

# *Honeyguide*

## **WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS**

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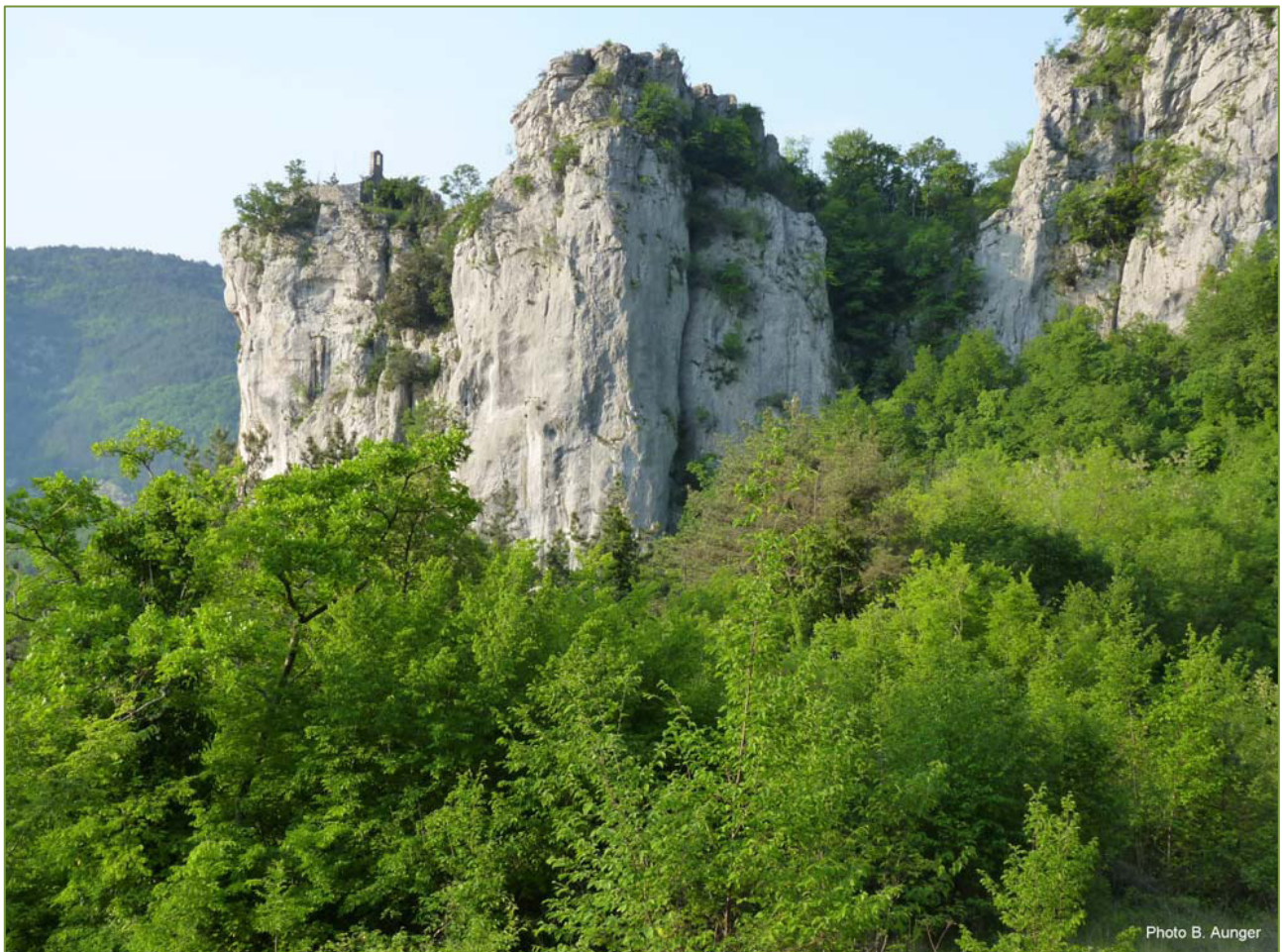


