

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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The French Pyrenees
11 – 18 September 2012

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Holiday participants

Shirley Awcock
Gill Page
Julia Maynard
George Malcolm and Sonia Donaghy

Leader

Chris Durdin

Our hosts in the French Pyrenees: Odile and Philippe Pujo, Hotel La Brèche de Roland
www.pyrenees-hotel-breche.com

Report by Chris Durdin. Photos by Chris Durdin, taken on the holiday,
except lammergeier by Ivan Nethercoat from 2011.

Cover: autumn colours in the Bué Valley.

Below: the Brèche de Roland, from the Hotel La Brèche de Roland.



This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. The conservation contribution this year of £40 per person towards lammergeier protection was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust. It was combined with the contribution from the group in the Dordogne (for the 'Refuge LPO' project), making a total this year of €1000 (rounded up, and equivalent to about £813) given to La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, the French Bird Protection League).

See <http://rapaces.lpo.fr/gypaete-barbu> for more information from the LPO on lammergeiers.

This brings the total given to LPO to £17,309 since 1991. The total for conservation contributions from all Honeyguide holidays since 1991 was at £81,772 by September 2012.

The French Pyrenees 11 – 18 September 2012

Tuesday 11 September – Stansted to Gèdre

Six of us made our way through a packed Stansted despite – or perhaps because of – the horribly early start. The Ryanair flight touched down promptly in Lourdes and, having found the new Europcar office in the car park, we were soon loaded in our nearly new Renault minibus and by 9:45 we were away.

An unhurried journey took us round Argelès-Gazost, through Luz St Sauveur and, once we'd started to ascend, past any number of cyclists. An hour later, we made a stop to look at large rosettes of Pyrenean saxifrage on rocks above the road. There were crag martins here, too, and Julia found a long-tailed blue butterfly. Flowers on the disturbed ground included shaggy soldier from South America, common amaranth from North America and the native vervain. Sonia pointed out common gromwell, with its white, shiny, porcelain-like nutlets. Ten minutes further up the road and we were at the Brèche de Roland Hotel in Gèdre, arriving just before 11:30. Odile's team had made the rooms ready so we had time to settle in before an excellent lunch of salad and fruit salad.

For the afternoon, we walked around Gèdre, starting down the quiet road past the hydro-power station to the River Gavarnie at 'dipper bridge'. Flowers at this low level after a dry summer were unremarkable, though still attracted brown argus and a bright blue (probably Adonis) that paused on some dog poo. George was sensibly looking in the other direction and was alert to a pale phase booted eagle, behind which in the distance were groups of thermalling griffon vultures with two high-flying peregrines. On the power station roofs and moving to the river and its bushes were white wagtails and two spotted flycatchers. Two grey wagtails were also there and a least two pied flycatchers (one close enough to be photographed with a compact camera – see p.12) feeding in sheltered areas, both flycatcher species no doubt slowly making their way south.

Julia had reached the bridge – without dippers today – a little ahead of the rest of us and discovered a Camberwell beauty on sallows, its larval food plant. Sonia noticed gone over (just) broad-leaved helleborines in the willow's shade. Finishing the loop around the village there weren't many other flowers, though Pyrenean cranesbill was nice to see. On walls, where not covered in several fern species, wall lizards were prominent and sometimes tame.



Camberwell beauty and common wall lizard in Gèdre.

Gill and Julia took a slightly shorter route back past the church and cemetery and we all met at the café/bar on the bridge at the corner. Here we had tea or beer in the garden, which overlooks the crashing River Héas above which were many basal leaves of Ramonda. We'd earlier seen a hummingbird hawk moth on the pelargoniums at the hotel: here, now, there were two, nectaring on petunias and lobelia in pots. A clouded yellow dashed past as we returned to the hotel.

After a rest or a snooze we were all ready to eat by 7:30, a delicious meal in a busy dining room, the occupants of which included a Naturetrek group that had arrived on Saturday. Then to bed, to re-charge batteries after this morning's early start.

Wednesday 12 September – Cirque de Gavarnie

With cloud over the mountains, the programme was shuffled to have a day at a relatively low altitude. There was a mixture of cloud and sunny intervals all day, but staying dry. The chatty lady in the car park at Gavarnie cycled over to take our €5. When she saw us watching crag martins she told us how the *hirondelles* nest on the adjacent hotel, where we could see a group of this year's young birds, with beak flanges clearly visible, perched on a wall face.

This area of the French Pyrenees had had a dry summer, we'd heard and could see, so there was none of the lush growth of early summer, but nonetheless a good sprinkling of interesting flowers. Horned violet was the first, and others included horse mint by the river, acanthus-leaved carline thistle (or cardabelle), our first merendera and the bright red berries of alpine elder (completing the set, having seen elder and dwarf elder yesterday). The cloud and our eyes lifted above the ridge to the west, as with some ravens were two golden eagles, both landing for short periods. We saw the eagles on and off right through the day. An Israeli lady stopped to see what we were looking at, with the telescope trained on a wall brown butterfly, and trawled through her photos to show us a speckled wood she'd photographed on a recent day. But the often cloudy weather meant we saw almost no other butterflies today.

