing the females that came their way, grabbing females with a clash of wings. Also present were a couple of Emperors, a single male downy emerald and a tandem of red-veined darters. The water was black with tadpoles in parts (some eating some of the huge tadpoles of another species), and there were also larva of great diving beetles many damselfly larva, seemingly ready to emerge. The only other dragonflies were plenty of emerging Western Willow Spreadwing damselflies (*Lestes viridis*) and the odd Common Blue Damselfly. At the water's edge there were also many Little, Adonis and the odd Baton and Chapman's Blue, as well as the now familiar Glanville Fritillary. In the fields around about the year's first Black-veined Whites were flying.

The little rock outcrops were dotted with fairy foxglove *Erinus alpinus* and a sandwort, *Arenaria aggregata*, while near where the van was parked we noted many sword-leaved helleborines and woodcock, military, lady, man and yellow-lipped fly orchids and the blue beautiful flax *Linum narbonnense* in the fields. Before heading off, Don showed us another of his finds – a small group of one-flowered wintergreens *Moneses uniflora*.

As we were going out after dinner, some chose to go back to the hotel, leaving Mike, Ray and Pam to head up the valley of the river Brèze, a quiet schist valley just behind the hotel in Meyrueis. Our main aim was to photograph the bug orchids that grow there. However, we were surprised to hear a Black Woodpecker, which Mike just caught a couple of glimpses of, and also noted Piedmont Ringlets flying over the road.

After dinner, most of the group piled into the van to go and listen for Stone Curlews on the Causse Méjean. Our first stop produced the sound of many Skylarks and Quails, as well as distant Stone Curlew. We moved on to where we seen the Stone Curlew a few days ago and stopped by the roadside. We were quickly rewarded with a Stone Curlew calling from nearby, although we couldn't really see it as it called in flight. A Quail gave a rather strange introductory call to its more familiar 'wet my lips', which Mike had never heard before; also heard was a Cuckoo, Tawny Pipit and a cockchafer!

Saturday 5 June

Nîmes le Vieux – Millau – Le Petit Camargue – Montpellier Airport

Weather: hot

And on our last day and with a flight a 9 in the evening, we had time to use our day wisely. First of all we headed for the rock chaos at Montpellier la Vieux. Here we parked, and wandered past another ox-shoing contraption and up into the maze of rock pinnacles. First sighting was of a male Rock Thrush on the same pinnacle as always away to our right, with a Black Redstart on another pinnacle a bit more to the left.

We climbed to the top of the path and spent some time looking around the pinnacles for *Daphne alpinum*, in the end conspicuous by its absence. However, we did find a lot of crested lousewort *Pedicularis comosa* in flower in compensation. As we were about to start back down, we spotted the first of a number of Griffon Vultures flying low overhead, obviously with a mission in mind. After a bit of searching, we finally noticed a vulture feeding frenzy in what was obviously a feeding site for these wonderful birds. In the end we all had views through the scope of up a 100 Griffon Vultures around a carcass, with a couple of Black Vultures thrown in for good measure. A couple more Black Vultures flew overhead and circled whilst the more daring fed below. Also in on the bunfight were a number of Ravens and a solitary Red Kite. On the way down, Mike, Sue and Anne-Marie puzzled over a Spanish catchfly *Silene otites* somewhat taller and stretched than normal.

We adjourned for lunch and had views through the scope of both Griffon and Black Vultures on an adjacent rock, resting after their morning feast. Just emerging next to our picnic site was a Black-veined White with a damaged wing.

Soon it was time to head off towards Millau and, after a few false starts we got to see the famous viaduct – but only from below. After a confusing tour of this town, Mike realised that he wasn't sure if the road up to the motorway and on to the viaduct allowed us to join the motorway in a southerly direction. So, instead – and just in case - we got onto the motorway to Montpellier south of the viaduct, which we were able to admire again from a distance.