Photo B. Auger

## **Istria**

**11th – 19th May 2011**

## Holiday participants

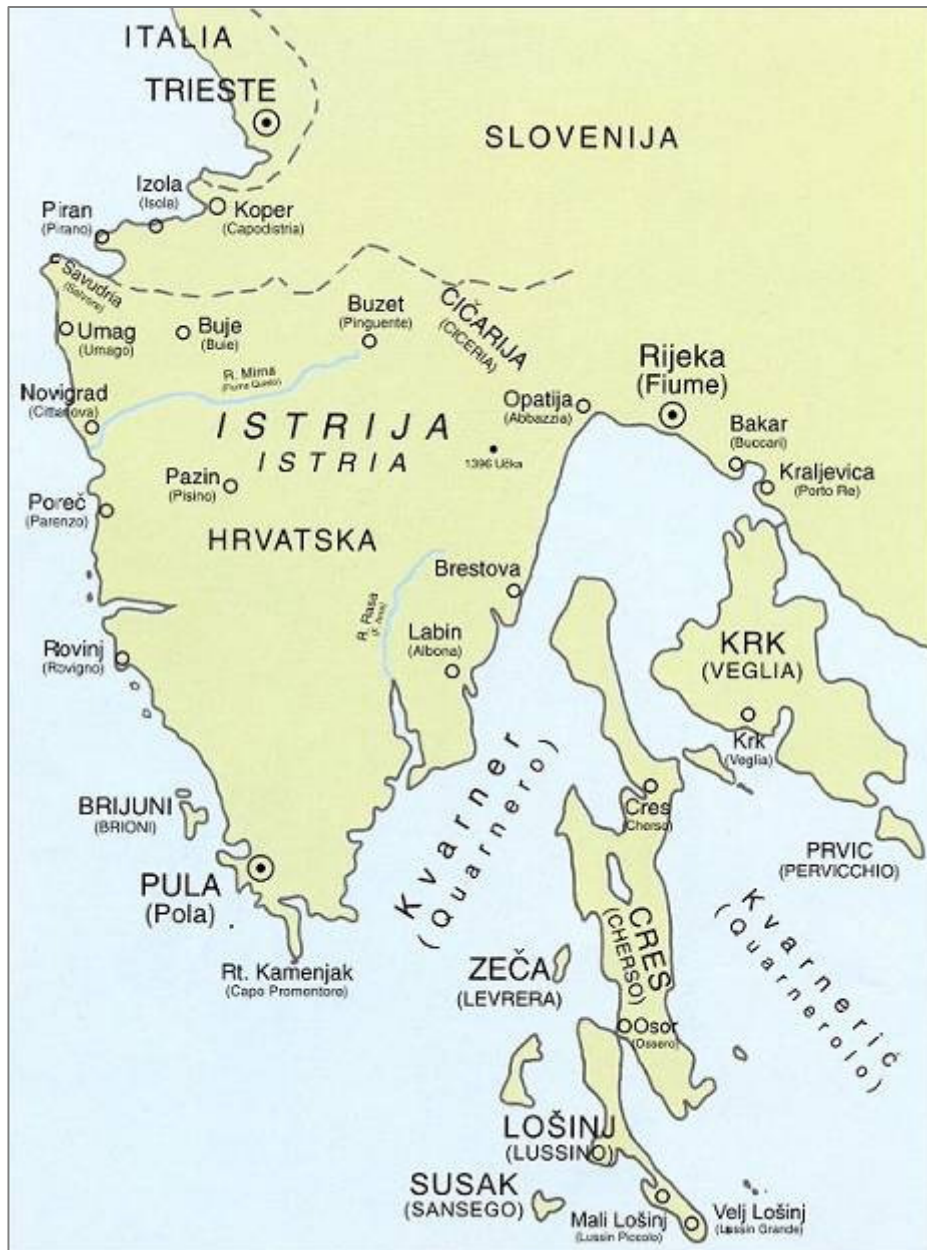
Desmond and Deborah Cassidi  
Mike Poulton

Margaret Dixey  
Karin and Brennan Auger

## Leader

Paul Tout, who also wrote this holiday report.

Our base was the modern Hotel Mirna at the spa of Istarska Toplice.  
Photos by Paul Tout and Brennan Auger, except those involving Hrastovlje  
and the aerial views of Premantura (from public sources).  
Cover photo: Sheer-sided rocks within the grounds of the holiday base at Istarska Toplice.



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 from this holiday, £240, went to DOPPS, BirdLife Slovenia.

At December 2011, the amount of all conservation contributions made through Honeyguide since 1991 totals £74,329.



## Istria – Istarska Toplice, 11th – 19th May 2011

### Wednesday May 11th – The first evening...

Everything went smoothly and the trains and planes all arrived on time, Europacar had even laid on a van for us! The journey from the airport took 90 minutes and was without incident and we arrived at the hotel towards 5.00pm. After a short rest the group took a stroll around the hotel grounds. There were 3 **Nightingales** in the scrub at the eastern end close to the pumping house (with a dozen or so **House Martin** nests) drowning out the singing male **Melodious Warbler**. A single snatch of **Grey-headed Woodpecker** 'song' was heard from the wet oak forest along the River Mirna and we were rarely out of earshot of **Girl Buntings**.

**Ravens** (*right*) passed by several times during the walk, including one carrying food towards a nest on the other side of the valley. As we returned to the hotel the **Alpine Swifts** were beginning to gather above the quarry before returning to their nests at dusk.

We went to dinner at the nearby Dolina restaurant at about 8.00pm and the temperatures had dropped considerably by 10.00pm as we emerged into a beautiful starlit night. From my room I could hear a distant **Scops Owl** calling occasionally. An early start tomorrow and a trip towards the sea along the Mirna Valley.



