



# Honeyguide

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Helping you enjoy wildlife



Helping to protect wildlife



# Honeyguide

## WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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## Holidays for the year 2010

Welcome to the 20th season of Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays. Twenty years: it seems hardly possible!

You'll have noticed that the brochure is all in colour for the first time. To date, we've been cautious about looking too 'glossy'. Happily modern colour printing adds just a little to the cost so it felt time to move towards reflecting nature's colour in these pages, as we already do in our holiday reports and on [www.honeyguide.co.uk](http://www.honeyguide.co.uk). The brochure is – as it always has been – printed on recycled paper, part of our continuing push to be environmentally sustainable.

For a third year running, we have three new holiday destinations. In Poland we visit the celebrated Biebrza Marshes and primeval Białowieża Forest. In South Africa, following holidays in the Western Cape and Garden Route, we move north to the great wildlife spectacle of Kruger National Park.

Last winter, a BBC wildlife programme featured Portugal's cork oak *montados* – wood pastures – and inspired many of us. Our new Central Portugal holiday includes these in a rich range of habitats including a limestone natural park, steppe grasslands, holm oak woodlands and both fresh and intertidal wetlands.

Group bookings mean that the Danube Delta drops out of this brochure, but Crete returns. If you'd like to think about a group holiday – small or large – please feel free to ask.

The Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust goes from strength to strength. These figures will soon be out of date, but we are pleased to report that in the first half of 2009 we donated £6,586 to conservation projects linked to our holidays, bringing our running total to just over £60,000 since 1991. Regular readers will know this is mostly through contributions of £35 per person built into the holiday price, topped up by the taxman through Gift Aid.

Finally, some practical points. A reminder that rules about selling travel insurance means if you want Honeyguide's insurance you need to go straight to our broker – via [www.honeyguide.co.uk](http://www.honeyguide.co.uk) is an easy route. Our bookings web page also has links for airport parking and hotels. Holidays give the typical flights we use, but increasingly we arrange flights from airports near to where you live, or help with other arrangements.

I look forward to meeting you or hearing from you soon.

Chris Durdin  
August 2009



The air holidays shown are ATOL Protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3253. ATOL protection extends primarily to customers who book and pay in the United Kingdom.



**Carbon Clear**  
Offsetting Our Emissions

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## More information

In this brochure we can give only a flavour of the holidays on offer. You are welcome without commitment to have a pack of information about any holiday, including a previous holiday report and itinerary. Holiday reports are also on [www.honeyguide.co.uk](http://www.honeyguide.co.uk)

## Honeyguide conservation programme for 2010

£35 of the price of your Honeyguide holiday goes to a conservation body, often the bird protection society of the host country, towards its current conservation work. The societies and projects we support are described under each holiday.

## HONEYGUIDE CHARITABLE TRUST

A donation to a local conservation project has been part of the holiday price ever since the start of Honeyguide in 1991. To date (August 2009), we have raised £60,166 for conservation projects, mostly in Europe.

The Honeyguide Wildlife Trust Limited was registered as a charity in June 2004, registered charity number 1104604. The object of the charity, in summary, is "To help conserve... the natural environment and wildlife".

The purpose, quite simply, is to claim tax from the Inland Revenue against the contributions from Honeyguiders. This can raise an additional 28p in the pound, and we then make the usual donations with the holidays a bit bigger for LPO, SEO, GOB, HOS, ROS and so on. This raises more than an additional £1000 each year for conservation.

Trustees of the charitable trust are Helen Crowder, Malcolm Crowder (secretary) and Chris Durdin (chairman).

We would be very grateful if everyone booking a holiday who is a UK taxpayer could complete the simple gift aid declaration on the booking form.

We also welcome additional donations or legacies through the Honeyguide charity.

We are very grateful to the Wildlife Outreach Network in Essex, which has already contributed £3,900 through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust.

# Your leadership team 2010

**Chris Durdin** (this year leading in **Extremadura, Crete, the Dordogne and the French Pyrenees**) is the driving force behind Honeyguide, running holidays since 1991. For many years he combined this with his work for the RSPB in Eastern England, often the Society's spokesman, but has been concentrating on Honeyguide full-time since 2009. Well, nearly full-time: a full family life includes coaching football to one son's under seven year group. As a naturalist, Chris is an all rounder.

## Madeira

**Catarina Fagundes and Hugo Romano** run Maderia Wind Birds, a small company specialising in observing the endemic and indigenous species of birds and plants on the island, and jointly lead all our groups on the island. The company embraces the principles of sustainable tourism, contributing to the conservation and interpretation of the natural heritage of Madeira's archipelago.

## Extremadura

**Martin Kelsey OBE** is our regular leader in Extremadura where he lives with his family, close to Finca Santa Marta. His background in ecology includes a three-year study on marsh warblers. After three years in the Amazon rainforest with the British Ornithologists' Union, where he met his wife Claudia, he worked for BirdLife International, before joining Save the Children.

## Central Portugal

**Domingos Leitão** works for SPEA, the Portuguese BirdLife partner, and alongside this is a holiday leader in his home country. One of his SPEA roles in 2008 was to run, jointly with the Portugal Tourism Board, a conference promoting nature tourism at which Honeyguide's Chris Durdin was a speaker. That's where we planned this new holiday.

**Rob Macklin** is the RSPB's area manager on the Suffolk coast, covering Minsmere and North Warren among several nature reserves. His rare appearances in the Honeyguide brochure are deceptive: he is well travelled in Europe, but as a leader usually with our regular groups from the Salisbury & District Natural History Society. He was so keen to see Portugal's cork oak forests that he seized on the chance to go on our recce for this holiday, and looks forward to returning.

## Menorca and Spanish Pyrenees

**Chris Gibson** is a conservation officer for Natural England working in north Essex, an author of several wildlife books and has led many holidays for Honeyguide. He is an outstanding all rounder, from birds through flowers to moths, and was recently recognised as a 'naturalist of distinction' by the British Naturalists' Association.

## Eastern Greece and the Cévennes

**Robin Hamilton** has a wide knowledge of western and central Europe and its wildlife,

especially birds. He worked for many years for English Nature. **Rachel Hamilton** spent her working life teaching natural history and conservation with the Field Studies Council and at Otley College in Suffolk. She is an enthusiastic all round naturalist, though her first interest is botany. Robin and Rachel, both of whom are experienced wildlife leaders and keen linguists, are regular leaders in Eastern Greece and set up our Cévennes holiday.

## Poland

**Artur Wiatr** is a wildlife enthusiast involved in nature protection and ecotourism development within the Biebrza River valley. He works both for the Biebrza National Park and since 1998 as a holiday leader. He's a licensed guide and is co-author of a pocket guidebook on Biebrza National Park.

**Andrew Gregory** is passionate about Poland, where he used to lead holidays for Gullivers Natural History Holidays. He was quick to propose this new Honeyguide destination. From Ipswich, he is one of the team that runs the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

## Bulgaria

**Assen Ignatov** is an experienced guide with an extensive knowledge of birds, butterflies and natural history. He is part of the team at Neophron – Egyptian vulture – the holiday arm of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, to whom any profits go. Assen is also an accomplished wildlife artist and keen photographer.

**Tim Strudwick** is the RSPB's site manager for the Mid Yare nature reserves in Norfolk – Strumpshaw Fen and nearby. Naturally Tim knows his birds from his work, 40 years of birdwatching and travelling in Europe and beyond, but he's also a keen botanist and runs courses on sedges and rushes. A more recent interest is in solitary bees and wasps, for which he is now the Norfolk county recorder.

## French Pyrenees

**Ivan Nethercoat** is training & interpretation manager in the RSPB's People Engagement department at Sandy. He is a regular and well-travelled Honeyguide leader. His degree, many moons ago, was in photography, and he is very happy to help any photographers in the group.

## Kruger National Park

**Geoff Crane** is the man behind Crane's Cape Tours & Travel, both local leaders and ground agents for Honeyguide in South Africa. An experienced guide himself, he co-leads all Honeyguide's holidays in South Africa.

**Mike Raymaker** has led tours and worked as a nature guide for Crane's Cape Tours & Travel on several occasions, including with Honeyguide. With 12 years guiding experience in South Africa, Mike's general knowledge of anthropology, botany, geology and ornithology is excellent.



Chris Durdin



Martin Kelsey



Catarina Fagundes



Hugo Romano



Domingos Leitão



Rob Macklin



Chris Gibson



Artur Wiatr



Rachel Hamilton



Robin Hamilton



Assen Ignatov



Tim Strudwick



Ivan Nethercoat



Geoff Crane

Our holidays have been designed with the general naturalist in mind. Beginners are especially welcome but all holidays offer much to the more experienced naturalist. Typically holidays are loosely based on 'birdwatching without blinkers'. Madeira, Menorca, Crete, Dordogne, the Cévennes and the French Pyrenees are aimed at both birds and flowers. Several holidays can be good for butterflies. Local history, culture and food play a part in every holiday.

