

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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FLOWERS AND BIRDS IN THE LOT
22 - 29 May 1993
29 May - 5 June 1993



Helping you enjoy wildlife



Helping to protect wildlife

Flowers and Birds in the Lot

List of participants

22-29 May 1993

Guy & Elizabeth Daniel
John & Christine Wakerley
Winifred Smith
Martin & Jane Smith
Meg Airey
Norma Davis
Keith & Eileen Gould
Margaret Weyms

Leader: David Brewster

29 May - 5 June 1993

Joan Foote
Win Symons
Margaret Houke
Margaret Biggs
Kate Groom
Barbara Gascoigne
Gwenda Cunningham
Mavis Stevens
Angela & Ralph Harbord

Chris Durdin

From David and Chris

Galoubet has a certain magic that only those who have been there can understand. The orchids outside the back door - and everywhere else - have something to do with it; so do the songs of nightingales and woodlarks; the quality food and wine plays its part; the buildings and their setting are vital ingredients of this special place. For us as leaders though, it's also about people; our hosts Lynn and Doreen Todd, drivers Guy and Jean-Claude, Maurice the Mayor, but above all the participants who became a group of firm friends over a week that ended all too soon.

If you were on this holiday, we hope this report acts as a souvenir to bring back happy memories. If you are thinking of going to this lovely area of France we hope it gives something of the flavour of the wildlife to be seen and the fun to be had.

By combining our holiday reports it helps to give a complete picture of the similarities and differences of what was seen by the two groups. There was, inevitably, much in common, especially in the lists of orchids, butterflies and birds. But we start off with our daily diaries, David's first, until the different holiday stories merge at Toulouse airport and Chris's keyboard takes over.

Lastly, it is worth remembering that these holidays also put something into protecting French wildlife. In 1993, £550 was sent to the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) towards its 'Refuge LPO' campaign. At the end of this report is a letter from the LPO's Jackie Chevallier which tells us more about this campaign that we helped.

David Brewster and Chris Durdin

Illustrations by Rob Hume
Front cover: Maison Meulet, Galoubet

Week 1 with David Brewster

Saturday 22 May - Toulouse to Galoubet

Even from 20,000 feet as we descended to Toulouse airport, the Department of the Lot was readily identifiable, like a green ruffled quilt intersected by wide meandering rivers. The first thing to strike you was the amount of woodland which dominated the landscape with a network of small meadows in the valley bottoms and dry scrubby grassland on the plateaux. The rivers looked ominously brown, testimony to the heavy rain of the last few weeks.

As the coach climbed from the fertile plain around Toulouse into the limestone plateau known as the Gramat Cause, its speed slowed allowing our plant identification on the move to be a little more accurate. Plants that we would become so familiar with over the next week started to appear, sainfoin and meadow clary colouring the hay meadows, pyramidal orchids like jewels in the verges - and what joker said they could see fairy flax? The birds were a little easier, the only hoopoe of the trip, the circling black kites over Cahors' rubbish dump and the ubiquitous buzzards.

With lively conversation the trip to Galoubet passed quickly, and there were Lynn, Doreen, Sacha and Sarah in the lane to greet us. All the exertions of travel melted away as we fell under the spell of Galoubet and the feeling of contentment was considerably enhanced as we sampled Sacha's first offering at dinner.

Sunday 23 May - around Galoubet

Seven o'clock proved too early for most and only an expectant Keith and Eileen greeted your leader as he appeared bleary eyed from his room. However the first view of the valley's red squirrels and a surprised roe deer made the early start worthwhile; well relatively early, the previous year the majority of the group had been out by 6.30 am! The laggards were acquainted of our discoveries over a leisurely outdoor breakfast while a large oak eggar caterpillar dined on lilac a few feet away.

Although only a modest two miles was planned for the morning, barely half a mile was covered on the walk to La Croix Blanche before we had to beat a fairly rapid retreat in order to be back for lunch. A stunning array of orchids and numerous butterflies dictated the pace. Martin quickly proved his competence on the latter and southern white admiral, black-veined white, adonis blue and swallowtail were all quickly recorded on the ascent up the road.