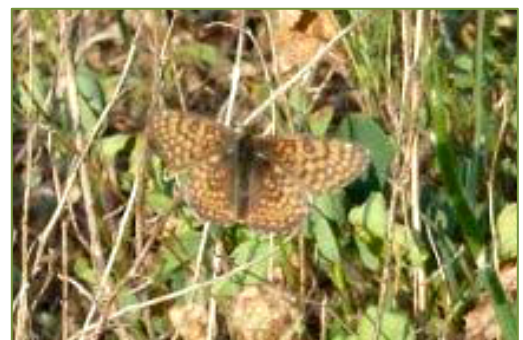
### Thursday May 12th – Mirna – Quiet and up to the quarry.



Splendid weather and a splendid start to the day and the week with an early morning walk at 07:00 up to the quarry (*left*). Before I got downstairs, at 06.45 a **Grey-headed Woodpecker** called half-a-dozen times in quick succession right outside my room! Of course it didn't call again before we set off for the day.

Waiting at the van for the others it became clear that a lot of **Spotted Flycatchers** had just arrived, several being very vocal, high in the large poplars in front of the building. The best bird revealed itself almost immediately, a splendid female **Black Woodpecker** landing on a pine c. 20 metres from us and posing in full sunlight for a minute or so. We heard it calling later. The walk up to the quarry was relatively uneventful (**Nightingale**, **Serin**) but once up in the quarry the resident colony of **Alpine Swifts** put on a splendid show dashing in and out of the caves, as did a male **Blue Rock Thrush** which engaged in song flights throughout our stop.

I set up the photo-trap on a low tree (having forgotten the sardine oil bait) at which point Michael picked out a woodpecker in the small shrubs above the quarry cave entrance, quickly identifying the bird as a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** which also gave excellent views. A family of **Black Redstarts** appeared briefly before hunger and our watches forced us back to the hotel. A **Rock Bunting** that sang briefly at the quarry couldn't be pinned down but some consolation was to be had from nice view of a **Glanville Fritillary**, *Melitaea cinxia* (*right*).



Following breakfast we made our way towards Buje before heading off along a gravel road towards the mouth of the river Mirna / Quieto. Evidence of the drought was everywhere to be seen with very little in the way of birdlife and little growth in the riverside vegetation. The first bird under scrutiny was an amusing **Hooded Crow** that was observed breaking off pieces of a bread roll and hiding them here and there along the river embankment. A **Great White Egret** and **Grey Herons** were easily observed together with a superb view of one of the many **Corn Buntings**

Further along the river we managed to hear the only **Zitting Cisticola** I've heard since the end of the winter (which was very cold) but there was no sign of the usually numerous **Ashy-headed Wagtails**. Excellent views were, however, obtained of a couple of **Great Reed Warblers** together with more distant ones of a nice yellowish singing male **Melodious Warbler**. The usually productive telegraph wires produced almost no birds at all apart from a pair of **Sand Martins**, and the **Black-headed Gulls**, 3 **Curlew** and **Little Egrets** at the lagoon close to the mouth were scarce compensation for the lack of raptors and other birds of interest in the usually wet fields close to the sea.



Great White Egret and Adriatic Lizard Orchid

Tarska bay produced a handful of summering **Great Crested Grebes** and the quarry yielded good views of a female **Blue Rock Thrush** but reptiles provided more entertainment with a magnificent blue-throated male **Green Lizard**, lots of **Wall Lizards** and I even managed to catch an **Aesculapian Snake** to show the group! On the way back we stopped off to see the spectacular hilltop town of Groznan-Grisignana and have a well-earned drink. The drive down yielded some half-a-dozen spikes of **Adriatic Lizard Orchid**, *Himatoglossum adriaticum*.

Tomorrow the early-morning walk will take us to the top of the rock behind the hotel and the visit during the day right to the southern tip of Istria – Premantura.

### Friday May 13th – Up the rock and down to the tip.

Today we programmed an early morning walk to the top of the rock that overlooks the hotel, setting off at 06.30. A stop on the top of the roof of the pumping house at the base of the rock provided views of **Serin** and a very close but elusive **Hawfinch**. The telescope also revealed the pretty white flowery cushions of the rare endemic sandwort **Moehringia tomamasinii** (right), found only on damp rock faces in the Karst and here at its most southerly station.... more of a rockwort really!



Moving up the rock slowly, the Mediterranean nature of the flora becomes evident and we encountered many species in rapid succession including **Bay Laurel**, **Broad-leaved Fillyrea**, and the **Sandalwood** species *Osyris alba*, the main tree species being **Evergreen Oak** and the **Eastern Hornbeam** *Carpinus orientalis* with its tiny leaves. From the damp oak forest below us we could hear the incredibly loud machine-gun-like drumming of the **Black Woodpecker**, a regular feature on this holiday, as well as a late migrant **Wood Warbler** in song. Further up the rock the vegetation thins out and becomes scrubbier and grassier with more flowers, including some very large mulleins just in flower and pretty displays of **White Lace Flower** (*Orlaya grandiflora*).





The view south-west from the top of the rock with the lowland oak forest in the foreground and the fortified hilltop town of Montona/Motovunta.