The holidays lend themselves to anyone wishing to leave the organised programme to sketch, paint, write or just potter.

17 – 24 February 2010

# Madeira

## Pearl of the Atlantic

Madeira's scenic contrast between sea and mountains, tropical gardens and equable year-round temperatures – around 17°C in winter – make it a tempting holiday destination, especially in the British winter. For naturalists, the isolation of this Portuguese archipelago, some 500 kilometres west of the African coast, brings special wildlife including many species found only here.

The scenery is immediately striking, with cliffs and mountains rising to more than 1800 metres squeezed into an island of only 741 km<sup>2</sup>. Old irrigation channels, known as levadas, with their side paths are excellent – and fairly flat – ways to get to know Madeira and its cultural and natural heritage, like the laurel forest. The green forest contrasts with the blue ocean – where there is a chance to observe some cetaceans.

The rural hotel where we stay, Quinta do Furão, is in Santana in the north of the island, a peaceful and traditional setting away from the main tourist areas around Funchal. From here one can admire the rocky cliffs rising from the sea and the top of the mountains touching the clouds.

## Flora

The main focus of this trip for flora will be the laurel forest, a UNESCO World Heritage site, with its endemic trees, shrubs, ferns, mosses and lichens. This forest is so named due to the dominance of trees from the laurel family, such as bay laurel, fetid laurel, Madeira mahogany and the Canary laurel. Other native plants flowering in February include the pride-of-Madeira, Madeira mountain stock, Madeira storks-bill and Mando's chrysanthemum.



## Birds

Two birds occur only on Madeira, trocáz pigeon and Madeira firecrest, and we aim to find these. Local subspecies around at the time we are in Madeira include Berthelot's pipit *Anthus bertelotti madeirensis*, Madeira chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs madeirensis*, grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea schmitzi*, rock sparrow *Petronia petronia madeirensis* and little shearwater *Puffinus assimilis baroli*. Other birds include quail, plain swift, spectacled warbler, waxbills and migrants such as waders. Bird density is low in Madeira and local knowledge to find these specialities is essential.

## Other wildlife

A sea trip to the Desertas Islands offers the chance to see bottle-nosed and spotted dolphins, with a possibility of seeing sperm and fin whales. The trip takes us to the breeding habitat of the endangered monk seal.

Butterflies are also interesting and easy to see with endemic species as Madeira brimstone *Gonepteryx madeirensis*, Madeira grayling *Hipparchia madeirensis* and Madeiran speckled wood *Pararge xiphia*, plus sub-species like Madeira small copper *Lycaena phlaeas phlaeoides*. Indian red admiral and the beautiful monarch butterfly also breed on the island.

## Itinerary

Our days out, all starting on the north coast of the island, visit a range of landscapes and protected areas throughout Madeira. Some days combine gentle walking with bird and flora watching; others will be mainly by minibus stopping at hot spots. A sea trip to the Desertas Islands, a Biogenetic Reserve recognised by the European Council, shows us Madeira from the sea and its maritime species. There will also be a free day with an opportunity to visit the celebrated tropical gardens.

## Conservation Project

Europe's rarest breeding seabird and once thought to be extinct, the Zino's Petrel or freira is endemic to Madeira. The Freira Conservation Project (FCP), founded in 1986, is a group of people and institutions working on the conservation of Zino's petrels, especially by controlling its main predator, the rat. The FCP has overseen a steady increase in numbers nesting in the central massif of Madeira. We will not see them as they can only be seen between April and August. Frank Zino, the son of Alec Zino who rediscovered the bird and named it as a separate species, is the FCP's president and will meet us for a brief talk about Zino's petrels.



Monarch on pride-of-Madeira



Above: Madeira firecrest, below: laurel forest



17 – 25 March 2010

# Extremadura

## Wild central Spain

Extremadura is one of the few remaining truly wild areas of Spain and, indeed, Europe. The region is renowned for its amazing variety of birds of prey, especially in Monfragüe National Park, and special species such as the bustards and larks to be found on the rolling plains of the Spanish steppes.

The plains around Trujillo and Cáceres form part of the great Spanish steppes with their fascinating assemblage of birds. Here we will search for great bustards performing their incredible breeding display. March is the best time to see the astonishing ritual in which the male turns himself into the appearance of a huge white pom-pom of feathers. Other steppe birds in this area are little bustards, stone-curlews and both pin-tailed and black-bellied sandgrouse. Crested and calandra larks are also found in the plains. Another speciality is Spanish sparrow, a rather local bird in Spain despite its name.

We will spend two or three days exploring Monfragüe National Park, some 25 miles north of Trujillo. This is one of the most outstanding areas for seeing birds of prey in a country which is itself probably the best for raptors in Europe. It has the core Spanish population of black vultures, which breed here along with griffon and Egyptian vultures.

Eagles are well represented here with Spanish imperial, golden, short-toed and booted. From the various crags, which make fine vantage points for raptor-watching, other species that can be seen include black stork, chough and rock bunting.

The lower valleys approaching Monfragüe hold good stands of holm oak woodland, the 'dehesa' or wood pasture that is such a distinctive feature of Extremadura. The dehesa is famous for the wintering cranes, most of which leave in February, but here also are azure-winged magpies, that amazing, colourful bird of the east with an outpost in Spain. One theory was that they originated from birds escaped during trade with China in earlier times, but proof that it is a relict population has recently come to light with the discovery of sub-fossil bones.

We stay at the wonderful Finca Santa Marta, a granite-built olive oil mill converted into a country inn, situated in the countryside south of Trujillo.

## Flowers

Patches of white Spanish broom and the pink *Silene colorata* bring colour to fields close to Trujillo. Miniature daffodils include delicate hoop petticoat narcissi. Early orchids, irises and lupins are flowering.



## Birds

As well as those already mentioned, we should see a selection of the following: Montagu's harrier, red, black and black-shouldered kites, peregrine, raven, hoopoe, blue rock thrush, little owl, southern grey shrike, red-rumped swallow, woodlark, Sardinian warbler, cirl and corn buntings, spotless starling and great spotted cuckoo.

## Other wildlife

Spain is western Europe's stronghold for wild mammals, including genet, mongoose and lynx, but these are mainly secretive or nocturnal. Stripe-necked terrapins and Iberian wall lizards are more obvious.

## Itinerary

Excursions will include visits to the Monfragüe National Park, including places such as Peña Falcon and the Tiétar cliffs; the holm oak dehesa region; and exploration of the plains around Trujillo and Cáceres. We will also visit

Price: £1,390 per person in twin room for nine days (Wednesday to Thursday)

Single room supplement: £200

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flights  
Gatwick – Madrid

Deposit: £200

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Martin Kelsey and Chris Durdin



Lesser kestrels



Above: Belén Plain, below: Iberian fritillaries

the wonderful old town of Trujillo with its striking central square and white storks and lesser kestrels.

## Conservation project

Traditional low intensity farming, especially non-irrigated arable farmland but also seasonal grazing, supports much of the special wildlife of Extremadura – and can never be protected just by nature reserves. The conservation of the Spanish steppes and 'dehesa' wood pasture is a great priority for the Sociedad Española de Ornitología (Spanish Ornithological Society / Bird Life Spain).



More information visit [www.honeyguide.co.uk](http://www.honeyguide.co.uk) 5

10 – 17 April 2010

# Central Portugal

Cork oak country and much more

From limestone hillsides to granite outcrops, cork oak woodlands to estuaries and dry grasslands, central Portugal offers a varied landscape with a rich range of wildlife.

This two centre holiday, starting close to Lisbon, offers contrasting habitats both between and within the holiday's two bases, one in the west of Portugal, the other in the east close to Spain.



Price: £1,290 per person in twin room for a full week (Saturday to Saturday)

Single room supplement: £150

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flight  
London Luton – Lisbon

Deposit: £200

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Domingos Leitão and Rob Macklin



Cork oak



Giant orchid



Spanish festoon

## Around Santarém

Here wildlife thrives in a mosaic of abandoned olive groves and farmland around the small and friendly Hotel Rural de Santarém. Black-shouldered kite, bee-eaters and southern grey shrikes compete for attention with a dozen orchid species, including giant and naked man orchids and violet limodor. Spanish festoon, green-striped and western dappled whites and false ilex hairstreak are a few of the local butterflies.