It was a pity that the same degree of competence was not shown by your leader in the afternoon, for when a group of honey brown flower spikes growing out of the leaf mould was pointed out, they were pronounced to be "broomrapes". Well it was from a distance and John, in a diplomatically quiet voice, suggested an alternative, birdsnest orchid. Guy sat impassively on his portable seat on the track below, far too much of a gentleman to comment. Attention was fortunately soon diverted for round the next bend was an attractive hay meadow that had Keith and Martin racing round in pursuit of fritillaries. On the other side of the track was a small pond and the rest of the group scanned the surface for pool frogs whose staccato belching had so amused last year's group. Alas despite some vulgar imitations, only a fleeting glimpse of one of the gigantic tadpoles indicated their presence.

Only Meg braved the swimming pool as the sky clouded and a wind sprang up, which precluded dinner outdoors. Culinary standards were maintained and the chicken was so tasty compared with our normal home product that several thought it a game bird - although Guy's suggestion of pigeon was greeted with much laughter.

Monday 24 May - Labastide-Murat

The early birds did not catch all the worms this morning for although good views were had of melodious warbler, curl bunting and woodlark, we walked straight past the middle spotted woodpecker's nest. This was spotted by Margaret in a dead branch of a walnut tree near the neighbouring farm and the discovery

caused great excitement at breakfast.

Then off to Labastide-Murat for market day. The auctioning of the animals was over and the lop-eared sheep were being loaded on board lorries, vans and cars. However a diverse array of stalls remained to tempt you with local produce. We assembled later with our cheeses, cherries and postcards for a drink outside the Hotel Climat, gaining strength for the walk back to Galoubet.

Guy and Winifred accepted Lynn's offer of a lift while the rest of us set off past brightly coloured serins, Murat's chateau and into the open countryside. It was only just over a mile to the lunch spot but we soon became so strung out that arrows had to be scratched on dusty roads for the butterfly backmarkers. They caught up as we lolled in grass overlooking a small wood with a slightly incongruous looking golf course set among orchid-studded fields. Insects were everywhere, small blues, pale clouded yellows, lovely yellow and black lacewings and field crickets. On a nearby pile of limestone, neat little red-bodied spiders with black and white striped legs caused much amusement as they sparred over the rather drab looking females.

Fortified by bread, pate and wine, we went down into the valley past numerous spikes of violet birdsnest orchid looking like purple asparagus. Another new butterfly was spotted, the grizzled skipper, and then much excitement for a Duke of Burgundy fritillary whose identity was confirmed by Elizabeth who had seen them in Britain. The trisyllabic call of a quail briefly dragged attention back to other forms of wildlife and a superb lady orchid and a nearby man orchid turned the conversation to sexist plant names.

A further halt was called before the steep ascent out of the valley where Norma, I think it was, found a four-leaved clover. The climb generated sufficient heat to warrant four of us entering the pool.

Tuesday 25 May - St Cirq Lapopie and Pech Merle

Only two of the group made the early morning walk but, following Margaret's directions, we were rewarded by excellent views of the middle spotted woodpeckers feeding their young. The red crown was obvious in both sexes and the male's black-flecked flanks were suffused with pink. Further up the track we also saw a short-toed treecreeper searching for food on a fence post on which a cirl bunting was singing its heart out.

At 10am, Jean-Claude had once again managed to do the seemingly impossible feat of getting the coach outside Maison Meulet and then we were off to St Cirq Lapopie. The road followed ever narrower tributaries and more spectacular limestone cliffs until the famous hilltop village was sighted over the muddy, meandering Lot. Far from admiring the architecture, Martin was straight off the coach into the gutter identifying a small blue. Several others were just as bad, using the remains of the sacked castle as a vantage point to observe crag martins and the elusive alpine swifts.