Merenderas were growing in their hundreds out of the short-cropped turf near the final (but closed) café on the right, and a few longer-stemmed autumn crocuses were in some longer grass. The yellow-flowered labiate sideritis was on the bank down to the river. A whistle drew our attention to a marmot on a rock across the other side of the river, and scanning round we found a few more. Gill picked up on a large bird of prey – our first lammergeier of the day. That one wasn't in view for long, but happily it was the first of six sightings today. Good numbers of griffon vultures were also on show, at one point streaming in a southerly direction along the ridge and most likely moving towards a carcass rather than thinking about migrating. A group of kestrels up there with the vultures could well have been a family party.



Lammergeier and some of the many merenderas.

Other flowers of interest included both monkshood and yellow monkshood, big patches of eyebright and three scabious species, the showiest of which was pink wood scabious. A male blackcap sat still just long enough to get the 'scope on it, and Julia picked up on the yellowhammers which in the mountains replace the cirl buntings found at lower altitudes. After a short stretch through some beech woodland we emerged to a view over the cirque and down to the meadow where we went to eat lunch, though that was after we'd stopped by a sheltered corner to look at a mixed of great, blue and coal tits, plus treecreeper and chiffchaff.

We ate our generous packed lunch overlooking an open area where the conditions and grazing kept the grass as short as a golf course. But it was far from uniform: close to us was a wet area with grass-of-Parnassus in flower and patches of yellow mountain saxifrage. The open area was sprinkled with low juniper bushes through which were growing both species of monkshood, some past their best but many flowering well. Going up the slope behind us, George found some round-headed rampion and our first of many dwarf thistles. A huge flock of choughs – some 150 – were too far to see their beak colour, but from call were certainly alpine choughs, and I heard red-billed

chough, too. A 'chip-chip' had us scanning the tops of pine trees, and we were lucky enough to find at least three crossbills, one of which was a red male. Sonia's best view ever, enough to regard it as a 'lifer'.

Heading back towards the village we had a very close view of a chiffchaff and twice Gill saw a dipper. Our fourth lammergeier was, from the dark colouration and relatively broad wings, an immature, and not long after that we saw two more, one of which had a brilliant white head against the grey clouds. By way of contrast, we also studied the odd-looking fern forked spleenwort.

The return walk seemed to pass in a short time, perhaps with the draw of a drink at a café. There was a little rain in the air and a cool breeze at the end of the afternoon, which reinforced that we'd struck lucky with the day's weather.

Thursday 13 September – Lac des Gloriettes and Ossoue valley

Black redstarts had been absent for the last two days, but that was put right by a singing male on a chimney pot, viewed from the car park before we left. The 'crest', probably a firecrest, calling in the cypresses wasn't so obliging and we saw just a dot flying away.

So much for the typically settled weather of September: it was cloudy and distinctly blustery for much of the day, so extra layers of clothing were put on after our very short journey to the *barrage* that creates the Lac des Gloriettes. Like many upland lakes it's pretty birdless, though looking at the muddy areas surrounding what little water remained there were several distant dots that we could call water pipits after looking through a the 'scope. Over us were ravens and the distinctive 'chi-ow' call of red-billed choughs. It was just about possible to pick up the very different call of a very large flock of choughs on the other side of the reservoir. As we moved on, these yellow-billed alpine choughs were often with us, an often dramatic flock of some 250 birds. The various signs showed longer walks back to Gèdre and elsewhere and a modest circuit of the lake of just 1.3 kilometres. In summer there are so many botanical distractions that to walk right round the lake could take the greater part of a day, and so in September at first this seemed like a good idea. But it felt a lot longer, and was probably a bad idea with some who were not-so-agile and a biting wind, plus driving rain on our backs at one point. There were some birds, though: a very tame black redstart, a close but dishevelled-looking yellowhammer and, especially, that whirling flock of alpine choughs. Reaching the farthest point, the hillside-edge path above the reservoir moved into a more open landscape and a small bridge took us across a stream. The cloud and our spirits lifted, boosted by a close lammergeier, along with the inevitable griffons. The return leg – signed as a 35 minute walk, and it wasn't much more, even at Honeyguide pace – weaving between low-growing junipers and rocky outcrops. In the shelter of the latter were *Daphne mezereon*, spurge laurel and alpenrose, albeit none of these in flower. Fringed pink was a new flower on the walk and there were many cardabelles. Those apart, there was little else in flower apart from many scores of merendera and some autumn crocuses.

We returned to Gèdre and ate our picnics at the hotel. The Naturetrek group also returned to the hotel, having met wintry weather at the Cirque de Troumousse, including fresh snow. Their luck remained out with a puncture on their minibus, though happily I saw that as they were leaving and they could tackle it in the relative safety of the car park.

It was our turn for a glitch. The Ossoue valley was more sheltered than the high tops, but there was an unsigned blocked road with machinery, which meant reversing our minibus, then a 9-point turn. We stopped further down the valley for a short period where we saw two common redstarts, one male and one female, bravely perching on rocks despite the continuing strong winds. It was time to give up, and we returned to Gavarnie for a drink and to browse the shops. There was a stroke of luck for four of us, walking back to the minibus, when two black woodpeckers flew overhead. It was the briefest of views, just a glimpse, but they couldn't have been anything else.

Back in Gèdre, Shirley and Sonia joined me on a quick recce up to Gèdre-Dessus, the small area of *causse*-style vegetation on the warm slopes above the village. This turned out to be more successful, botanically speaking, than I had imagined so late in the season. The commonest flower was the slim, aromatic umbellifer spignel, and another unusual umbellifer was sickle-leaved hare's-ear. The huge seedpods of *Alyssum cuneifolium* were very obvious and there was even one in

flower where it had re-grown after being cut. Another impressive seedhead was cone knapweed. Under a yarrow seedhead were the distinctive red-and-black shield bugs *Graphosoma italicum*. Shirley found a song thrush and we saw a lammergeier.