Spoonbills, whiskered terns, pratincoles, flamingos, herons and egrets join the waders – wintering, passage and breeding – on the mudflats and lagoons of the Tejo Estuary. Much of the estuary is adjacent to wood pastures – *montados* – of cork oak, where nature and man have combined to create a sustainable harvest of cork on which a valuable ecosystem is based. Birds include short-toed and booted eagles, hoopoes, cirl buntings and woodchat shrikes. White storks are common and there are calandra larks, marsh and Montagu's harriers in more open areas.

The limestone pavements and hills of the Serra de Aires and Candeeiros Natural Park provide a complete contrast. Flowers include specialities like Portuguese iris *Iris lusitanica*, hoop petticoat narcissus, Portuguese daffodil *Narcissus calcicola*, wild tulip and some 27 species of orchids. Portuguese dappled white, Lorquin's Blue, two-tailed pasha and tree grayling are just some of a great variety of butterflies. As well as birds seen in previous days, we should find wryneck, Dartford warbler and coughts.

## Marvão and northern Alentejo

After three days near Santarém, two hours' driving takes us east to Marvão. Our hotel, the Albergaria el Rei Dom Manuel, is within this fortress village, which remains intact from the Islamic occupation in the Middle Ages and has applied to be a World Heritage site. Marvão offers stunning views from the massive quartzite outcrop on which it is set.

In this part of the Alentejo countryside, granite outcrops and the drier climate favour holm oak (rather than cork oak) and Pyrenean oak. Special birds can include griffon vulture, crag martin, black-eared wheatear, Orphean, subalpine and Dartford warblers and rock bunting. After dark, scops owl and red-necked nightjar are possible.

In steppe grassland, more than 100 great bustards display among a carpet of wild flowers. A range of raptors includes Bonelli's eagles and lesser kestrels. Other steppe birds include little bustard, stone-curlew, roller and great spotted cuckoo.

## Birds

As well as those already mentioned, other likely birds may include black stork, golden oriole, spotless starling, blue rock thrush, short-toed and Thekla larks, Spanish sparrow, tawny pipit, Iberian chiffchaff and Bonelli's warbler.

## Flowers

Other local specialities include Brotero's peony, angel's tears narcissus and Spanish bluebell. Iberian orchids include conical, Lusitanian mirror and *Orchis olbiensis*, plus many species found farther afield including narrow-leaved helleborine, small-flowered serapias and champagne orchid.

## Butterflies

A long list could include Lorquin's, baton and mazarine blues; purple-shot copper, Provence and Chapman's green hairstreaks; Provençal and marsh fritillaries; Cleopatra and swallowtails.

## Itinerary

Visits include natural parks in the hills of Aires and Candeeiros in the west and São Mamede in the east. Important Bird Areas include the Tejo Estuary, the plains and grasslands of Elvas and Caia Dam IBA. Much of the interest is in the farmland, scrub and wood pastures in both the east and west parts of the holiday.

## Conservation project

The Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves (SPEA, BirdLife in Portugal) has a network of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) with volunteers monitoring these and acting as 'caretakers'. The Albufeira do Caia IBA has a large population of waterbirds, including collared pratincoles, little terns (the only inland colony in Portugal), gull-billed terns (an astonishing 500 pairs) and red-crested pochards. SPEA is helping to manage the IBA by clearing and creating islands for terns and grebes, and runs a ringing station.



16 – 23 April 2010

# Discovering Menorca

A relaxed wildlife holiday on this quiet Mediterranean island



Menorca provides the perfect setting to see birds typical of the Mediterranean. A small island, a little over 30 miles long and 13 miles wide, its quiet, unhurried atmosphere complements a relaxing birdwatching holiday. All parts of the island can be reached easily and quickly so most of the holiday can be spent in the field enjoying an array of birds among masses of flowers. It all has a charm rarely equalled elsewhere in Europe today.

While small, the island holds a great variety of habitats. The rugged coasts are spectacular and off-islands provide nest sites for the scarce Audouin's gull. Any view of the surrounding sea may reveal Cory's or Mediterranean shearwaters. Lagoons and fresh water lakes hold a variety of waders including black-winged stilts, plus egrets, herons and even the occasional flamingo.

The open countryside is full of birds. Thekla and short-toed larks and hoopoes sing from dry stone walls; stone-curlews skulk in rocky fields, woodchat shrikes, ravens and tawny pipits are often seen and quail heard.

There is never a dull moment as the sky seems frequently full of birds of prey. Menorca holds concentrations of booted eagles, Egyptian vultures and red kites, the kites happily increasing after a period of decline.

In spring the island provides a stepping stone for birds migrating across the Mediterranean – so anything can turn up. Regular migrants include red-rumped swallows and golden orioles. Bee-eaters come to nest in sand quarries. Resident birds include blue rock thrushes, stonechats, moustached and Sardinian warblers.

Pastures, coastal rocks and sand dunes provide a range of attractive wild flowers such as mirror orchids and small tongue orchids can be abundant.

Other wildlife includes huge Egyptian grasshoppers and, in wetter areas, stripeless tree frogs and terrapins.

Matchani Gran, our holiday base, is a Menorcan farmhouse near Mahón delightfully converted for private guests or small groups by our hosts, Jenny and Shaun Murphy. It has a swimming pool and terrace for outside meals, all set in 10 acres of countryside complete with hoopoes, Thekla larks and Hermann's tortoises.

## History

The island's varied history shows well in architecture and archeology. Strange stone monoliths, known locally as Torres, date from around 1000 BC. Of later origin are traditional stone huts called Talaiots.

Access to these monuments is easy and they are often good places to see wildlife.

The small cities of Ciutadella and Mahón are both fascinating. A mix of architectural design reflects the result of dominance by Romans, Moslems and British.

## Itinerary

Excursions should include Fornells harbour and the cape and lighthouse at Cavallaria; the hill of Monte Toro; Punta Prima; the old capital of Ciutadella; Algendar gorge; Mahón harbour; Son Bou reedbed and dunes; the salt pans at Mongofre Nou; the seasonal wetland at Tirant; plus various short excursions or local walks.



## Conservation project

The Grup Balear d'Ornitologia i Defensa de la Naturalesa (GOB – the Balearic Ornithological Group) is an active local organisation working to protect the Balearic Islands from over-development. Red kites were declining on Menorca, due to accidental poisoning and deaths on electricity pylons, and GOB has successfully campaigned to reverse this.



Price: £1,290 per person in twin or double room for a full week (Friday to Friday)

En suite facilities

Single room supplement: £180

Scheduled Monarch flights, Luton or Manchester to Mahón

Deposit: £200

Max. number: 14, with two leaders

Main leader: Chris Gibson



Above: Hermann's tortoise, left: mirror orchid



Above: Audouin's gulls, below: Menorcan gates



20 – 27 April 2010

# Crete



## Island birds and flowers in the cradle of civilisation

Crete is a magical and mysterious island. Home of Europe's earliest civilisation, influenced by many nations, yet it retains its own identity and culture of which its people are justifiably proud.

The island's position in the Mediterranean has not only played a crucial role in its history but is an important migration route for birds on their way north in spring. Crete in April is free of crowds, the days can be warm and the hillsides are full of flowers.

This, the largest and most southerly of all the Greek islands, is dominated by a backbone of mountains through which cut many deep gorges. These are as spectacular as they are rich in wildlife, be it migrant birds, nesting vultures or endemic wild flowers.

Wildlife and history are difficult to separate on Crete, with many important archeological sites also rich in both plants and birds. We shall sample Minoan ruins and, perhaps, spend some time in the old Venetian port of Rethymnon.

We are based at the small and friendly Sophia Hotel in the fishing village of Plakias on the south coast. It is ideally placed for local walks and excursions and has an impressive backdrop of gorges and mountains.

### Flowers

Crete's rich flora of 1600 native species includes 140 endemic to the island, such as Cretan cyclamen and Cretan ebony. In April many orchids are at their peak with Cretan bee, naked man, few-flowered, rainbow, four-spotted and bumblebee orchids among 20 or more species. Shrubs like Jerusalem sage and cistus contribute to colourful and aromatic hillsides.

### Birds

The mountains and gorges of Crete are a stronghold for birds of prey, with the largest population of griffon vultures in Greece. Lammergeier, Bonelli's and golden eagles and

buzzard all breed, as do crag martin, blue rock thrush, chough and raven. The hillsides and scrub support both Sardinian and the much rarer Rüppell's warbler. At this time of year a whole range of birds passes through on migration, pausing especially at wetlands, however small; these might include red-footed falcon, alpine swift, bee-eater, squacco heron, little bittern and various waders and warblers.

### Other wildlife

Even at this time of the year there are butterflies such as swallowtail, scarce swallowtail, cleopatra and eastern festoon. We often see freshwater crabs (see brochure back cover); reptiles can include Balkan (stripe-necked) terrapin and Balkan green lizard.