On top of the rock we visited the small ruined church of Sveti Stjepan – Santo Stefano with its mass of votive offerings from passing pilgrims (who can now enjoy the new Stations of the Cross that have been placed along the route up!) but apart from a fly-by of 8 or so **Alpine Swifts** and a short, sharp view of **Subalpine Warbler** there was little else to be seen.

At 09.00 we started our journey down to the southern tip of Istria, Punta Premantura – Promontorio, a trip that is now much easier than it used to be with the completion of the new motorway. Punta Premantura was a major Yugoslavian military base until 1990 and as a result has remained largely unspoilt in terms of tourist developments and is a real haven for wildlife, particularly plants. The drought this spring

has meant that the floral displays have been particularly poor everywhere, but we remained hopeful and were not disappointed.

Birds were rather scarce, with **Hoopoe**, **Hobby** and **Wryneck** being glimpsed on the way down but on our arrival a largish long-tailed falcon that flew past the van at speed but in good light turned out to be an **Eleonora's Falcon**, another being seen later coming in off the sea. These birds which are late breeders will have just arrived from their wintering grounds in Madagascar and breed on a few of the outlying islands along the Dalmatian coast, the northern ones of which (Cres – Cherso and Losinj – Lussino) were clearly visible to us from Premantura.



Above: Punta Premantura – Promontorio; and right: one of Premantura's unspoiled bays.

The commonest birds on the open grassy patches were **Tawny Pipits** whilst a few **Whinchats** and a **Wheatear** were still passing through together with large numbers of **Swallows**. The damper scrub held many singing **Nightingales** and **Melodious Warblers**, with **Sardinian Warblers** in the drier areas. The drought meant that there were very few butterflies apart from the occasional **Scarce Swallowtail** and **Glanville Fritillary**. Pride of place however at Premantura has to go to the flora. The site, surrounded on three sides by the Adriatic, has a very mild climate indeed but is buffeted by the Bora wind and subject to a heavy salt spray – indeed, the last very powerful Bora of 4th March 2011, one of the strongest ever recorded at almost 200 kph, seems to have badly scorched a lot of the plants of *Cistus*. The Mediterranean scrub was truly stunning, with beautiful displays of **Sage**, pink and white (sage-leaved) **Cistus**, yellow **Broom** and pink **Etruscan Honeysuckle** set against the dark foliage of stunted **Maritime Pines**, **Evergreen Oaks** and wind-pruned **Lentisk** and **Tree Heath**.

A quick chat with two Austrian botanists (thank you Karin!) revealed some of the tinier joys of Premantura – its orchids, and everyone had a good look at a small collection of **Tongue Orchids** or **Serapias** (*S. cordigera* and *S. istriacus*) and a single tiny *Ophrys incubacea*. A short distance away were 3 or 4 spikes of the impressive **Man Orchid**.

On the former helicopter pad we found a few dying spikes of *Orchis papilionacea* but the best was saved for last and as we left the site Karin spotted a couple of interesting plants beside the road. We stopped and found that the shaded sandy verge was filled with dozens of excellent specimens of **Bertoloni's Bee Orchid!**



Left: Bertoloni's Bee Orchid, *Ophrys bertolonii*. Middle: Butterfly Orchid, *Orchis papilionacea*.  
Right: Pula's Roman amphitheatre.

It would have been a shame to completely neglect Istria's superb cultural heritage today and so on the way back we stopped off at Pula's Roman amphitheatre which once seated 22,000 baying spectators and is the sixth largest in the world. A long and interesting trip. I think a quieter day is in order tomorrow!

#### **Saturday May 15th – Cepici, Sterna and Motovun – Montona.**

After yesterday's rather long-distance visit to Premantura a shorter visit was in order today. An early morning walk around the hotel grounds produced the usual suspects but **Nuthatch** was added to the list and the **Black Woodpecker** was heard drumming once again. Two **Roe Deer** already in the more russet summer pelage, showed well for all the participants.

The journey to Cepici was very short, just a few minutes north of the hotel. Locating the path down to this hidden and totally enclosed valley we were pleased to find that the damp air from the valley bottom seemed to have prevented the vegetation from drying out and there were a large number of butterflies to be seen including **Silver-studded** and **Adonis Blues**, **Wood Whites**, and a female **Clouded Yellow** of the form *hyale*. The final first brood **Dingy Skippers** were still on the wing as, surprisingly, were a few fresh-looking **Orange-tips** more than six weeks after I'd seen my first one on the 27th March 2011. The **Small Blue** that we caught and examined was evidently feeding on the masses of reddish **Kidney Vetch** that were present.



Identifying butterflies.

As we got lower down the butterflies changed and **Black-veined White**, **Duke of Burgundy**, **Speckled Wood** and **Comma** were all added to the list. Down in the valley bottom it rapidly became clear that all was not well and the site was extremely dry. We returned to the van and dropped down to the other side of the valley, passing through a cutting where a couple of Slovene rock climbers were practising their skills. A drainage ditch has been 'improved' since my last visit and this, together with the drought, meant that very little standing water was available and the marshland flora was seriously stunted, only a single **Summer Snowflake** in flower.