We interrupted our journey for a coffee in an interesting bar/local produce shop and headed on towards Montpellier. We made excellent time and so were able to go for a tour of the salt pans near the airport: we stopped to admire a number of Greater Flamingoes, along with Shelduck, Black-winged Stilt, Little Egret and finally, from the road, a White Stork.

And with that it was off to the airport and fond farewells.

BIRDS, LES CÉVENNES, MAY/JUNE 2010

Species	29/5	30/5	31/5	1/6	2/6	3/6	4/6	5/6	Comments
Grey Heron		X	X						Along Tarn and tributaries: breeding colony in Florac.
European Honey Buzzard		X					X		Mont Lozère, Gorge de Jonte
Common Buzzard	X			X		X	X		Motorway and elsewhere
Black Vulture	X							X	Castelbouc and at carcass near Montpellier le Vieux
Eurasian Griffon Vulture		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common every day
Short-toed Eagle	X			X	X	X	X		Regular records
Black Kite	X		X	X		X	X		Common along river valleys and motorway
Red Kite				X			X	X	Roc d'Hortous, Nîmes le Vieux, etc.
Montagu's Harrier			X		X	X			Mont Lozère and Causse Méjean
Hen Harrier			X		X		X		Mont Lozère and Causse Méjean
Sparrowhawk			X	X					On road from Airport
Common Kestrel			X	X	X		X		Here and there
Quail							X		Hears on Causse Méjean near Drigues
Stone Curlew				X	X		X		Seen and heard on Causse Méjean near Meyrueis
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	In towns
Wood Pigeon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	On <i>causses</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	In towns
Common Cuckoo	H	H	X	H	H	H	H	X	Heard everyday
Alpine Swift		X					X	X	Above Belvédère des Vautours, for example
Common Swift	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common
Great Spotted Woodpecker		X	X				X		From road
Green Woodpecker		X							Heard at Castelbouc
Black Woodpecker							X		Heard and seen by Mike in Brèze valley
Woodlark				X			X		Not rare on wooded <i>causes</i>
Eurasian Skylark		X	X	X	X	X			Very common in all open habitats

European Crag Martin		X	X	X			X		Common around cliffs and houses
Common House Martin	X		X	X		X	X		Common around cliffs and houses
Barn Swallow	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common in towns
White Wagtail	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common
Grey Wagtail	X	X	X	X	X	X			On rivers Tarn and Tarnon
Tree Pipit		X	X			X			Mont Lozère and Mont Aigoual
Tawny Pipit					X				Quick views on Causse Méjean and Causse Noir
Red-backed Shrike		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common on <i>causes</i>
Wren			H						Heard in woodland
Rock Thrush						X		X	Causse Méjean and Nîmes le Vieux
Common Blackbird	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common
European Robin				H					Heard occasionally
Common Nightingale		H		H	H	H	H		Heard in towns and woodland
Black Redstart		X	X	X		X	X		Common on <i>causes</i> and villages
Common Stonechat			X		X				Mont Lozère
Whinchat			X						Mont Lozère
Northern Wheatear			X	X	X				<i>Causse</i> s and Mt. Lozère
Blackcap	H	H	H	H	H	H	H		Omnipresent!
Common Whitethroat		H	H		X		H		Heard commonly
Western Bonelli's Warbler		H	H	X		X	X		Heard often and well seen near Le Rozier
Western Orphean Warbler							X		Near Nivolier
Chiffchaff	H	H	H	H					Common in woods
Firecrest					H	H	H		Often heard in planted conifers
Goldcrest						H			Heard on Mt. Lozère
Long-tailed Tit		X	X						Castelbouc
Coal Tit			X	X					In conifers
Great Tit	H	H	H	X	X	X	X		Common
Marsh Tit						X	H		Heard Mt. Lozère and near Le Rozier
Eurasian Jay	X	X	X	X		X	X		Common
Black-billed Magpie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common
Red-billed Chough		X		X	X	X	X	X	Common around cliffs
Jackdaw	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common
Carrion Crow		X	X	X	X	X	X		Common in open areas
Common Raven	X	X	X	X	X			X	Common near cliffs
Common Starling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Very common
Yellowhammer		X	X		X	X			Common in open areas
Chiffchaff					X		X		Near Nivoliens
Ortolan Bunting					X				Causse Méjean
Corn Bunting				X	X	X			Causse Méjean