### Excursions

As well as local walks, our minibus trips this week include visits to Moni Preveli, Kourtaliotiko and Kotsiphos Gorges, Frangokastello, Spili, Ayia reservoir, and the ancient sites of Ayia Triadha and Phaestos.

### Conservation project

The lammergeier conservation project is run by the Hellenic Ornithological Society, BirdLife Greece. In the Balkans it occurs only in Greece, with the bulk of the population on Crete. Alongside survey and monitoring, the long-term survival of Europe's rarest vulture is being tackled by site protection, food provision and the encouragement of traditional grazing systems.

SUPPORTING



Tree frog



Little bittern



Above: *Orchis boryi* - Spili, below: Plakias Bay



25 April – 1 May 2010

# Eastern Greece

## Dadia Forest reserve and the Evros Delta



The district of Evros in the north-eastern region of Thrace, overlooking the border with Turkey, is one of the least developed areas of Greece. A mixture of cultures, charming villages, and both farmed and wild landscapes are all set against the nearby expanse of the Evros Delta, one of Europe's most outstanding wetlands. The area is renowned for its variety of wetland birds and raptors, and regional specialities include pygmy cormorant, Dalmatian pelican, isabelline wheatear, masked shrike and the elusive semi-collared flycatcher.

Based outside the village of Dadia, we stay at the ecotourism centre managed by the local community co-operative in collaboration with WWF Greece. Nearby is Dadia Forest Reserve, an Important Bird Area and candidate World Heritage Site. It lies over rugged, limestone hills dominated by pine and oak, with a relatively undisturbed 'core' area that still supports wolf and wild boar.

This is one of the best sites in Europe to see raptors and 36 species have been recorded with over 20 species breeding. Dadia holds the last remaining black vulture colony in south-east Europe and both griffon and Egyptian vulture also breed. These can be seen from the comfort of a hide overlooking carcasses left as supplementary food on a feeding station. Short-toed, booted, lesser spotted and imperial eagle can all be seen as well as honey and long-legged buzzard.

Shrikes are a great feature of local farmland with red-backed, lesser grey, woodchat and masked, the last here on the edge of its range. White storks breed in the village squares, the underside of their huge nests busy with breeding Spanish sparrows, and black storks can be seen almost daily in the area.

The Evros Delta is an immense wetland complex, internationally renowned for its wealth of resident and migrant birds. The delta is a mosaic of farmland, freshwater and brackish lagoons, reedy canals and tamarisk scrub. It is one of the few known stopovers of the enigmatic slender-billed curlew, but this is the least likely of all the many migrant waders we may see. Searching out the wettest lagoons there is a chance of seeing white and Dalmatian pelicans, pygmy cormorant, glossy ibis, herons and egrets, white-winged black and gull-billed terns. Raptors hunt over the delta, including white-tailed eagle, migrant red-footed falcons and an abundance of marsh harriers.

### Birds

Other birds to look for include Levant sparrowhawk, goshawk, hobby, scops owl, bee-eater, golden oriole, hoopoe, Syrian

woodpecker, calandra, short-toed and crested larks, red-rumped swallow, crag martin, blue rock thrush, black-eared wheatear, Bonelli's, olive-tree, olivaceous, subalpine, Sardinian and great reed warblers, sombre tit, hawfinch, black-headed, cirl, ortolan and rock buntings.

### Reptiles & amphibians

The Evros area supports one of the richest herpetofaunas in Europe and we may see both Hermann's and spur-thighed tortoises, the striking green toad and several species of lizard. Also locally are the spectacular yellow-bellied toad and European glass lizard, and with luck we might uncover a fire salamander.

### Other wildlife

The Dadia Forest area holds a rich assemblage of flowering plants and butterflies. Other invertebrates include dragonflies, praying mantis, crickets and grasshoppers.

### Itinerary

At Dadia, two days for relaxing walks on the village outskirts. We will spend two full days in

Price: £1,350 per person in twin or double room for nine days (Friday to Saturday)

En suite facilities

Single room supplement (four only): £140

Scheduled Aegean Air flights Heathrow–Athens–Alexandroupolis

Deposit: £200

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Robin and Rachel Hamilton



White stork nest in Dadia village



the Evros Delta, including a day in a restricted area. We visit the hills above Loutros, rich Mediterranean scrub with orpheap warblers and more open country overlooking the delta. West of Lefkimi, farmland gives way to mixed forest as we climb towards the radio mast on the highest crags and a chance of chukars and eagle owl.

### Conservation project

WWF Greece runs a project in Dadia Forest reserve in collaboration with the community-based co-operative in Dadia village. Wildlife conservation is achieved by its integration with forestry, farming and ecotourism.

Above: the Evros Delta, below: wild peony



5 – 12 May 2010

# Spanish Pyrenees

## Spring at Berdún



Price: £1,250 per person in twin room for a full week (Wednesday to Wednesday)

Single room supplement: £120

En suite facilities

Probably scheduled Ryanair flight Stansted to Zaragoza

Deposit: £200

Maximum number (one leader): 7

Leader: Chris Gibson



Hoopoe



Above: spring gentians, below: Berdún

A stunning landscape and a wealth of wildlife make the Spanish Pyrenees attractive in any season. In spring, with vultures soaring, birds singing and flowers in bloom, it's a wildlife experience difficult to top anywhere in Europe.

Raptors often steal the show. The foothills of the Pyrenees, where we are based, are acknowledged as having Europe's highest density of birds of prey. Red and black kites feed in the river valleys. Short-toed eagles hover as they search for snakes and lizards; booted eagles are regular too. There are three vulture species: griffons are easily the commonest and increasing, Egyptian vultures are getting scarcer here and everywhere. We are at the heart of Europe's stronghold for the rare lammergeier.

The scenery is dramatic with the constant backdrop of snow-topped mountains. There are deep gorges that attract griffon vultures, alpine swifts and crag martins. High pastures have gentians and other early alpine flowers, and on lower slopes asphodels and early spider orchids are among the species to be found.

Berdún itself – host to Honeyguide holidays for 20 years – is a charming, fortified village perched on a hilltop in the Pyrenean foothills. Berdún itself has many nightingales, whose evening chorus may be joined by scops owls drawn in by a well pitched whistle. Our base now is Casa Sarasa, where Peter Rich and Melanie Hallam offer a warm welcome. Evening meals are served in Emilio's small restaurant in the corner of the village square.

The Pyrenees may sound quite strenuous, but our itinerary is actually fairly relaxed. Anyone reasonably fit will have no trouble keeping up.

## Itinerary

Our coach trips take us to the monastery and pine woods at St Juan de la Peña, the high Pyrenees at Aisa or Portalet, the sandstone cliffs at Riglos and the gorges of Arbayún and Lumbier. Local exploration (two days) is equally rewarding to the rivers Veral and Aragón and to Binies gorge.

## Birds

Those mentioned above plus golden eagle, bee-eater, hoopoe, crested lark, golden oriole, black-bellied dipper, Cetti's, subalpine and Sardinian warblers, rock sparrow, spotless starling, chough, blue rock thrush, citril finch and many more.

## Flowers

Lady and elder-flowered orchids, hepatica, amelanchier, trumpet and spring gentians, beautiful flax, wild daffodil, rush-leaved narcissus, tassel hyacinth, Pyrenean saxifrage, petrocotilis to name just a few.

## Other wildlife

Mammals could include alpine marmot and isard – Pyrenean chamois – at the high tops, and red squirrel. Butterflies include cleopatra, scarce swallowtail, Moroccan orange-tip and Spanish festoon. Spanish moon and giant peacock moths are often seen.

## Conservation project

The Sociedad Española de Ornitología (Spanish Ornithological Society) manages 1600 acres of steppe, one of the most threatened bird habitats both here in the Aragón region and in Europe. Dupont's and lesser short-toed larks, pin-tailed and black-bellied sandgrouse and stone-curlews benefit from the establishment of this reserve at Belchite, near Zaragoza.



6 – 13 May 2010

# Dordogne

A taste of the good life

The department of the Dordogne in south-west France is justly famous for its pretty villages, cave paintings, elegant towns and landscapes of river valleys and quiet countryside. Less discovered is the wildlife: a charming mix of flowers, birds and butterflies.

Orchids are the most striking natural asset: up to 25 species can be found. Half of these are around our base at Castang. Birds on the doorstep include red-backed shrike, cirl bunting, melodious warbler, wryneck, honey buzzard and black redstart.

## Castang

Castang is a hamlet close to the Dordogne river above the village of Le Coux et Bigaroque, not far from St Cyprien. Cathy and Keith Parker are our hosts; Cathy is from Montcaret, a little farther west along the Dordogne valley, and Keith is from England. The house was once a Pergordian tobacco farm of great character and charm, parts of which are thought to be more than 400 years old. The farmhouse, together with its complex of converted barns, provides comfortable accommodation around a sunny terraced courtyard. Dinner, after a leisurely aperitif, is one of Castang's great features. Five courses of the best of the region's cuisine, from soup to dessert, accompanied by local wines, are prepared and cooked by Cathy.