A **Yellow-bellied Toad**, "like a Scops Owl on amphetamines" was seen and heard along with red and blue damselflies. Several large dragonflies were cruising up and down the drainage ditch, including some **Green-eyed Hawkers**. Coming back through the cutting we noticed several beautiful large **Lady Orchids** still in flower beside the road as well as several plants of *Moerhingia tommasinii* at eye-height on the rock wall.



A Roe Deer in the hotel grounds; Yellow-bellied Toad *Bombina variegata*; and a male (stag) turkey.

Returning through the village a male turkey put on a magnificent display for us. We stopped off beside a lovely rural church shaded by a huge **Small-leaved Lime** tree close to the village of Sterna. **Hoopoe** and **Woodlark** were seen close to the village but the main display was floral with two as-yet-to-be-identified orchids, perhaps **Milky Orchid** being one of them, lots of spikes of **Burning Bush**, **Crested Cow-wheat** and **Violet Helleborine**. Our final stop-off was in Montona – Motovun for coffees and ice cream!

### Sunday May 15th – Učka Vela, Kotli, Hum.

The weather forecast promised rain and a strong southerly *Scirocco* wind and we awoke to a dreary and overcast sky. As we were going to the rainiest part of Istria, its highest point, Učka Vela (or Monte Maggiore in Italian), any hopes of escape were very slim indeed.

We headed south on the old road to Rijeka (Fiume) and quickly arrived at the foot of Učka and it was still dry when we began the climb by van on the gravel road towards the summit (1394m with a 6m tower to bring it to a round 1400m), built a century ago by the Austrian Alpine Club. The road winds up through beech woods and the occasional plantation of **Norway Spruce** and **White Fir**.

Arriving at the summit car park (where there is, unfortunately, a large NATO radar station) we were quickly able to appreciate the temperature difference in the overcast conditions with a chilly southerly breeze. The walk to the tower was short and uneventful, although there were some nice alpine flowers to admire in the nooks and crannies of the low limestone rock-face that bordered the walk, including **Southern Matted Globularia**, *Globularia meridionalis*, and **Bigflowered Broom**, *Chamaecytisus supinus*. The fossils in the rocks (mostly rudist bivalves) were testament to the fact that ground we were standing on had been formed beneath the Adriatic millions of years ago.

There were few birds to be seen or heard from the tower; hardly surprising given the damp weather and the chilly breeze. **Tree Pipit** and the only **Coal Tit** of the trip could be heard in song, but below the tower a brave **Lesser Whitethroat** showed well and sang strongly from the low **Mugo Pines**. Few people in UK realize that this bird is a mountain species in southern Europe and Mugo Pine is its favourite habitat.

At this point the weather was becoming decidedly unseasonable and we beat a retreat to a nearby bar for coffee and chocolate. After warming up a little we attempted to visit the broad subalpine grasslands below the summit but the weather was extremely inclement, with heavy rain for the rest of the afternoon. The disappointment at the poor weather was lightened by visits to **Kotli** (an old village with several watermills) and **Hum**, listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the smallest town in the world and consisting of about a dozen houses or so but complete with its own Venetian-style *loggia*, and 'capital' of the Glagolitic script, an archaic form of Slavonic writing which was in widespread use in Istria until the 14th century.

**Monday May 16th – Quarry, Hrastovlje, Škocjanski Zatok, Sečovelje, Mirna.**

Just as the forecast had promised, the weather had improved dramatically overnight and the sun was shining first thing. A quick walk from the hotel up to the quarry revealed a **Rock Bunting** and excellent views of **Alpine Swifts** entering and leaving the colony in the cave.

Our first stop was at the Romanesque walled church of **Hrastovlje** just over the border into Slovenia. Dating back to before 1490 the church is heavily fortified with high walls to protect it from Turkish marauders from Bosnia who often passed through the valley of the Osp on their way to north-east Italy in search of plunder. There were **Black Redstarts** nesting high in the walls and **Rock Buntings** in the scrub behind the church which is famous for its superb *danza macabra* showing that death claims both rich and poor, popes and paupers.



The fortified church at Hrastovlje with its mural showing, possibly, a Bald Ibis, and the late-medieval fresco *Danza Macabra*.

There is ornithological content too in the murals and they appear to show a bird that could represent a young **Bald Ibis** which of course would be ridiculous were it not for the fact that the painter (John of Castua) was born and brought up in Istria and the species is specifically mentioned for Istria by two 15th Century naturalists, the Austrian Gesner (1557) and the Italian Aldrovandi (1603). Proof of the bird's presence in Europe came when their remains were found in the medieval middens of Salzburg in the northern Alps. 500 years ago the area was very different, there being very few forested areas and the landscape was dominated by vast, heavily-grazed grasslands – ideal habitat for the ibises.

As we left Hrastovlje we noted **Wheatears**, **Whinchats** and a **Red-backed Shrike** in and around a closely-cropped field, suggesting that there had been a fall of migrants during the poor weather the previous night. This was to prove crucial in a decision later in the day!