Once Elizabeth and Guy had been located we then took the coach to Pech Merle where we picnicked on the grass above the car park, only to have the peace and tranquility wrecked by the French Highways Department and two coach loads of French school children. The caves were much admired by the group both for their natural wonders and the Stone Age paintings with the piece de resistance being the frieze of horses. One can imagine the artist's horror when one of the tribe daubed a charcoal pike over their work of art.

The warmth of the late afternoon sun was welcome after the cave and while Winifred and Guy descended to Cabrerets by coach, the rest took a rocky path through a delightful show of bastard balm, kidney vetch, milkwort and bloody cranesbill. We never did identify the large snake found dead on the road but the delightful umbellifer was ivory-fruited hartwort and the damselfly was beautiful agrion. Later in the evening, after another of Sacha's masterpieces, we lounged around the pool philosophising and making guesses as to stars' names as they appeared through the ragged clouds. Shame we misidentified the planet.

Wednesday 26 May - Local walks

The clouds of the previous evening filled the sky and a hesitant rain fell as we started the morning walk up Combes de Cayres. A mass donning of overtrousers followed and from then on the chance of hearing any birdsong disappeared among the rustle of plastic. It did not disturb the middle spotted woodpecker which performed well for the whole group. The local farmer looked bemused; why was this group so interested in watching one of his walnut trees in the rain?

The rain eased as we climbed the gentle slope up the ridge, off came the waterproofs and at last the delightful song of the woodlark could be heard as it fluttered overhead with its bat-like flight. The first lesser butterfly orchid was spotted in an oak grove and a showy display of pyramidal orchids by the main road. Interspersed among them were common broomrapes, man and fly orchids. We then wandered down the track to Galoubet, past the pond, where although numerous large tadpoles were seen alas none of their parents. When viewing the surface of the pond with binoculars, occasional newts could be seen rising to the surface among the water beetles, but they moved with such speed that it was impossible to confirm that they were, as we suspected, great crested newts.

After lunch, the sensible pottered around Galoubet while the more adventurous ignored the gathering storm clouds and set off on various pursuits such as butterfly hunting and scree running until prolonged torrential rain put paid to our plans. One consolation for Eileen and Margaret, who sheltered in a convenient barn, was that on emerging they at least glimpsed the elusive golden oriole.



The storm still rumbled around the horizon in the evening so dinner was taken indoors. We emerged later to see the bats leave the pigeonaire. These had been seen returning earlier that morning by the nocturnal Winifred. She set up chairs for Meg and Norma to have a ringside seat but only eight were seen to leave. Two nightjars were heard on the other side of the valley and an expedition was mounted to try to see them. It was however a forlorn hope for with the rumbling stomachs, giggling and Martins solo impression of a platoon of marching infantry, the nightjars retreated in front of us. Soon even the cacophony of Martin's shoes was drowned by the approaching thunder, so we retired to our beds.

Thursday 27 May - Rocamadour

Red squirrels were playing around the sycamores as the early risers passed. While route planning with Jean-Claude after breakfast, it was quickly realised that the planned trip to a quarry above Rocamadour was not possible as the coach was unable to negotiate the bends. Previously we had always visited the site by minibus. Lynn suggested a scenic route via Payrac and how grateful we were to him for this suggestion.

The route was tantalising as St Bernard's lily, rock soapwort and other goodies sped by the windows. Eventually a layby appeared and we disembarked with enthusiasm into the limestone grassland. A red kite and several honey-buzzards were wheeling in the developing thermals as temperatures soared. Keith and Martin barely raised their eyes as they chased the drifts of butterflies that flitted over the profusion of flowers, which included, at last, some lizard orchids that were fully out, pink convolvulus, purple milk-vetch, yellow-wort and cupidone. Norma and Guy's attention was on the stream below where a kingfisher had been spotted, so we were now getting close to last year's total for birds.

At Rocamadour we lunched in a small park by the chateau. After lunch the more energetic assaulted the steep limestone slopes on the other side of the River Alzou intent on getting to the maze of abandoned fields on the plateau. As the track climbed steeply through humid oak woods, the sight of lesser butterfly orchids, Solomon's seal and wild candytuft provided welcome opportunities for rests.