Castang's large meadow has many hundreds of green-winged orchids along with tongue and pyramidal orchids. Loose-flowered orchids grow where the meadow gets damper down the hill, close to where golden orioles and nightingales can be heard and, with a little luck, seen. Beyond the orchid field, the area is a mix of meadows, cropped land and woods, cut by the wide river valleys of the Vézère and Dordogne.

## Flowers

Lady, man, burnt-tip, fly, woodcock, narrow-leaved helleborine and greater butterfly are among the orchids, and two great surprises this far north are sombre bee orchid and long-lipped serapias. Some 250 plant species include meadows thick with yellow rattle, banks with meadow clary, tassel hyacinth, milkwort and a range of cranesbills, flaxes and rockroses. Dogwood, fly honeysuckle and field maple are common shrubs.

## Birds

Serins, Bonelli's warblers, short-toed treecreepers and hoopoes are all found around Castang or close to home. Black kites and buzzards are the most frequently seen birds of prey; hobbies are also likely.



## Other wildlife

Butterflies on the wing in mid-May include scarce and common swallowtails, black-veined and wood whites, Cleopatra, Glanville fritillary, green hairstreak, large copper and small blue. Elegant yellow and black ascalaphids – something between a lacewing and an



ant-lion – hunt over meadows. Other invertebrates include violet carpenter bee and hummingbird hawkmoth. After dark, the "poo...poo" of midwife toads and glow-worms.

## Itinerary

Two days will be on walks around Castang. Three days will be gentle walks a little farther afield, combined with visits to the village of Limeuil, at the confluence of the Vézère and Dordogne rivers, and a morning on market day in the town of Le Bugue. Our cave walk includes an optional visit to the crystal cathedral cavern of the Gouffre de Proumeyssac. The sixth day includes a visit to the caves of Font de Gaume at Les Eyzies to see prehistoric paintings of bison, horse and reindeer; and to Roque St Christophe for crag martins and woodland flowers at a site better known for cave dwellers from the days of Cro Magnon man onwards.

## Conservation project

La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (French Bird Protection League) is setting up a network of no-hunting sanctuaries throughout France.

Progress is steady with individuals and institutions declaring refuges. LPO is also battling French hunters to prevent an extension of the shooting season into the spring.



Price: £1,290 per person in a twin room for a full week (Thursday to Thursday)

Single room supplement (two only): £150. En suite facilities

Scheduled Ryanair flights Stansted – Bergerac. Flights from other UK airports may also be possible

Deposit: £200

Maximum number: 12

Leader: Chris Durdin

Two views walk meadow



Above: knapweed fritillary, below: woodcock orchid



Price: £1,350 per person in twin room for nine days (Saturday to Sunday)

Single room supplement: £120

En suite facilities

Scheduled Wizz Air flight London Luton – Warsaw

Deposit: £200

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Artur Wiatr and Andrew Gregory

15 – 23 April 2010

# Poland

## Biebrza Marshes and Białowieża Forest



Biebrza Marshes forms a formidable but beautiful barrier between solid land in north east Poland and Belarus. The primeval Białowieża Forest also lies along that same international border, and together they form one of Europe's greatest natural experiences.

The River Biebrza consists of some 100 miles of meanders and ox-bows within its basin of about 3,000 square miles. Winter is long lasting, while summers are short and rich. Floods of unpredictable length can last into early summer.

These produce habitats ranging from swampy, impenetrable forest, much beloved by breeding cranes and black storks, to huge grasslands, covered with millions of marsh marigolds in spring with nearby water hosting many breeding marsh terns. The area supports many of the 50,000 pairs of white storks that breed in Poland. The evening murmuring of fire-bellied toads is one of the more memorable sounds, especially if accompanied by the bugling of cranes and the rasping of corncrakes.

Białowieża too has its wetlands but is most admired for the majesty of its forest. Here, famously, several hundred European bison roam. Beavers abound – *Bobra* in Polish, which was the original name of the Biebrza – and are sometimes even seen from the bridge in the village of Białowieża.

One piece of the forest that once covered much of central Europe, Białowieża was originally preserved for private hunting by Polish kings and Russian Tsars. Modern protection is a National Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mixed oak, lime and hornbeam is the commonest of the six main forest types in the Polish part of Białowieża; in Belarus there is more coniferous forest.

### Birds

Spring brings strutting hordes of ruffs to the marshes together with dancing brigades of white-winged and black terns. Thrush nightingale, great reed warbler and white-spotted bluethroat arrive early and sing delightfully often from exposed positions. Soon they are joined by scarlet rosefinch, red-breasted flycatcher, aquatic, river and barred warblers together with the fluting golden oriole. Raptors such as white-tailed eagle and Montagu's harrier show frequently, while penduline tits bring extra delight by building much-admired nests. Eight species of woodpecker are present in Białowieża forest, including black and white-backed. Their holes provide homes to flycatchers, starlings and pygmy owls. Other woodland birds include lesser spotted eagle, nutcracker and hazel hen; red-backed shrikes can be common in surrounding fields and meadows.

### Mammals

As everywhere, mammals can be difficult to see, though in Biebrza and Białowieża the chance of sightings are quite good. Elks can usually be seen grazing or loping in the marsh. Wild boars may be surprisingly obvious; there are many hares, but no rabbits. Pine marten is possible, as are red squirrels. Tarpan or Konik horses, now frequent inhabitants of British nature reserves, are being bred to revive a species close to the original wild horse of Europe.

### Other wildlife

Marsh, edible and green tree frogs join the fire-bellied and grey toads in suitable wetlands. Dragonflies are not numerous in May but include Siberian winter and white-legged damselflies. Among early butterflies, Camberwell beauty and large tortoiseshell are popular with British visitors.

### Plants

Biebrza holds a multitude of water-loving plants such as water soldier, sundew, yellow marsh saxifrage and a range of marsh orchids. Trees are much admired in Białowieża with certain individuals famous for their size. On the woodland floor there are hepatica, anemones, lungwort, sweet woodruff and carpets of ransoms. A curious mix of northern, alpine and eastern species can include long-leaved speedwell, bastard balm, spiked rampion and, we hope, ladies slipper orchid.

### Itinerary

Four full days at Biebrza marshes, followed by moving to Białowieża for the remaining three days of the holiday. In Biebrza we stay close to Goniadz, surrounded by meadows and woods. In Białowieża we will stay in a village close to the Tsar's Palace Park.

### Conservation Project

The Biebrza National Park runs many environmental projects in the Biebrza Marshes. Scrub management is underway to give more space for scarce lady's slipper orchids.



Black-tailed godwit



Lady's slipper orchids



Białowieża forest

Never felled, with giant trees and large amounts of dead wood, both standing and fallen, this unruly wilderness seems to invite architectural similes. Cathedral-like in the more spacious parts, it is dense in others. For many the highlight of any visit is to enjoy a walk with a local expert guide in this ancient forest.

# Bulgaria

## Wallcreepers and wetlands

Few countries can rival Bulgaria's scenic splendour and diverse nature. Alpine mountains, rivers with spectacular canyons, vast meadows and forests contrast with coastal wetlands and sandy beaches.

Bulgaria's geographic position in the south-eastern corner of the Balkan peninsular and the wide range of habitats ensure outstanding wildlife diversity. The higher plants number about 3,500 species and include more than 400 Bulgarian and Balkan endemics and nearly 70 species of orchids. Bulgaria boasts the richest dragonfly and butterfly fauna in Europe. The country's most valuable natural features are protected in three national parks, twelve nature parks and numerous wildlife and nature refuges.

With about 410 bird species, Bulgaria has something to offer birdwatchers during all seasons, 340 of these seen in the wetlands around Bourgas. Many of these are eastern species including Levant sparrowhawk, Syrian woodpecker, masked shrike and black-headed bunting. Other favourites, almost everywhere in the lowlands, are roller, bee-eater, hoopoe and ortolan bunting and many white stork nests.

The cultural heritage and traditions of the country include magnificent architecture from the 18th and 19th centuries in many towns and villages. Ancient icons, breath-taking murals and superb woodcarvings preserved in monasteries and churches, form just a part of the religious, historic and cultural wealth. Other traditions include the tasty Bulgarian cuisine and good local wines!

This natural history holiday explores two beautiful, biodiversity-rich landscapes: the Rhodope Mountains and the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast.