Moving on to the **Škocjanski Zatok** / Val Stagnon Nature Reserve on the outskirts of Koper, we were met by Bojana Lipej of the Slovene Birdlife charity DOPPS and we were quickly able to add a large number of wetland species that had so far eluded us including **Spoonbill**, **Great White Egret**, **Ashy-headed Yellow Wagtail** and **Great Reed** and **Cetti's Warbler**. In spite of the very dry spring the reserve looked in terrific condition with the grasslands grazed to perfection and good water-levels.

After handing over the Honeyguide donation to Bojana, from the city of Koper we then headed east towards the saltpans of **Sevcolje – Siccirole** along the Dragogna river that here forms the (disputed) border between Croatia and Slovenia. We were lucky to find a troupe from Slovene



national TV on site and the barrier up so that after lunch we were able to drive to the furthest point closest to the sea and people could make their way back to the car park on foot should they so choose. This is a large site with a rather limited range of species but those present are always interesting and the site held nesting **Kentish Plovers** and **Black-winged Stilts**, a pair of **Shelducks** (a species in rapid expansion around the Adriatic), **Little Terns** and **Common Terns**. At this point we were at a fork in the road! Re-entering Croatia we had the choice of an ice-cream and a return to the hotel for 4pm or going-for-broke with a return to the **Mirna Valley** that had been rather disappointing on Day One but this time going from the sea upriver towards our base. The previous day's rain and the migrants here and there suggested it might be a little better but afternoon birding around the Mediterranean is a very hit-and-miss affair. As it happened the gamble paid off and we were rewarded with **Spanish Sparrow**, 4 **Lesser Kestrels**, a large flock of 30+ **Red-footed Falcons** and, best of all, crippling views of newly-arrived male **Black-headed Buntings** singing their hearts out along the route.

After dinner, and still feeling lucky, a few intrepid souls set out along the river once again, the night producing six or so **Nightjars** resting on the gravel in the headlights but none of the hoped-for owls.

### **Tuesday May 17th – Hotel, Mlaka, Zrenj.**

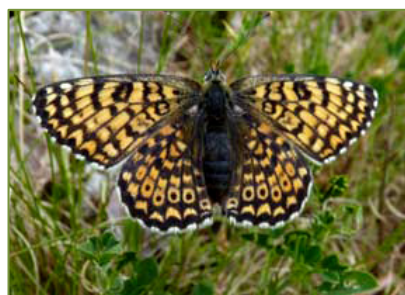
After such a hectic day yesterday a more relaxed one was in order for today. From the hotel we crossed the main road to visit a quiet area where a stream, the **Mlaka**, enters the Mirna river. Birds were rather scarce, although we did hear a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**. The main rewards came in the form of amphibians: a terrific **Fire Salamander** and a couple of **Fire-bellied Toads** as well as several splendid butterflies and plants including fine specimens of **Purple-edged Copper** and **Adriatic Lizard Orchid**.

Following the walk along the Mlaka we headed for the hills above the hotel where there is some pristine countryside. First stop was to see the splendid meadows around the village of **Stridone / Zrenj**. Although the very dry spring had taken the edge off the floral display there was plenty to see, including **Fragrant Orchid**, **Tassel Hyacinths** and many **Carthusian Pinks**. There were plenty of butterflies too, including large numbers of **Marsh Fritillaries**, though it was hard to see what the larval foodplant might have been. The meadows here are too dry for **Devil's-bit** and the literature suggests they must be using another Scabious species, perhaps **Small Scabious** or a close relative. Periodically we were interrupted by the loud calls of introduced **Bobwhite Quail**. Brought by hunters this bird was quite widespread in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s but has since declined to extinction almost everywhere in Europe and this small part of northern Istria is one of the last places you can see the species with any degree of certainty.



There were plenty of other small birds to be seen around the village including **Black Redstarts**, **Serins** and **Cirl Buntings**. Several rather late **Glanville Fritillaries**, *Melitaea cinxia*, were still on the wing. Another unusual observation was a lovely bright pink form of the very common (and usually deep blue) **Meadow Clary**, *Salvia pratensis*. Common enough in gardens, this was the first time I'd noticed it in the wild. If I'd found it in the Alps north of Udine I'd have been tempted to call it the **Julian Clary**!

Pink Meadow Clary, left,  
and Glanville Fritillary.



At this point, just before lunch, a comic episode took place. As we wandered around the meadows identifying plants and butterflies a sprightly figure in blue overalls (very reminiscent of Yugoslavia in the 1980s) came striding towards us. He looked a bit cross! His opening gambit (in Croatian) was met with incomprehension and "*Je ne govorim hrvaško*" ("I don't speak Croatian" – not as oxymoronic as it sounds as it's in Slovene) but he rapidly followed

with "*ma spero che ti te parli un pochettin d'Italjan?*" in the Italo-Venetian they speak in at home in the villages close to the coast. I explained that we were admiring the birds, butterflies and flowers around the village and he stopped to chat. Duillio Sorgo, an 80-year old in splendid form, he was tending his 2,000-odd vines and popped off to bring us a litre of his Malvasia. Now I'm not a big fan of Malvasia and didn't try any but those in the party who did assured me I wasn't missing much! We said our goodbyes and he went back to work.