Common Chaffinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Very common
Serin	X				X	X	X		In Florac and elsewhere
Common Crossbill			X						Near Pont de Montvert
Citrel Finch			X						Col de Finiels
Greenfinch				X					Aven Amand
European Goldfinch					X	X	X		Not uncommon
Common Linnet		X	X	X	X		X		Common in open areas
House Sparrow	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common
Rock Sparrow					X		X		Seen at Nivoliers and Nîmes le Vieux
CAMARGUE									
Greater Flamingo									
White Stork									
Black-winged Stilt									
Shelduck									

OTHER VERTEBRATES, LES CÉVENNES, MAY/JUNE 2010

Species	29/5	30/5	31/5	1/6	2/6	3/6	4/6	5/6	Comments
MAMMALS									
Daubenton's Bat				X					On river Tarn
Lesser Horseshoe Bat				X					On river Tarn
Whiskered Bat				X					On river Tarn
REPTILES									
Green Lizard						X	X		Common
Common Wall Lizard		X	X						Common
AMPHIBIANS									
Natterjack Toad				X			X		In lavognes on causses
Common Frog		X							Combes de Cade

BUTTERFLIES, LES CÉVENNES, MAY/JUNE 2010

Species	29/5	30/5	31/5	1/6	2/6	3/6	4/6	5/6	Comments
Scarce swallowtail	X			X	X	X	X	X	Abundant
Swallowtail				X	X	X	X	X	Relatively abundant
Black-veined white							X	X	Appeared at end of week on causses
Large white							X	X	Common on migration at end of week
Small white							X		Rare
Orange-tip	X			X	X	X	X	X	In woodland on causses
Clouded yellow				X		X	X		Singles
Berger's clouded yellow	X			X	X	X	X	X	On causses
Brimstone				X			X		Scarce
Wood white	X			X	X		X		Common in woods
Green hairstreak				X	X		X		Genista scrub
Provence short-tailed blue					X				Causse Méjean

Mazarine blue		X							River Briançon
Small blue	X	X		X	X		X		Abundant everywhere on limestone
Osiris blue		X							River Briançon
Green-underside blue	X					X	X		Not rare on <i>causes</i>
Chequered blue		X							River Briançon
Escher's blue				X					Roc des Houtous
Adonis blue	X				X	X	X	X	Common on limestone
Common blue	X	X		X			X		Common on limestone
Duke of Burgundy						X			Col de Perjuret
Peacock							X		Brèze valley near Meyrueis
Red Admiral				X		X			Occasional
Painted lady				X			X		Here and there
Small tortoiseshell								X	Nîmes le Vieux
Southern white admiral							X		Near Le Rozier
Glanville fritillary	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	The only common fritillary
Knapweed fritillary	X			X			X		On <i>causses</i> , above all at <i>lavognes</i>
Marsh fritillary						X			Near Meyrueis
Piedmont ringlet							X		Brèze valley near Meyrueis
Small heath	X			X		X	X		Common
Pearly heath							X		Near Le Rozier
Wall brown						X	X	X	Fairly common
Large Wall Brown					X		X		Photographed by Don
Speckled Wood	X						X		In woodland
<i>Pyrgus</i> sp.	X		X		X		X		Common
Dingy skipper	X			X			X		Uncommon

ODONATA, LES CÉVENNES, MAY/JUNE 2010

Species	29/5	30/5	31/5	1/6	2/6	3/6	4/6	5/6	Comments
ODONATA									
Winter willow damselfly							X		Emerging at <i>lavogne</i> on Causse Noir
Azure damselfly				X			X		At both <i>lavognes</i>
Broad-bodied chaser							X		Abundant at <i>lavogne</i> on Causse Noir
Four-spotted chaser				X					Emerging at <i>lavogne</i> on Causse Méjean
Emperor							X		3 at <i>lavogne</i> on Causse Noir
Downy emerald									1 at <i>lavogne</i> on Causse Noir
Golden-ringed damselfly							X		One in woods near