### The Rhodope Mountains

are in southern Bulgaria, close to the border with Greece. The mountain's rounded, pine-clad hills are occasionally cut by streams and rivers winding through deep gorges. The magnificent Trigrad Gorge is one: limestone cliffs known for their wallcreepers. This beautiful bird can be seen constantly flicking its crimson-and-black wings while investigating rocky nooks for food.

We can enjoy birds like peregrine, alpine swift, crag martin, red-rumped swallow, dipper, red-backed shrike and rock bunting on the crags and around mountain meadows. Elsewhere in the Western Rhodopes we search for pallid swift and nutcracker. There are many endemic plants such as *Haberlea rhodopensis*, a bellflower *Campanula orphanidea*, and the saxifrage *Saxifraga sibirnyi*. Butterflies include many Balkan species: blues, graylings, fritillaries and more.



On route to the southern Black Sea coast, the Sakar Mountains are an area of hills, valleys and steppe-like grassland, a stronghold for imperial eagles in Bulgaria. Other birds of prey include short-toed and lesser spotted eagles and long-legged buzzard, plus olive-tree warbler and calandra lark.



### Black Sea coast

The second part of the holiday is based near the wetlands around Bourgas, one of Europe's richest bird areas. Lakes, saline lagoons and salt pans support black-winged stilt, Kentish plover, slender-billed and Mediterranean gulls and gull-billed tern and a great variety of migrating waders.

The greatest lure of the Bourgas wetlands is the flocks of resident white and Dalmatian pelicans. Other birds can include all the European herons and egrets, spoonbill, little crakes and whiskered and white-winged black terns. A visit to the Poda Nature Conservation Centre is planned. We will spend an afternoon birdwatching from the terrace of the centre or walking in the nature reserve.

Past the beautiful sea town of Sozopol and the sand dunes of Primorsko, we come to the most south-eastern corner of Bulgaria, covered by the forests of the Strandja Mountain. An endless chain of gentle crests and folding wood-covered tops, the Strandja is one of the top places in Europe in terms of biological diversity. Its deciduous forests are of oriental beech with oaks *Quercus polycarpa* and Strandja Oak *Quercus hartwissiana*. Birds here can include black stork, grey-headed woodpecker, barred warbler, semi-collared flycatcher and sombre tit.

### Conservation project

The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, the BirdLife partner in Bulgaria, manages the Poda Nature Protected Site. Close to the city of Bourgas, the coastal lagoon is a key staging ground for water birds during migration and in winter it hosts thousands of pygmy cormorants. It has a fine heronry and the only breeding colony of spoonbills along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast.



Price: £1,390 per person in twin room for ten days (Thursday to Saturday)

Single room supplement: £200

En suite facilities

Scheduled easyJet flights, London Gatwick – Sofia

Deposit: £200

Maximum number: 14

Leaders: Assen Ignatov from our hosts Neophron and Tim Strudwick

Trigrad gorge



Above: wallcreeper, below: roller



4 – 13 June 2010

# The Cévennes

Causses and Gorges in a little-known corner of France



Price: £1,390 per person in twin room for ten days (Friday to Sunday)

Single room supplement: £200 (two only)

En suite facilities

Scheduled Ryanair flights London Stansted to Rodez

Deposit: £200

Maximum number: 14

Leaders: Robin and Rachel Hamilton

The southernmost outpost of the Massif Central, before it plunges down into the Mediterranean heat of the Languedoc plain, is the vast limestone plateau of the Grands Causses. Monstrous movements of the earth's surface cracked this slab into sections, and water poured into the cracks, forming deep, dramatic gorges.

The largest of these carries the Tarn, one of France's most famous and spectacular rivers.



Cantobre village



Black-veined white butterfly



Griffon vulture

## Birds

If there is an iconic bird of the region, it is the griffon vulture, thanks to a highly successful reintroduction programme. Craggy cliffs of the gorges also provide nesting sites for choughs and golden eagles. The open, rocky cause landscape offers productive feeding for short-toed eagles, harriers, shrikes and wheatears. Woodlands and scrub echo to the song of nightingales, joined at nightfall by churring nightjars. Around villages, the song of serins and black redstarts may be heard, and the air is alive with swifts and crag martins.

## Flowers

Nothing can outdo limestone for the richness of its flora. Grassland is white and yellow with rockroses and fragrant underfoot with wild thymes. Roadside screes are pink and blue with rock soapwort, fairy foxglove, flax and aphyllanthes. On granites and schists we find saxifrages and cinquefoils; in the rich meadows, wild tulips and narcissi.

There are orchids too, a wide range of species, some in great profusion: carpets of lesser butterfly orchids among feather grass, banks of early purple and elder-flowered orchids on damp streambanks. Lady, monkey, man and military orchids are abundant (and hybridising!). There are two endemic *Ophrys* species.

## Other wildlife

European beavers have been successfully reintroduced into the river Dourbie, close to our base. A herd of the rare Przewalski's horses has been established on the Causse Méjean, in a habitat akin to their native steppes. Reptiles are abundant: green and wall lizards and harmless viperine and grass snakes. We may hear the bell-like call of midwife toads at night. The open scrub and grassland of the cause is rich in butterflies and other insects.

## Itinerary

We have limestone and granite to explore, three rivers with their magnificent gorges and several causses, each with its own individuality. There are flower-rich grasslands, pine, oak and sweet chestnut woods, rocky cliffs and scree and tumbling rivers. We shall drive to the top of Mont Aigoual, visit the Templar village of la Couvertoirade, the Roquefort Caves and the famous Aven Armand – a beautiful cavern big enough to accommodate Notre Dame Cathedral. A good look at the Millau Viaduct is a must and lunch one day at the best local *ferme auberge* is on the schedule.

## Conservation Project

Conservation contributions from this holiday support work to protect the vultures and other wildlife of the Grands Causses. La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, the French Bird Protection League) runs a programme of habitat management in partnership with landowners, combined with research, survey and education.

SUPPORTING



Smaller rivers, the Jonte and the Dourbie, flow into the Tarn and the ancient town of Millau, near their confluence, is now famous for its magnificent bridge, the Millau Viaduct. Enchanting villages of honey-coloured stone are scattered in strategic positions on hillsides and beside rivers, each with its Romanesque church; the Knights Templar had strongholds in the area.

To the east of the Grands Causses, limestone gives way to schist and granite hills, culminating in the peaks of Mont Aigoual (1567 m) and Mont Lozère (1702 m). This is the true Cévennes, made famous some 130 years ago when the youthful Robert Louis Stevenson narrated his 'Travels with a Donkey'. The whole area is now recognised for its landscape and natural history as the Parc Regional Naturel des Grands Causses and the Parc National des Cévennes.

Ancient landscapes are entwined with cultural history. On the steppe-like plateaux of the Grands Causses, the characteristic small brown sheep, the brebis, have been fundamental to agriculture for many centuries. The sheep are milked for what many consider to be the finest cheese in the world – Roquefort. The cuisine is rich and inventive. The sweet, flavourful meat of the brebis and Roquefort cheese often play a part: you can have Roquefort in every course! Aligot, a dish of soft cheese and potato, devised by shepherds to prepare far from home, is not to be missed.

For many years, a railway transported people and produce across the Causse. The line itself is long defunct but several railway buildings remain along the old track. Above Nant, up on the Causse du Larzac, the *Gare aux Ânes*, the 'donkey station', renowned for many years as a restaurant, is a perfect base for Honeyguide.

8 – 15 September 2010

# French Pyrenees

## Stunning scenery and mountain wildlife

For a combination of mountain views, flowers, butterflies and birds, the Pyrenees take some beating. Spectacular cirques, flower-filled meadows and soaring vultures; it lends itself to our mixed natural history style.

Many Honeyguiders know the Spanish Pyrenees: the French side is lush, greener and the emphasis of this holiday is much more on the high Pyrenees. Access is easy to gentle walks or pottering in mountain pastures, up there with the isard – Pyrenean chamois – and marmots.

Snowfinch, both red-billed and alpine choughs, rock bunting and rock thrush are highly likely. That most thrilling of birds, the lammergeier, is as easy to see here as anywhere; other birds of prey include griffon and Egyptian vultures, golden eagles and red kites. There are wallcreepers, though typically they are elusive.

September also brings a steady flow of migrants. Countless numbers of birds are moving south and many rest and feed in Pyrenean valleys before crossing the high peaks. Weather conditions and luck will play their part in what we see: raptors, storks and cranes pass through and we hope to see warblers, chats, flycatchers and more.

Butterflies include apollo, Camberwell beauty and swallowtail, plus a selection of graylings, ringlets, blues, fritillaries and others. It's our first September visit so the fun will be discovering which species are on the wing.

High mountain pastures should still have colour with later flowers such as Pyrenean thistle, giant yellow gentian and white false helleborine. We'll search for flowers on rocks, screes and streambanks and seek out patches of late snowmelt for alpine gentians, primroses and butterworts.