At dinner, a professional photographer was taking photographs of Philippe cooking lamb chops over an open fire.

Friday 14 September – Barèges, Col de Tourmalet and Glère valley

A still and bright day, chilly at first but soon warming. We headed down the hill, through Luz St Sauveur and stopped in Barèges close to the fast-flowing river. This was with the hope of finding a dipper – and two flew upstream away from us immediately, albeit not much of a view. From the bridge it was no surprise that there was also a grey wagtail. Walking a little further there was a little cluster of migrants, with (or near) some tits: a pied flycatcher on a wire, a willow warbler, a chiffchaff and some indeterminate 'willowchiffs'. Back nearer the footbridge, a buddleia had drawn in a hummingbird hawkmoth, a red admiral with a notably orange trailing wing edge, and a rather tatty silver-washed fritillary. Behind this, another pied flycatcher appeared, with a serin on the wall next to a lizard. A dipper reappeared and settled on the river close to us, tucked in by the river wall.

It could hardly have been brighter as we wound past the winter ski infrastructure and through glorious scenery to the pass at Col de Tourmalet. There's a small cluster of ugly buildings at the top and plenty of room to park, where today we failed to find the snowfinches known from here. A much nicer café was a short distance away, allowing a walk and a chance to look at tiny plants, namely alpine toadflax, alpine eyebright, Montpellier milkvetch and a compact mound of the leaves of cushion bedstraw. A kestrel hovered motionless in the gentle breeze, and a female butterfly almost clamped onto a dandelion proved to be an Adonis blue. There were lots of pipits, which needed careful looking at, turning out to be rather brown and streaky juvenile water pipits, far less obvious than the distant ones seen yesterday. The weather was ideal for coffee outside. George picked up on a female northern wheatear and the sudden movement of the group of pipits alerted us to a sparrowhawk coming through, which briefly flew alongside a kestrel. Two red-billed choughs and plenty of griffons were as expected, but the sudden appearance of a low-flying osprey was a complete and stunning surprise. Walking back to the minibus, a damp patch was sprinkled with white flowers: far from glamorous perennial daisies, much as you'd have in your lawn, and the leaves of marsh marigold. Alpine birdsfoot trefoil was a flower we'd missed going in the other direction.



Alpine toadflax, round-leaved sundew and grass of Parnassus.

We headed down the hill, taking the turn to Chez Louissette through beech and pine woodland and into the attractive clearings at the bottom of the Glère valley. A picnic in the warm September sun was accompanied by coal tits, another pied flycatcher and other small birds, with a clear view this bright day up to the astronomical observatory at the top of the Pic du Midi. A clouded yellow appeared and with net and bug box we confirmed the bright blue butterflies as Adonis blues. Lunch over, we potted through the open area, which is rather like a fairway between belts of silver firs. There weren't many flowers, but a damp strip had many grass-of-Parnassus flowers, lots of low-growing devilsbit scabious and some round-leaved sundew. A soft trilling alerted us to crested tits, and with a little patience we had excellent views, and also found a goldcrest.

After tea at Chez Louissette, we returned to Gèdre. Three of us went to 'dipper bridge' and enjoyed sustained views of – you've guessed it – a dipper, in and out of the water or perched on rocks.

Saturday 15 September – Saugué and Col de Tentes

A hot day, but the shortest of journeys to start, as the way up to Saugué is barely out of Gèdre. There was immediately a stroke of luck in the first, wooded section: a young, dark-tailed red squirrel, scampering slowly across the road and into a tree where it sat as we looked at it from the minibus.



At our first stop out of the bus there wasn't a great deal of botanical note, but large yellow restharrow with its red-striped yellow petals was admired. There was a family of ciril buntings, sitting together, mostly in indistinct juvenile plumage.

We wound round and up the narrow lanes, emerging into the open meadows, pulling up for our main stop at 'butterfly corner'. At that moment there were few butterflies around, but our attention was more focussed first to a short-toed eagle, which flew over the hillside and landed on a rock, then an immature golden eagle. A little later a red kite moved north along the valley. Having shuffled the minibus to allow another to park alongside, it was time to concentrate on the butterflies emerging as the day warmed. On the roadside a concentration of blues was taking salts, we assume, 40 or so butterflies settled or buzzing around. Careful study showed them to be a mixture of Adonis, chalkhill and common blues. A Queen-of-Spain fritillary fed on a knapweed flower, and like yesterday there was a tatty silver-washed fritillary. Clouded yellows came past from time to time and a small heath added to the tally. Flowers were the now usual wet-flush mix of grass-of-Parnassus and devilsbit scabious, and everywhere the cropped turf was punctuated by the pale purple of merenderas. Autumn flowers, short-toed eagle, golden eagle, red kite, a swarm of butterflies in the sunshine: this was the Pyrenees in September at its glorious best.

Driving on a short distance we reached the end of the road, so we walked a short distance and admired the scenery, especially the great view of the Cirque de Gavarnie. There was a buzzard perched in one tree and a kestrel in another, and a couple of black redstarts. More striking, though, was the migration taking place: many scores of swallows, a mixture of adults and juveniles, moving slowly but steadily towards the cirque, and no doubt over it and into Spain a little later, along with no more than two or three house martins. We returned to 'butterfly corner' where there was shade for our picnic lunch.