Duillio Sorgo and Paul Tout in the magnificent Istrian countryside (photo Brennan Auger).

A trip around the vicinity in the minibus along the farmland tracks soon revealed the best bird of the day for me, and my best view ever of the species, a male **Bobwhite Quail** parading down the road in front of the van. A lovely afternoon was spent in the gentle countryside around Zrenj with plenty of wonderful meadows to examine and lots to see, before heading back towards the hotel, stopping off for a cup of coffee at the ancient town of Oprtalj (Portole in Italian) with its ancient Venetian *loggia*, the walls of which are decorated with fragments of the *Serenissima*



Bobwhite Quail, above, and Portole's Venetian loggia with a view to the countryside beyond (photo Brennan Auger)

### **Wednesday May 18th – Hotel, Sbeunica, Vodice, Crnotice.**

The final full day was dedicated to an upland visit about 15km east of the hotel to the interior part of Istria with mountains, part of the Dinaric Alps running NW/SE and parallel with the eastern Adriatic coastline. A pleasant final early morning walk around the hotel yielded nothing new and we set off for the mountain of Sbeunica via the fantastic subalpine meadows above the town of



Buzet/Pinguente. The climb up Sbeunica was steep but well worth it, and under the umpteenth azure sky of the trip and with a little encouragement here and there even the less fleet-of-foot managed to get up onto a flatter part of the trail where everyone could stop to catch their breath and enjoy the view.

Apart from singing **Skylarks** and **Tree Pipits** and the odd **Raven**, birds are rather few and far between in these uplands but this is more than made up for by the flora, with an abundance of **Wild Daffodils** (*Narcissus radiflora*) still in flower at this altitude, as well as **Wild Peonies** (*Paeonia officinalis*), lots of the huge umbellifer **Sermountain** (*Laserpitium siler*) and, in a large damp dolina close to the top, large displays of the **White Asphodel** (*Asphodelus albus*). Returning to the van for lunch, accompanied by a magnificent view over the surrounding countryside, we were treated to excellent views of a singing and displaying male **Tree Pipit**, a species that has become so rare in the UK it is easy to forget that it is the commonest species across much of central Europe.

Following our hike up the Sbeunica some lighter exercise was called for and a short distance away is the tiny, isolated (but nevertheless international) border crossing of Vodice, close to the tumbledown village of Jelovice. A stroll along a gravel track just outside the village failed to produce many birds in the heat of the afternoon apart from a singing **Yellowhammer**, the species which replaces **Cirl Bunting** in the cooler interior of Istria, but amongst the orchids along the road there was still a splendid **Monkey Orchid**, *Orchis simia*, in flower. These were long past their best at other sites we had visited but in the cool climate of inner Istria this specimen was perfect.



The interior uplands of Istria, and a fine Monkey Orchid in the cooler climate here.

We crossed over the border into Slovenia without incident, other than a certain incredulity on the part of the Slovene border-guards who evidently weren't anticipating anyone other than locals this afternoon, and our final stop was close by, a huge area of *Landa Carsica* at Crnotice, dry steppe-like grassland in limestone country produced over thousands of years by deforestation and heavy grazing. Many of the areas in Slovenia are owned by public authorities and have recently been relet to graziers and are in the process of being restored to open grassland with cutting and grazing. Crnotice did not disappoint, there being plenty to see, including **Red-backed Shrikes**, a territorial **Tawny Pipit** and splendid prolonged views of a hunting male **Montagu's Harrier**. The bird was a sub-adult with brown feathering remaining in the secondaries so is unlikely to have been breeding. As far as I'm aware no harrier species breed in Slovenia. The area strikes me as very odd because it is quite far from the coast and quite high up but nevertheless the dominant vegetation in much of the area is **Sage**, *Salvia officinalis*, a species which struggles with the cold in areas even just a few hundred metres away from the coast close to Trieste.

The journey back to the hotel, ducking back into Croatia, was quick, straightforward and uneventful.

#### Thursday May 19th - Bosco Porenta, Isola della Cona.

We set off bright and early for the airport to get in some serious birding before the flight. First stop was just inside Italy at Bosco Porenta, a rather unpromising small plot of **Beech** trees, *Fagus sylvatica*, planted as an experiment by the Austrians just before the First World War. The trees grew quite large but have suffered grievously from drought and disease in recent years offering fine pickings for woodpeckers, with 5 species breeding regularly (**Black, Green, Grey-headed, Great and Lesser Spotted**). Only the Great Spotted Woodpeckers were on view during our visit, along with **Marsh Tit, Chiffchaff and Short-toed Treecreeper**.

Our final stop before the airport was Isola della Cona at the mouth of the River Isonzo, the nature reserve with the longest bird-list in Italy (and one of the longest in Europe) – 322 species excluding escapes. How many would we manage in little over an hour? A very creditable 47, many of them 'firsts' for the trip.