Watercourses can hold Pyrenean brook newts and Pyrenean rock lizards scuttle around on rocks in the higher pastures.

Our base is the Hotel La Brèche de Roland, of Gèdre, just north of Gavarnie. It's an attractive former 17th century family house in the village, looking out onto Brèche de Roland. The 'brèche' or breach is like a bite out of the top of the cirque, measuring 100m by 60m. Roland, nephew of Charlemagne, carved it, according to 11th century legend. He was leading the fight against the Moors and was trying to smash his magical sword Durandel to save it from enemy hands.

## Birds

Highlights, in addition to those mentioned above, could include short-toed eagle,

peregrine, alpine swift, black woodpecker, woodlark, crag martin, water pipit, black-bellied dipper, crested tit, red-backed shrike and citril finch.

## Itinerary

The cirque of Gavarnie is rightly famous; it can be busy but that takes little away from its magnificence and wildlife interest. Other sites to be visited include the Barrage des Gloriettes, Saugué valley, Ossoue valley, Col de Tentes, Col du Tourmalet and Cirque de Troumouse.

## Conservation project

The lammergeier, or bearded vulture, is Europe's scarcest bird of prey. Though never common, their decline prompted a partnership to tackle their protection and, as a result, numbers are now on the up. La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, the French Bird Protection League) is active here, with careful monitoring of the local population of the *casseur d'os* (bonebreaker), including tracking birds with radio transmitters; site protection in collaboration with other mountain users, such as climbers; and food provision in the breeding season.



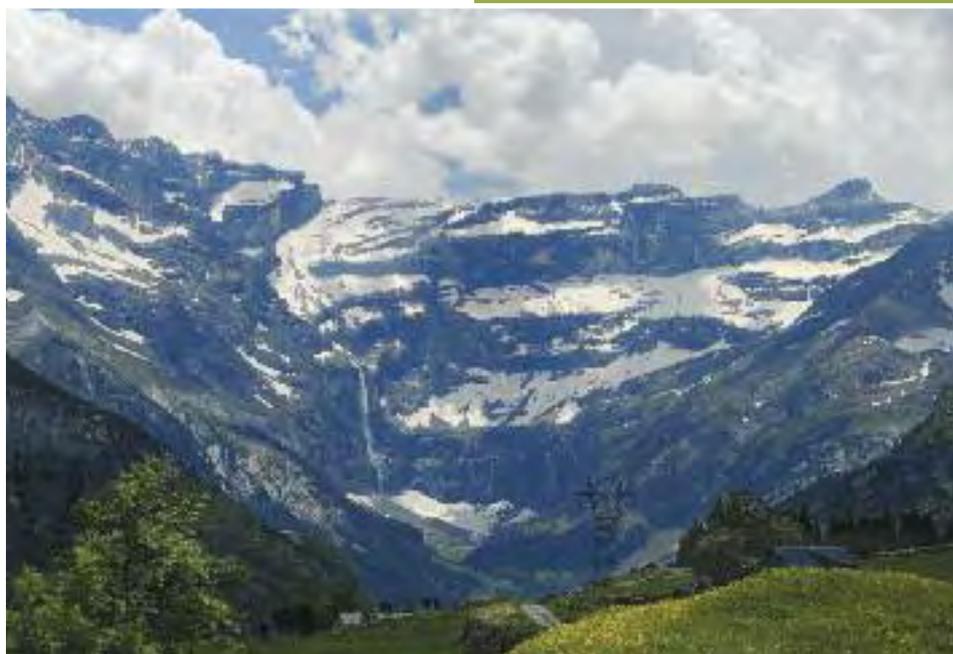
Above: moulting marmot



Apollo butterfly



Above: lammergeier, below: Cirque de Gavarnie



Price: £1,250 per person in twin room for a full week (Wednesday to Wednesday)

Single room supplement: £130

En suite facilities

Scheduled Ryanair flight Stansted to Pau Pyrenees

Deposit: £200

Maximum number (two leaders): 14

Leaders: Chris Durdin and Ivan Nethercoat

20 October – 4 November 2010

# Kruger National Park

Two weeks of unparalleled bird and wildlife watching in South Africa



Price: £3,600 per person in twin room for 14 days in South Africa, plus two overnight travel days (Wednesday to Thursday)

£3,500 for bookings received during 2009

Single room supplement: £400

En suite facilities

Scheduled flights, London to Johannesburg

Deposit: £400

Number: minimum of 4, maximum 14

Leaders: Geoff Crane and Mike Raymaker

Dramatic yet accessible, wild Africa yet people-friendly, the Kruger is one of the world's great National Parks.

The Kruger has the enviable reputation of having the highest recorded species diversity of wildlife in a game reserve in the whole of Africa. The park is a fantastic destination for birdwatchers, with 517 bird species having been recorded in the park to date. Of these, 253 are residents and 117 are non-breeding migrants.

Kori and black-bellied bustards, secretary bird and ostriches are some of the biggest and most obvious birds. The park is particularly rich in cuckoos (nine species), rollers (five species), hornbills (six species) and kingfishers (nine species). Large raptors encountered throughout the year include African harrier-hawk, bateleur, dark chanting goshawk and five vulture species: eagles include martial, Verreaux's and tawny plus African fish eagle, African hawk eagle, brown and black-chested snake eagles.

Everyone wishes to see the so-called 'big five' - lion, elephant, rhino, buffalo and leopard - but these are just the best known of the park's 147 species of mammals. African wild dog, cheetah, giraffe and spotted hyaena are just a few of the others. Yet the 'little five' - lion ant, elephant shrew, rhino beetle, buffalo weaver and leopard tortoise - are equally fascinating in their own way.

We will be visiting the park towards the end of the dry season. This will make viewing wildlife more rewarding as the vegetation is sparser and animals and birds are drawn to waterholes to drink. Hippopotamus, Nile crocodile and marsh terrapin are residents of dams, rivers and waterholes.

Waterbirds include goliath heron, saddle-billed stork, African openbill and yellow-billed stork.

rhino beetles, roosting bats, sun-basking reptiles and well camouflaged insects. All the camps have ponds or bird baths, which are worth spending time at during the heat of the day. On one occasion we were shown 117 different bird species by the camp gardener - before breakfast! There is also a large variety of mammals that can be seen with in the camps: tree squirrel, banded and dwarf mongooses, bushbuck, baboons and vervet monkey, the last quick and cunning when food is in question.

Linked to to game and birdwatching, we will be looking at the Kruger's six eco-systems: baobab sandveld, mopane scrub, lebombo knobthorn-marula bushveld, mixed acacia thicket, combretum-silver clusterleaf woodland on granite and riverine forest. Altogether the park has a recorded 1,982 species of plants. The trees and shrubs within the camps where we stay are labelled as are some of the more impressive trees in the park, making for easy identification.

In the park we are able to drive our own vehicles and some of the smaller roads take us off the beaten track. This gives us the chance to stop at any point to study wildlife at close quarters and makes for excellent photographic opportunities.

In addition, night drives afford the chance to see birds and mammals not normally found during the daylight hours. Careful observation with a spotting light can reveal owls and nocturnal ground birds such as coursers and thick-knees. We will also be on the look out for the nocturnal mammals, predators like lions, leopards, African wild cat, serval and caracal, as well as large-spotted genet, civet, porcupine, lesser bushbaby and pangolin.

The Kruger National Park, the Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe and the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique have now been incorporated into the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park. The long term goal of this Park is to eventually open up a huge National Park system, with no internal fences so that the wildlife can reinstate their ancient migration routes.

Over our two weeks in South Africa we stay in four rest camps within the Kruger National Park, plus a final night before departure, via the Paul Kruger gate and Mpumalanga, at the Misty Mountain Private Nature Reserve.

## Conservation project

The second South African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP II) is one of the most intensive monitoring programmes ever undertaken in South Africa. Many areas are difficult to access but critically need atlas work and ongoing monitoring work for BirdLife South Africa to understand the bird conservation challenges in these remote sites.



White rhino



Above: ground hornbill, below: leopard



The established indigenous gardens in the rest camps play host to a multitude of smaller creatures. There are beautiful butterflies, huge

# More wildlife of the Kruger National Park, South Africa



Lion



Crested barbet



Wahlberg's eagle



Lilac-breasted roller



Impala



Cheetahs

## Our holidays

- are all round natural history holidays, tailored to get the best out of the wildlife of each area
- go at a relaxed pace
- usually stay at one place
- include good, local food
- use the best of leaders, with extensive conservation knowledge, natural history skills, good experience of the local area and the right personal skills
- are designed to benefit you, wildlife and the local people whose services we use
- include a £35 contribution from each participant to wildlife conservation

Holidays for natural history societies, RSPB local groups or other groups can be arranged.