									La Rozier
Red-veined darter							X		Pair at <i>lavogne</i> on Causse Noir

Other invertebrates

Moths

- Callistege mi* Mother Shipton: common on *causses*
- Euclidia glyphica* Burnet Companion common on *causses*
- Odezia atrata* Chimney Sweeper: on final days on *causses*.
- Pseudopanthera macularia*: Speckled Yellow: see quite often on *causses*.
- Aglia tau* Tau Emperor: flying in woods on way up Mont Aigoual.
- Macroglossum stellatum* Hummingbird Hawkmoth near Le Rozier
- Prosperinus prosperina*: perched on foxglove next to river Briançon on first day
- Hemaris* sp. Bee Hawkmoth (broad-or narrow-bordered): seen just the once.
- Tyria jacobaeae* Cinnabar moth: spotted by Pam next to river Briançon on first day
- Adscita* sp. Forester moth: shiny green moth, quite common on *causses*.

Others

- Misumena vatia* (?). Yellow crab-spider: females on flowers.
- Gryllus assimilis* Field cricket: one in grass at Combes de Cades
- Libelloides* sps.: the yellow and black flying predators (Ascalaphidae) we saw in many warm pastures.
- Cetonia aurata* (?) Rose chafer: the golden green chafer we saw on a couple of occasions.
- Xylocopa violacea* Violet carpenter bee: the large violet-black ‘bee’ we saw quite frequently

ORCHIDS, LES CÉVENNES, MAY/JUNE 2010

Species	29/5	30/5	31/5	1/6	2/6	3/6	4/6	5/6	Comments
Lady slipper orchid				X					One site on the Causse Méjean
<i>Epipactis</i> sps.									Not in flower next to <i>toit cîterne</i> .
White helleborine				X			X		Scarce – mainly in pinewoods
Sword-leaved helleborine	X			X		X	X	X	Holding on well in

									many wooded habitats
Red helleborine							X		In one oakwood near Le Rozier
Greater butterfly orchid	X	X		X		X	X	X	Abundant.
Lesser butterfly orchid		X					X		Only common on Causse Noir near La Rozier
Common twayblade	X	X		X		X	X		Quite scarce
Lizard orchid	X	X					X	X	Not quite in flower at Le Rozier and near Florac.
Violet limodore				X			X		At Blanquefort and oakwood near Le Rozier
Pyramidal orchid				X	X	X	X		Very abundant but mainly not quite out.
Burnt-tip orchid	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	Abundant.
Green-winged orchid	X	X		X					More abundant than in other years
Early purple orchid	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	Abundant.
Lady orchid	X			X	X	X	X	X	Singles, often hybridising with military
Bug orchid		X					X		Scarce.
Monkey orchid	X			X					Surprisingly scarce.
Military orchid	X	X		X	X	X	X		Hyper-abundant.
Frog orchid						X			Col de Perjuret.
Broad-leaved marsh orchid		X							Only in Combe des Cades.
Elder-flowered orchid	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Vast numbers on Mount Aigoual and elsewhere
Heath spotted orchid		X	X			X			On granite
Common spotted orchid					X	X	X	X	On limestone
Fragrant orchid				X					Rare on Causse
Bird's-nest orchid				X					Scarce, but here and there.
Man orchid	X			X		X	X	X	Not rare on <i>cause</i>
Early spider orchid						X	X		Just hanging on
Fly Orchid	X								Col de Rey
Yellow-lipped orchid				X	X		X		Not rare on <i>cause</i>
Woodcock orchid	X						X		Col d Rey and Le Rozier.
Total = 30	14	12	2	18	9	14	20	9	