Blues at 'butterfly corner', mostly chalkhill blues; slender gentian *Gentianella tenella*.

With the weather on our first two days in the Gèdre-Gavarnie area mitigating against going high, today's blue skies gave us a chance to try the high tops at Col de Tentes. We paused a couple of times on the ascent to look at marmots – and they at us – and noted wheatear as we moved on up. We stopped to see what flowers there might be in the grazed, short-cropped turf, which at first seemed botanically bereft. But eagle-eyed Sonia found a tiny gentian, and then a few more, and they were later identified from photos as slender gentian *Gentianella tenella*. Careful searching revealed a few more tiny flowers. A flock of about 100 alpine choughs flew along the ridge and swallows continued to be on the move.

At the top, the Col de Tentes car park was nearly full, with the hot Saturday weather bringing out many visitors. We walked part of the way along the road towards the border with Spain at Port de Boucharo, with a steady stream of people coming past us in both directions and even a few people on the high mountain tops on the far horizon. It was too busy to have any chance of seeing the isard that George was hoping for; birds were limited to two distant lammergeiers and some fly-over red-billed choughs. Bright red-winged grasshoppers accompanied us all the way, and there was the one blue-winged grasshopper. A migrant clouded yellow was to be expected, but wall and large skipper butterflies more surprising. Again it looked poor for plants, but careful searching revealed a few, with the commonest being alpine toadflax. Pygmy hawkbeard *Crepis pygmaea* was new to us, with chunky though prostrate cardabelles contrasting with miniature species, which included yarrow and red clover in compact growth as if they'd been bonsai'd by the conditions. Among the rocks, holly fern and scaly male fern were growing.

On the roadside scree we looked carefully at the lizards, one of which was certainly a Pyrenean rock lizard (picture on p.13) and another was a common wall lizard. Two of us had a brief but clear view of a greyish, long-tailed vole scampering into cover, which must have been a snow vole.

On the return, just below Gavarnie, two herons were struggling to fly up the valley and appeared to give up, conveying the impression that migration was just too much effort this evening. Back at the hotel, the chicken for the evening meal's main course had an interesting extra: battered, fried slices of comfrey leaves, picked in Odile's herb and flower garden.



Left: a cardabelle at Col de Tentes. Right: a group of autumn crocuses *Colchicum autumnale* by a stream in the Bué Valley. The blur of red wings on the right is a hummingbird hawkmoth.

Sunday 16 September – Bué Valley and around Gèdre

On another day that was fine, still and getting progressively warmer, we took the short drive past yesterday's turn for Saugué to the end of the road, the final part unmetalled, at Bué, which is more or less opposite Gèdre. The small parking area was already nearly full with those out walking this fine Sunday, but it's still a quiet spot. With the walk back down the road in shade, we started by spending a delightful hour or so in the open meadow by the river. There was nothing new for the week, but a chiffchaff sang half-heartedly, two blackcaps seemed to be taking berries on an alpine elder and there were several Adonis blues and clouded yellows moving around. Some good clumps of alpenrose and spurge laurel were protected by rocks. Most of the autumn crocuses, as usual, were well-spread, but some were well grouped and attracted a hummingbird hawkmoth.

It was surprisingly cool in the shadier bits of the road. We started by watching a small group of goldcrests, mixed with coal tits, and confirming the identification of Good King Henry. Woodland edge in September was never going to be botanically rich, but there was plenty to see. Damper bits held lots of grass-of-Parnassus and yellow mountain saxifrage. On the road edge, Sonia found

two small toadflax species: chaenorhinum and Jersey toadflax. Other flowers included Welsh poppy, bush vetch and two lettuce species, wall and blue, both confirmed by finding last, lingering flowers.

I retrieved the minibus from the top of the road and we drove to meadows below the woodland, finding a combination of shade and sun for lunch. A grayling butterfly, probably woodland grayling, flew past and landed while we ate. This prompted some butterfly catching after we'd eaten, with



Swallowtail on marigolds.

the chance to look at netted specimens of a superb Queen-of-Spain fritillary and a less than perfect long-tailed blue.

We spent the rest of the afternoon in and around Gèdre, starting with a short walk to the confluence of the Héas and Gavarnie rivers, where there was a dipper on the former. On disturbed ground outside the *patinoire* was Pyrenean toadflax, looking much less yellow than the picture in the alpine flora. Julia was alert to our first swallowtail

of the holiday, feeding on marigolds and mesembryanthemums along with the almost inevitable hummingbird hawkmoth and looking so smart that we wondered if it was freshly emerged. We adjourned for tea in the café by the bridge up the road, where a Camberwell beauty flew past us in the garden.

I then briefly showed Shirley the steps that take you to the riverside opposite the Brèche de Roland hotel, finding a comma butterfly. Four of us gathered round the back of the hotel, but were in no hurry to move off as scores of swallows were moving through and pied flycatchers were hunting from the tops of oak trees. We drove up to Gèdre-Dessus, finding a similar range of species as when three of us visited three days previously, including those red-and-black Italian shield bugs, but adding holly blue and small white to the butterfly list.

After dinner, there was a brief but heroic failure to look for planets, stymied by the gathering cloud, and what had looked a bit like Venus from the dining room turned into an artificial light high on a hillside. Jupiter appeared after the cloud had lifted, but that was in the middle of the night.