Visit: [www.honeyguide.co.uk](http://www.honeyguide.co.uk) for holiday reports, photos and more.



# Honeyguide booking form



A REPLACEMENT BROCHURE WILL BE SENT WITH YOUR BOOKING CONFIRMATION. PAYMENTS BY CREDIT, CHARGE OR DEBIT CARDS CANNOT BE TAKEN.

Please use BLOCK CAPITALS and make cheques payable to 'Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays'.

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ place(s) on your holiday to \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ deposit(s) at £200 (£400 for South Africa) totalling: £ \_\_\_\_\_

Total enclosed: £ \_\_\_\_\_

Single room supplement(s): please book \_\_\_\_\_ single room(s) at \_\_\_\_\_ extra each

I understand that the balance will become payable eight weeks (12 weeks for South Africa) before departure.

Holiday insurance company and policy: \_\_\_\_\_

Passport number(s) and expiry date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title	Forenames*	Surnames	Date of birth
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

\*As written on your passport. Please note or underline what you like to be known as, if different from the first name

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Next of kin/home contact point in case of emergency (name & tel. no.) \_\_\_\_\_

Any special requirements (eg dietary) \_\_\_\_\_ Non-smoker  Smoker

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

For couples, do you prefer twin beds  a double bed  or don't mind

The price of all Honeyguide holidays includes £35 earmarked for a local conservation project. We would be very grateful if everyone booking could complete the following conservation contribution consent and gift aid declaration.

Please complete sections 1 and 2

## 1. CONSENT FOR CONSERVATION CONTRIBUTION

We agree that Honeyguide Wildlife Trust Ltd (registered charity no. 1104606) may apply £35 from the cost of this holiday on behalf of each person named on the booking form, to be donated to a wildlife conservation project in the country to be visited.

PLEASE TICK BOX

Complete (a) or (b)

(a) Please print the name of each person on the booking form who qualifies to gift aid their contribution.

.....  
.....  
.....  
Date .....

## 2. GIFT AID DECLARATION

If you pay UK income tax or capital gains tax, Honeyguide Wildlife Trust Ltd can reclaim from the Inland Revenue an extra 28p on every £1 donated, helping your conservation contribution go further. To qualify you must pay at least as much UK tax for the year in which you donate as the amount we are able to reclaim on your donation – currently £9.80 on each £35 contribution.

If you are a UK taxpayer, please give us the opportunity of increasing your donation in this way.

(b) If **nobody** on the booking form qualifies to gift aid their contribution, please tick this box.

*giftaid it*

Thank you

Please return to: Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays, 36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich NR7 0PX

# Honeyguide booking details



**How to book:** a booking is made when the completed booking form (photocopies are fine) plus deposit have been received and accepted by us. We are very happy to take telephone bookings, to be confirmed with the form plus deposit during the week following your call.

**Deposit and payment:** £200 per person (£400 for South Africa) deposit is payable by cheque with the booking, with the remainder due eight weeks before departure. Payments by credit, debit or charge cards cannot be taken. Tickets or booking references will be sent 1-2 weeks before departure.

**Cancellation by you:** if you have to cancel, please telephone as soon as possible and confirm in writing. The cancellation will take effect from when it is received in writing. The scale of cancellation charges below is calculated by the time period before departure.

More than eight weeks	deposit only
5-8 weeks	30% of total price
2-5 weeks	60% of total price
1-14 days; on or after departure date	100% of total price

Travel insurance should cover you (less any excess) for cancellation charges if circumstances are beyond your control, such as ill health, and more than simply a change of mind. Insurance premiums are not refundable.

**Cancellation by us:** in the unlikely event of this happening your money will be refunded in full. A decision to cancel would normally be made at the time of reminders for the remainder of payment, ie eight weeks before departure.

**Single rooms and supplements:** we don't like single room supplements but sometimes they can't be avoided, and we pass on only the extra the single room costs us. If you are willing to share but we don't find someone to share with you, you pay only half of any single supplement. Because we have often chosen small, community-based accommodation, single rooms may not always be available. It often helps to talk it through with us at an early stage.



**Honeyguide enamel badges** – free from the Honeyguide office.

**Information:** including detailed itinerary, information on books, maps, shopping, weather etc will be supplied as part of the package for enquirers or will be sent after booking. Previous holiday reports are available for most holidays.

**Flights:** flights noted in the holiday details were the likeliest when the brochure went to print. However many summer schedules were not then out. Which airlines fly to where, and on what days, are increasingly prone to change; this may affect the flights and occasionally the dates for some holidays.

We use scheduled services and cannot be held responsible for any departure delays. We are not in a position to state the aircraft type to be used. Flights from other UK airports are sometimes possible: please contact the Honeyguide office.

**Changes to the programme:** should circumstances beyond our control make significant changes to the programme necessary we will consult you to see if these are acceptable to you.

**Holiday leaders:** we do our best to keep the leader named for the holiday, but we reserve the right to replace him or her in the event of illness or some other reason. When two leaders are listed, one may not accompany the holiday if there are not enough participants.

**Group size:** very occasionally if there is one place available on a holiday and a couple wishes to book we may go over the group size stated. The minimum is usually four.

**Overnight accommodation and parking near the airport:** we often cannot avoid flights that mean an overnight stay for many participants. We may be able to advise on a hotel and/or parking. If staying overnight, please consider if you wish to have an extra day on your travel insurance.

**Extending your holiday:** for some holidays it is possible to arrive early or stay on. Please contact the Honeyguide office for details.

**Passport:** a valid full passport is essential.

**Brochure:** a spare brochure (more if you wish) will be sent with every booking.

**Our price commitment:** the prices of our holidays are fixed – there are no surcharges.

**What the price includes:** flights, airport taxes, carbon offsets, all travel and excursions, services of your holiday leader(s) and your conservation contribution are included in the holiday price. Also included are accommodation and meals - breakfast, packed lunch and evening meal, normally inclusive of wine - except for picnic lunches in Crete.

**What the price excludes:** insurance and personal expenditure.

**Smokers etiquette:** heavy smokers are discouraged from booking with Honeyguide. Light smokers are requested not to smoke when this may affect non-smokers, for example at meals or in transport.

**Tips and gratuities:** all services in the itinerary are covered. You may wish to leave a small 'thank-you' for room or restaurant staff at the end of your stay; this is at your discretion. We may pass round a hat if service has been particularly good.

## Carbon offsets

Realistically, most of our travellers will fly. Air travel makes up only a small fraction of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions at present, but that fraction is growing. We're serious about our responsibility to tackle global climate change so we have chosen Carbon Clear to offset our carbon emissions from holiday flights. Carbon Clear invests in projects that remove carbon dioxide from the air by replacing polluting technologies with clean ones, and planting native trees.

Honeyguide has been including carbon offsets in the price of our holidays since 2007 and was one of the first travel companies to do so. Some Honeyguiders travel to our holiday destinations by public transport, and their holiday price is reduced by the cost of flights plus carbon offsets. For more information see [www.honeyguide.co.uk](http://www.honeyguide.co.uk)



## TRAVEL INSURANCE

Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays acts as an Introducer Appointed Representative for the purposes of your travel insurance, appointed by Global Travel Insurance Services Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority and whose status can be checked on the FSA Register by visiting [www.fsa.gov.uk/register](http://www.fsa.gov.uk/register) or by contacting the FSA on 0845 606 1234.

**Contact details:**  
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**Amelia House,**  
**Crecent Road,**  
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**West Sussex,**  
**BN11 1RL**  
**Telephone: 01903 203933**  
**Fax: 01903 211106**  
**Email: [enquiries@globaltravelinsurance.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@globaltravelinsurance.co.uk)**  
**Web: [www.globaltravelinsurance.co.uk](http://www.globaltravelinsurance.co.uk)**

You can go to our website where you can obtain a quotation and arrange the insurance online, or download an application form. If preferred, we can send you an application form on booking enabling you to arrange this insurance.

Beyond providing this information, we are not allowed to assist you in any way in the arrangement of your travel insurance or give any advice.

# Honeyguide wildlife holidays



Cover picture: 'Fight for the right', spoonbills by Daniel Petrescu. To see more of Daniel's pictures, visit [www.daniel.petrescu.ro](http://www.daniel.petrescu.ro)  
Back cover: freshwater crab on Crete by Chris Durdin

#### Other photos by:

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Domingos Leitão  
Madeira Wind Birds  
Ivan Nethercoat  
Mike Souter  
Svetoslav Spasov (Neophron)  
Roger Tidman  
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Design and print by Gowiseprint, Norwich [www.gowise.co.uk](http://www.gowise.co.uk)



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