Some of the interesting species were **Squacco Heron, Cattle, Little and Great White Egret, Purple Heron, White Stork, Spoonbill, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Shelduck, Garganey, Shoveler, Honey Buzzard, Moorhen, Coot, Black-winged Stilt Little Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Wood Sandpiper, Black and Whiskered Terns, Bee-eaters** (breeding), **Marsh and Reed Warbler, Golden Oriole and Red-backed Shrike** as well as large numbers of **European Pond Terrapins, *Emys orbicularis***.

With that it was off to the airport just 15 minutes drive away, and another successful Honeyguide holiday was done and dusted.



Paul Tout handing over Honeyguide's conservation contribution to Andrej Medved, the President of DOPPS.



# BIRD LIST

PRINCIPAL LOCALITY	Hotel	Mirna Valley	Premantura	Local	Ucka Vela	Stagnon Val	Local	Crotonce	Isola Cona
DATE	Day 0 11/5	Day 1 12/5	Day 2 13/5	Day 3 14/5	Day 4 15/5	Day 5 16/5	Day 6 17/5	Day 7 18/5	Day 8 19/5
Little grebe						x			x
Great crested grebe		x							
Shag			x						
Squacco heron						x			x
Cattle egret									x
Little egret		x	x	x		x			x
Great white egret		x				x			x
Grey heron		x				x			x
Purple heron									x
White stork									x
Spoonbill									x
Mute swan						x			x
Greylag goose									x
Shelduck						x			
Garganey									x
Mallard		x							x
Shoveler									x
Honey buzzard		x							x
Short-toed eagle									x
Marsh harrier					x				x
Montagu's harrier								x	
Common buzzard	x	x		x			x	x	x
Lesser kestrel						x			
Common kestrel								x	
Red-footed falcon						x			
Hobby			x						
Eleonora's Falcon			2						
Bobwhite quail							x		
Quail								h	
Pheasant	x	x					h		x
Moorhen						x			x
Coot						x			x
Black-winged stilt						x			x
Little ringed plover						x			
Kentish plover						x			
Lapwing									x
Curlew		x							
Wood sandpiper									x
Black-headed gull		x							x
Yellow-legged gull	x	x	x		x	x			x
Common tern						x			x
Little tern						x			
Black tern									x
White-winged black tern									
Whiskered tern									x
Rock dove/feral pigeon		x				x	x	x	x

Woodpigeon									x
Collared dove		x	x	x		x			x
Turtle dove			x	h					
Cuckoo		h		h	h	h	h	h	h
Scops owl	h	h	x		h	h	h		
Nightjar						x			
Swift		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Alpine swift	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Bee-eater		x	x	h		h	x	h	x
Hoopoe			x	x		h	x	h	
Wryneck			x				h		
Green woodpecker		h	h			h			h
Grey-headed woodpecker	h	h	h						
Black woodpecker		x	h	h	h				
Great spotted woodpecker		x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Lesser spotted woodpecker		x							
Woodlark				x		x		x	
Skylark							x	x	
Sand martin		x							
Swallow	x	x	x						x
House martin	x	x	x						x
Tawny pipit			x						
Tree pipit					h			x	
Yellow wagtail (ashy-headed)						x			x
Grey wagtail				x	x	x	x		
White wagtail	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Robin				h	x	h	h		
Nightingale	h	x	h	h		h	h	h	h
Black redstart		x				x			
Whinchat			x			x			
Stonechat						x			
Northern wheatear			x			x			
Blue rock thrush		x	h	h					
Blackbird	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Song thrush			x	x	x	x	x	x	
Mistle thrush		x		x			x	x	
Cetti's warbler						x			h
Fan-tailed warbler		x							
Marsh warbler						h			x
Reed warbler						h			
Great reed warbler		x							x
Melodious warbler	h	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Subalpine warbler			x						
Sardinian warbler			x						
Lesser whitethroat					x				
Whitethroat				h		h	x	h	
Blackcap	h	h	h	h	h	x	h	h	h
Chiffchaff				h		h		h	x
Wood warbler			h				h		
Spotted flycatcher		x	x	x		x	x		h
Long-tailed tit		x				x		x	
Marsh tit									x
Blue tit		x	x	x			x	x	
Great tit	x	x	x	x			x	x	x



Nuthatch				x					
Short-toed treecreeper			h	x		h	h	h	h
Golden oriole	h	h	h	x		x	h	x	x
Red-backed shrike						x		x	x
Jay		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Magpie				x		x			x
Hooded crow		x	x	x		x	x		x
Raven	x			h		x	x	x	
Starling		x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Spanish Sparrow						x			
House sparrow	x	x		x	x	x	x		x
Tree sparrow		x	x	x					x
Chaffinch	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Serin		x		x		x	x		
Greenfinch	h			h		h	x	h	
Goldfinch	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Linnet			x						
Hawfinch			x	x				x	
Black-headed Bunting						x			
Cirl bunting	x	h	h	h		h	x	x	
Rock bunting		h				x	x		
Corn bunting		x	x	x		x	x	h	



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