Monday 17 September – Cirque de Troumouse

We were away sharply at 9:15, driving along the Héas valley, and we passed the booth that acts as a *péage* at the bottom of the mountain road before it was open. Up the hill a great crowd of water pipits encouraged a stop, where there were also migrating swallows, wheatear and black redstart. Sonia was studying some monkshood flowers and found that bees were taking nectar through holes drilled in the upper part of the flowers (photo on p.12).

Climbing further though the open hillside we wound our way through marmot country to the halfway house – more properly the Auberge du Maillet. I doubt there's a more spectacular setting for a café in Europe. We arrived at the same time as a coach load of French tourists, surprising partly as they were there fairly early but even more because none went into the café. George had been wondering about the mysterious isard – Pyrenean chamois – all week, and it was only apt that he should find our first group. There were four, high on the hillside, what appeared to be a mother and kid, another adult and a middle-sized animal – presumably a family party. We watched them as we had our coffee in the warm sunshine. After we left the café and drove on up there was another group of eight isards to our left, and Julia found a further four more distant animals in a different direction.

The Cirque de Troumouse as landscape is quite simply spectacular, with the distant yet still towering cliffs of the cirque round some 300 degrees of a rolling mountain plain. I'd mentioned the lack of gentians in September, so it was a welcome surprise to find one in full flower, identified as southern gentian *Gentiana alpina*.



Group members soak up the scenery at the Auberge du Maillet, Troumouse.

We made ourselves comfortable by a stream for our picnics, with two species of dragonflies in the air. One of these settled and was certainly a golden-ringed dragonfly and the other, from flight views, seemed to be common (or moorland) hawk. Julia had noted these laying eggs a little farther along the watercourse, and it was also Julia who first saw what we'd hope to find – a Pyrenean brook newt. It went under a small stone, showing a yellow-striped head out of one end and a striped tail out of the other, before swimming away and giving everyone brilliant views of this special mountain species.



Isard – Pyrenean chamois.

We spent a relaxing couple of hours soaking up the Cirque's magic before descending to the same café again, and re-finding the four isards a good distance from where they'd been earlier.

Tuesday 18 September – Gèdre and home

Philippe was up early to prepare breakfast for us at 6:30, including warm chocolate croissants, and we were away just after 7 am. It was a smooth journey back to the airport, broken briefly by stopping for fuel in Lourdes, with cloud and drizzle in the lowlands accentuating the good weather we'd enjoyed most days in the mountains.

Holiday highlights

Group members kindly gave their holiday highlights which give an insight into the varied things that will remain as powerful memories.

Sonia: carpets of merendera; the Italian shield bug *Graphosoma italicum*; butterfly corner.

Gill: lammergeier and dipper; the lovely company.

Shirley: the cloud of blues, Camberwell beauty and Queen-of-Spain fritillary.

George: the scenery; short-toed eagle, butterfly corner, serin, Camberwell beauty.

Julia: lammergeier, Pyrenean brook newt.

Chris: Camberwell beauty, grass-of-Parnassus, the whole Troumousse experience.

Systematic Lists

BIRDS

Grey heron	One in the Ossoue valley, 13 th ; two below Gavarnie, 15 th , all could have been migrants
Red kite	One, Saugué valley, 15 th .
Lammergeier	Seen on three days, with six sightings at Gavarnie involving at least three individuals.
Griffon vulture	Seen every day in the Pyrenees.
Short-toed eagle	One, Saugué valley, 15 th .
Sparrowhawk	Recorded on two days.
Golden eagle	Seen on three days, including at Gèdre and several sightings at Gavarnie.
Booted eagle	Single pale-phase birds at Gèdre, 11 th , and Gavarnie, 12 th .
Common buzzard	Seen on most days
Osprey	A migrant at Col du Tourmalet on 14 th .
Kestrel	Seen on most days, including about 12 in the air together at Gavarnie.
Peregrine	Recorded on the first two days.
Feral pigeon	On the first two days.
Woodpigeon	Seen on two days.
Collared dove	On day one only.
Green woodpecker	Heard on three days.
Black woodpecker	Heard in the distance at Gavarnie; two dashed through over Gavarnie village, 13 th .
Great spotted woodpecker	Heard in Gèdre by the hotel
Swallow	None for the first four days, then migrating flocks, numbering many hundreds, for last three days.
House martin	Seen on three days, two of which involved ones and twos with big flocks of swallows.
Crag martin	Seen daily, often feeding in flocks. Recently fledged chicks in Gavarnie.
Water pipit	At all the high altitude stops in small flocks, and c50 feeding on mud at the Lac des Gloriettes.
Grey wagtail	Seen on five days, including in Gèdre.
White wagtail	Seen on five days, including in Gèdre.
Dipper	On four days, notably at 'dipper bridge' and the river confluence in Gèdre and in Barèges.
Wren	Gavarnie only.
Dunnock	On juniper bushes in short turf at the Lac des Gloriettes and Troumousse, recalling suburban hedge and lawn habitat.
Robin	Heard or seen on five days.

