



# Honeyguide

**WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS**

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Scarce swallowtail, Rocamadour.

## The Dordogne July 2019

These are some notes about wildlife and a new site for Honeyguide following a family holiday in the Dordogne in July 2019. It's intended as a brief item of interest for Honeyguiders who will be on our holiday based at Castang in September 2019. This will be our first Dordogne holiday that isn't in May – unless you count the Central Portugal group that stayed at Castang in April 2010 when volcanic ash meant a return home overland. In particular, I have noted odonata (dragonflies and damselflies) recorded, as there are relatively few in May and there may be more (albeit often different species) in September.



Field eryngo *Eryngium campestre* in Castang's meadow.

My overall impression is that the Dordogne was greener than I expected in a hot July. There were, of course, far fewer **flowers** than in May. No orchids, and mostly summer-flowering species such as wild carrot, chicory, marjoram and various ruderal species. Where meadows or road verges had been cut there was regrowth, such as flowering birdsfoot trefoil.

There was a smaller range of **butterflies** than in May, though plenty on the wing including many scarce swallowtails, marbled whites and Cleopatra. Most obvious were many great banded graylings, flying fast and perching, though never close enough to be photographed. Big, fast-flying fritillaries were probably silver-washed.

**Birds:** black redstarts, crag martins and black kites were common plus serins in several places. Large numbers of nesting house martins, such as in Montignac, and huge flocks of swifts at dusk in Sarlat were nice to see, in contrast with their declines in the UK. Common sandpiper on the Dordogne River was a surprise; an early migrant, non-breeder or failed breeder presumably. Most notable finding was a middle spotted woodpecker at Groléjac Marsh, a difficult species to see anywhere.

**Dragonflies and damselflies:** species recorded are noted by site in the table below. The three demoiselle species can be tricky to tell apart, though all occur in the Dordogne according to distribution maps. Damselflies showing the characteristics of these closely related species were recorded in rather different habitats.



Above: Blue featherleg, immature, and large red damselfly, both at the pond at Roque St Christophe.  
Below: Small pincertail, Groléjac.



<b>DAMSELFLIES &amp; DRAGONFLIES</b>	
<b>Pond by the café at Roque St Christophe, 14 July</b>	
Banded demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>
Western willow spreadwing (willow emerald damselfly)	<i>Chalcolestes viridis</i> – egg-laying scars
Azure damselfly? (Needed better views/photo)	<i>Coenagrion</i> sp.
Large red damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>
Blue featherleg (white-legged damselfly)	<i>Platycnemis pennipes</i>
Blue emperor (emperor)	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Keeled skimmer	<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>
<b>Groléjac Marsh, 15 July</b>	
Beautiful demoiselle – 1, within the fen	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>
Azure damselfly? (Needed better views/photo)	<i>Coenagrion</i> sp.
Blue emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Small pincertail (green-eyed hooktail) – 25 counted resting on a path	<i>Onychogomphus forcipatus</i>
Downy emerald – common within the fen, hovering, fast flight	<i>Cordulia aenea</i>
Black-tailed skimmer – paths outside the fen	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>
White-tailed skimmer – 1, within the fen	<i>Orthetrum albistylum</i>
Ruddy darter – common within the fen	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>
<b>Dordogne River, 17 July</b>	
Western demoiselle – thousands	<i>Calopteryx xanthostoma</i>
Blue emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Small pincertail (green-eyed hooktail) – hundreds, often resting on canoes	<i>Onychogomphus forcipatus</i>
<b>Brive Railway Station, 18 July</b>	
Western spectre (dusk hawker)	<i>Boyeria irene</i>



Western demoiselle, on a canoe by the Dordogne River.

### **Groléjac Marsh**

This is “the largest alkaline fen in Dordogne (20ha)” says the Crossbill Guide for the Dordogne, and I visited after reading the book and consulting the book’s author, David Simpson, with a view to adding a new element into September’s itinerary.

The approach takes you along the side of a lake with various leisure facilities nearby such as camping/caravans, and the lake’s beach was busy with holidaymakers on a hot day in July. It should be quieter in September. The fen is dominated by huge (and probably very old) greater tussock sedges, grading into wooded ‘carr’, mostly alder plus what a sign says is ‘saule roux’ *Salix acuminata* though it looks like any other willow. Greater spearwort was the only flower of note; others had gone over or were routine species for me from the Norfolk Broads. As the list above notes, it was a lively place for dragonflies in July.

There is a well-maintained boardwalk that takes a circular route around what would otherwise be an inaccessible fen. The far end of the circuit was wooded carr, with more open water and ditches nearer the way in.

The overall conclusion is that the marsh and lake isn't amazing but will make an interesting additional site to visit in early autumn.



Groléjac Marsh, various views, plus map and adjacent lake.