Black redstart	Singing in Gèdre in early mornings, seen at the high altitude stops.
Redstart	2 in Ossoue valley, 13 th .
Northern wheatear	At all the high altitude stops.
Blackbird	Seen or heard on four days.
Song thrush	One at Gèdre-Dessus, 13 th .
Mistle thrush	2 in Saugué valley, 15 th .
Blackcap	Seen on four days.
Northern chiffchaff	Heard or seen on five days.
Willow warbler	Seen on three days, and there were many unidentified 'willowchiffs, too.
Goldcrest	Excellent views in the Glère valley and a small group in the Bué valley.
Firecrest	Not confirmed, though an identified 'crest' flew from the cypress tree at the hotel where there are usually firecrests.
Spotted flycatcher	2 by the river at Gèdre, 11 th .
Pied flycatcher	Migrants on three days, including 2 by the river in Gèdre on 11 th , in Barèges and the Glère valley on 14 th and at the back of the hotel on 16 th .
Great tit	Seen on six days.
Blue tit	Seen on six days.
Coal tit	Seen on three days, and especially visible at Glère valley on 14 th .
Crested tit	Excellent views in the Glère valley.
Nuthatch	Heard almost daily at Gèdre.
Jay	Seen on all except one day.
Magpie	Seen on three days.
Raven	On four days.
Carrion crow	Recorded on all except one day, usually at lower levels.
Red-billed chough	On five days, at all the high areas.
Alpine chough	On four days, including big flocks: 150 at Lac des Gloriettes, 250 at Tourmalet, 100 at Col de Tentes, and 25 at Troumouse.
Starling	A group round the buildings at Lourdes airport, on arrival and departure.
Chaffinch	Seen on three days, including at the hotel.
Linnet	Recorded on three days, all at high altitude.
Serin	Seen on three days.
Crossbill	3 at Gavarnie.
House sparrow	Seen on three days, and a nice group of c20 in a Gavarnie garden.
Yellowhammer	6 at Gavarnie and heard at Saugué.
Cirl bunting	Gèdre-Dessus and a family of 5 at Saugué



Yellow monkshood; pied flycatcher; monkshood with holes made by bees to take nectar, best seen in the flowers on the top left.

MAMMALS

Alpine marmot
 Red squirrel
 Snow vole
 Pine marten
 Isard

AMPHIBIANS

Common frog
 Pyrenean brook newt

REPTILES

Common wall lizard
 Pyrenean rock lizard



A Pyrenean rock lizard casts a shadow at Col de Tentes. Note the rather uniform back colour.

Swallowtail
 Red admiral
 Small tortoiseshell
 Camberwell beauty
 Comma
 Queen-of-Spain fritillary
 Silver-washed fritillary

BUTTERFLIES

Wall brown
 Woodland grayling
 (probably)
 Small heath
 Large white
 Small white
 Clouded yellow

Common blue
 Adonis blue
 Chalkhill blue
 Holly blue
 Brown argus
 Long-tailed blue
 Large skipper

MOTHS

Hummingbird hawkmoth – very common around planted flowers. Vestal

OTHER INVERTEBRATES

Tettigonia viridissima
Oedipoda germanica?
Oedipoda caerulescens?
Stethophyma grossum
Cordulegaster boltonii,
Aeshna juncea,
Cetonia aeruginosa
Graphosoma italicum
Pyrrhocoris apterus
Coccinella 7-punctata
Geotrupes stercorarius
Formica rufa
Tipula maxima
Gerris sp (probably)

Great green bush-cricket, Saugué
 Red-winged grasshopper, scores at Col de Tentes
 Blue-winged grasshopper, one at Col de Tentes
 Large marsh grasshopper, Troumouse (below left)
 Golden-ringed dragonfly, Troumouse
 Common (or moorland) hawk. Probably this species at Troumouse.
 a rose chafer
 Italian shield bug (below right, on a spignel seedhead)
 Fire-bug
 7-spot ladybird
 Dor beetle
 Wood ant
 a crane-fly
 pond skater



FLOWERING PLANTS

Some widespread and familiar species are omitted.

nif = not in flower, mostly for distinctive leaves.

Dicotyledons

Aceraceae	<i>Acer campestre</i>	Field maple	
	<i>A. pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	
Amaranthaceae	<i>Amaranthus retroflexus</i>	Common amaranth	
Apiaceae	<i>Bupleurum falcatum</i>	Sickle-leaved Hare's-ear	
	<i>Conopodium pyrenaicum</i>	Pyrenean pignut	
	<i>Daucus carota</i>	Wild carrot	
	<i>Eryngium bourgatii</i>	Pyrenean eryngo	
	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed	
	ssp <i>pyrenaicum</i>		
	<i>Laserpitium siler</i>	a sermountain	nif
	<i>Meum athamanticum</i>	Spignel	
	<i>Pastinaca sativa</i>	Wild parsnip	
Asclepiadaceae	<i>Vincetoxicum hirundinaria</i>	Swallow-wort	nif
Asteraceae	<i>Achilla millefolia</i>	Yarrow	
	<i>Antennaria dioica</i>	Cat's-foot	nif
	<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Perennial daisy	
	<i>Carduus carlinoides</i>	Pyrenean thistle	
	<i>C. (carlinifolius) medius</i>	a thistle	
	<i>Carlina acanthifolia</i>	Cardabelle (= acanthus-leaved carline thistle)	
	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Black knapweed	
	<i>Cirsium acaule</i>	Dwarf or stemless thistle	
	<i>C. eroiophorum</i>	Woolly thistle	
	<i>C. rivulare</i>	Brook thistle	
	<i>C. palustre</i>	Marsh thistle	
	<i>Crepis pygmaea</i>		
	<i>Erigeron acer</i>	Blue fleabane	
	<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>	Hemp agrimony	
	<i>Galinsoga ciliata</i>	Shaggy soldier	
	<i>Hieracium lanatum</i>	Woolly hawkweed (Gèdre-Dessus)	nif
	<i>H. pilosella</i>	Mouse-eared hawkweed	
	<i>Inula conyza</i>	Ploughman's spikenard	
	<i>Lactuca perennis</i>	Blue lettuce	
	<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	Hairy hawkbit	
	<i>L. pyrenaicum</i>		
	<i>Leuzea conifera</i>	Cone knapweed	nif
	<i>Mycelis muralis</i>	Wall lettuce	
	<i>Picris hieraceoides</i>	Hawkweed ox-tongue	
	<i>Solidago virgaurea</i>	Golden-rod	
	<i>Tragopogon pratensis</i>	Goat's-beard	
	<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	Colt's-foot	nif
Berberidaceae	<i>Berberis vulgaris</i>	Barberry	in fruit
Betulaceae	<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver birch	
Boraginaceae	<i>Echium vulgare</i>	Viper's-bugloss	
	<i>Lithospermum officinale</i>	Common gromwell	
	<i>Pulmonaria</i> sp	Lungwort	nif
Brassicaceae	<i>Alyssum cuneifolium</i>	Yellow, very silvery hairy, big oval pods, at Gèdre-Dessus	
Buxaceae	<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>	Box	
Campanulaceae	<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>	Harebell	
	<i>C. trachelium</i>	Nettle-leaved bellflower	
	<i>Phyteuma orbiculare</i>	Round-headed rampion	
Caprifoliaceae	<i>Sambucus ebulus</i>	Dwarf elder	in fruit
	<i>S. nigra</i>	Elder	in fruit
	<i>S. racemosa</i>	Alpine elder	in fruit

Caryophyllaceae	<i>Dianthus deltoides</i>	Maiden pink	
	<i>D. monspessulanus</i>	Fringed pink	
	<i>Silene alba</i>	White campion	
	<i>S. dioica</i>	Red campion	
	<i>S. nutans</i>	Nottingham catchfly	nif
	<i>S. vulgaris</i>	Bladder campion	
	<i>Saponaria officinalis</i>	Soapwort	
	<i>Spergularia rubra</i>	Sand spurrey	
Chenopodiaceae	<i>Chenopodium bonus-henricus</i>	Good King Henry	
	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	Common rock-rose	
Cistaceae	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	Perforate St. John's-wort	
Clusiaceae (Hypericaceae)			
Corylaceae	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel	
Crassulaceae	<i>Sedum telephium</i>	Orpine	
Dipsacaceae	<i>Knautia dipsacifolia</i>	Wood scabious	
	<i>Scabiosa columbaria</i>	Small scabious	
	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	Devilsbit scabious	
	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>	Round-leaved sundew	nif
Droseraceae	<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	Bearberry	in fruit
Ericaceae	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather	
	<i>Rhododendron ferrugineum</i>	Alpenrose	nif
	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	Bilberry	in fruit
	<i>Vaccinium uliginosum</i>	Bog whortleberry or Northern bilberry	in fruit
	<i>Euphorbia characias</i>	Large Mediterranean spurge	nif
Euphorbiaceae	<i>E. helioscopia</i>	Sun spurge	
	<i>Astragalus monspessulanus</i>	Montpelier milk-vetch	
Fabaceae	<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i> ssp <i>pyrenaica</i>	Kidney Vetch	
	<i>Lathyrus latifolius</i>	Broad-leaved everlasting pea	
	<i>L. sylvestris</i>	Narrow-leaved everlasting pea	
	<i>Lotus (corniculatus) alpinus</i>	Alpine bird's-foot-trefoil	
	<i>L. corniculatus</i>	Bird's-foot-trefoil	
	<i>Medicago sativa</i>	Lucerne (=alfalfa)	
	<i>Melilotus alba</i>	White melilot	
	<i>Ononis natrix</i>	Large yellow rest-harrow	
	<i>O. striata</i>	Yellow rest-harrow	
	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red clover	
	<i>T. repens</i>	White clover	
	<i>Vicia cracca</i>	Tufted vetch	
	<i>V. sepium</i>	Bush vetch	
	<i>Castanea sativa</i>	Sweet chestnut	
	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Beech	
	<i>Quercus faginea</i>		
	<i>Q. pubescens</i>	Downy/white oak	
Gentianaceae	<i>Gentiana alpina</i>	Alpine gentian	
	<i>Gentianella tenella</i>	Slender gentian	
Geraniaceae	<i>Geranium molle</i>	Dovesfoot cranesbill	
	<i>G. pyrenaicum</i>	Pyrenean cranesbill	
	<i>G. robertianum</i>	Herb Robert	
	<i>G. rotundifolium</i>	Round-leaved cranesbill	
Gesneriaceae	<i>Ramonda myconi</i>	Ramonda	nif
Lamiaceae	<i>Acinos arvensis</i>	Basil-thyme	
	<i>Clinopodium vulgare</i>	Wild basil	
	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Self-heal	
	<i>Sideritis hyssopifolia</i>	Sideritis	

	<i>Teucrium pyrenaicum</i>	Pyrenean germander	nif
	<i>Thymus serpyllum</i>	Wild thyme	
Lentibulariaceae	<i>Pinguicula grandiflora</i>	Large-flowered butterwort	nif
Loranthaceae	<i>Viscum album</i>	Mistletoe	
Malvaceae	<i>Malva moschata</i>	Musk mallow	
	<i>M. neglecta</i>	Dwarf mallow	
Oleaceae	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	
Onagraceae	<i>Epilobium angustifolium</i>	Rosebay willowherb	
	Plus a low-growing alpine willowherb that we didn't identify.		
Oxalidaceae	<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>	Wood-sorrel	nif
Papaveraceae	<i>Chelidonium majus</i>	Greater celandine	
	<i>Meconopsis cambrica</i>	Welsh poppy	
Parnassiaceae	<i>Parnassia palustris</i>	Grass of Parnassus	
Plantaginaceae	<i>Plantago maritima</i> ssp <i>serpentina</i>	Fleshy plantain	
	<i>P. media</i>	Hoary plantain	nif
Polygonaceae	<i>Rumex scutatus</i>	French sorrel (= Rubble dock)	
Ranunculaceae	<i>Aconitum anthora</i>	Yellow monkshood	
	<i>A. napellus</i>	Monkshood	
	<i>Aquilegia vulgaris</i>	Columbine	nif
	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	Marsh marigold	
	<i>Clematis vitalba</i>	Traveller's-joy	nif
	<i>Helleborus foetidus</i>	Stinking hellebore	nif
	<i>Hepatica nobilis</i>	Hepatica	nif
	<i>Ranunculus bulbosus</i>	Bulbous buttercup	
Resedaceae	<i>Reseda lutea</i>	Wild mignonette	
Rosaceae	<i>Alchemilla alpina</i>	Alpine lady's-mantle	nif
	<i>A. vulgaris</i>	Lady's-mantle	nif
	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	
	<i>Dryas octopetala</i>	Mountain avens	nif
	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	Meadowsweet	
	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil	
	<i>Rosa glauca</i>	Blue-leaved rose	in fruit
	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	Blackberry/bramble	
	<i>R. idaeus</i>	Raspberry	in fruit
	<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>	Salad-burnet	nif
	<i>Sorbus aria</i>	Whitebeam	
	<i>S. aucuparia</i>	Rowan	in fruit
Rubiaceae	<i>Galium album</i>	Upright bedstraw	
	<i>G. pyrenaicum</i>	A cushion bedstraw	nif
	<i>G. odoratum</i>	Woodruff	nif
	<i>G. verum</i>	Lady's-bedstraw	
Salicaceae	<i>Salix viminalis</i>	Osier	
Saxifragaceae	<i>Saxifraga aizoides</i>	Yellow mountain saxifrage	
	<i>S. longifolia</i>	Pyrenean saxifrage	nif
	<i>S. paniculata</i>	Livelong saxifrage	nif
	<i>S. umbrosa</i>	Wood saxifrage	nif
Scrophulariaceae	<i>Chaenorhinum</i> <i>origanifolium</i>	Chaenorhinum	
	<i>Euphrasia alpina</i>	Alpine eyebright	
	<i>Euphrasia</i> sp	Eyebright	
	<i>Linaria alpina</i>	Alpine toadflax	
	<i>L. pelisseriana</i>	Jersey toadflax	
	<i>Verbascum nigrum</i>	Dark mullein	
	<i>V.thapsus</i>	Great mullein	nif
	<i>Veronica beccabunga</i>	Brooklime	
Solanaceae	<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>	Bittersweet or woody nightshade	

Thymelaeaceae	<i>Daphne laureola</i> ssp <i>philippii</i>	Spurge-laurel	nif
	<i>D. mezereum</i>	Mezereon	nif
Verbenaceae	<i>Verbena officianalis</i>	Vervain	
Violaceae	<i>Viola cornuta</i>	Horned violet	
	<i>V.riviana</i>	Common dog violet	
Monocotyledons			
Cyperaceae	<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	Cotton-grass	
Liliaceae	<i>Asphodelus albus</i>	Asphodel	nif
	<i>Colchicum autumnale</i>	Autumn crocus	
	<i>Merendera pyrenaica</i>	Merendera	
	<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i>	Butcher's-broom	nif
Orchidaceae	<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>	Narrow-leaved helleborine	nif
Poaceae (very incomplete)	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	Sweet vernal grass	
	<i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i>	Heath false brome	
	<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking-grass	
	<i>Nardus stricta</i>	Mat-grass	
CONIFERS	<i>Abies alba</i>	Silver fir	
	<i>Larix decidua</i>	European larch	
	<i>Pinus nigra</i> ssp <i>salzmannii</i>	Pyrenean black pine	
	<i>Juniperus communis</i> (+ ssp <i>alpina</i>)	Juniper	
FERNS	<i>Asplenium ruta-muraria</i>	Wall-rue	
	<i>A. septentrionale</i>	Forked spleenwort	
	<i>A. trichomanes</i>	Maidenhair spleenwort	
	<i>Ceterach officinarum</i>	Rusty-back fern	
	<i>Dryopteris affinis</i>	Scaly male fern	
	<i>D. dilatata</i>	Broad buckler-fern	
	<i>D. filix-mas</i>	Male fern	
	<i>Polypodium vulgare</i>	Common polypody	
	<i>Polystichum lonchitis</i>	Holly fern	
	<i>P. setiferum</i>	Soft shield-fern	
	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken	



Southern gentian *Gentiana alpina* at Troumouse; maiden pink in the Bué Valley.