Showers bubbled up and after several attempts to shelter under one umbrella a short cut was taken in order to return us to Rocamadour. We threaded our way through a maze of thorny scrub and grassy clearings and with some relief arrived on the return path. At this point Christine produced the opal fruits; she obviously had little faith in her leader and had kept them back in case we had to spend the night lost in the Causse country.

The showers continued while we explored Rocamadour, at times throwing large, jagged chunks of hail down on us. The village clings spectacularly to the rock face like a multi-layered cake with the houses at the bottom, then the churches on the next level with the chateau on top separated by a vertical wall of limestone. Martin and Keith joined us on the ascent to the top, reporting sightings of cleopatra, idas blue, bath white and, yes, at last, a small white.

On the return to Galoubet, our driver suddenly stopped the coach and got out uttering something incomprehensible. As your guide left the coach to see if he could help, Elizabeth said reassuringly that he only wanted to show me a dry river bed. In fact it turned out to be a loose hubcap and our running repairs proved to be less than successful as it came bowling off later on the journey and a search party had to be mounted.

Optimistically we had our starters outdoors but rather than dilute one of Sacha's delicious sauces with rainwater we took our main course indoors. We emerged at dusk for another spot of bat watching and an abortive attempt to spot a nightjar. However there was great excitement when the plaintive call of a Scop's owl was heard.

Friday 28 May - all day walk

Drizzle curtailed the early morning walk. However the skies cleared for the all day hike which took us past the Mayor's house, across dripping hay fields and down a spur into the Combes de Cayres. The sparse grassland under the stunted oaks was liberally dotted with orchids and over a dozen were seen on the descent. We joined another of the myriad of farm tracks that criss-cross the area, and as we walked along it Jane spotted a roe deer hind startled by our passage. She was clearly agitated and it became apparent that she had become separated from two half grown fawns. After much noisy communication between them, they became reunited and disappeared into the trees.

After an interlude watching the strange sight of a flock of 35 crows, Jane made another sighting, a pure white orchid which was apparently a type of heath spotted orchid but the one that came close in the book was found only in the Hebrides. Lunch was taken at a site that produced the first early spider orchid, with its distinctive blue H mark on the lip. A crashing in the undergrowth proved to be a large scrub goat, almost identical to the largest Billy Goat Gruff. However despite wicked looking horns he was quite friendly, if a bit smelly, and he took great delight in demolishing Keith's apple core.

On our way up to the main road we traversed a sodden hay meadow taking care to avoid treading on the Roman snails which make a horrendous sound when crushed. An inquisitive black kite inspected us carefully as we moved forward, spending several minutes looking intently downwards before flying off

with a shrug of the wings.

Before reaching the road, we found a small pond and at last the parents of the giant tadpoles, a group of pool frogs. They appeared to spend most of their time clambering up a dead tree, whether to reach the sunlight or to use it as a diving board we never learned for they refused to perform or even emit the slightest belch despite numerous poor imitations. The woods gave way to grassland and woodland birds were replaced by corn buntings, crested larks and a unmusical melodious warbler. The speciality of the afternoon was spotted by Margaret on a dead tree, a handsome male red-backed shrike, though a fleeting glimpse for some. The climb out of the Combe in rising temperatures left us all hot and sticky and a record number of seven were later seen in the pool. Dinner was a little more subdued than normal for we had spent our last full day at Galoubet.

Saturday 28 May - Galoubet, then Toulouse and home

At Meg's suggestion we took a delightful walk down the valley from Maison Meulet and discovered three new orchids, dark red helleborine, a single greater butterfly orchid and something that looked like a green-winged orchid, although even after a heated debate no definitive conclusion was reached. Beyond doubt were the adderstongue fern and the spiked star-of-Bethlehem about to come into flower. With great reluctance we dragged ourselves away for lunch, then fond farewells to Lynn, Doreen, Sacha and Sarah. A few half-hearted attempts were made to add to the bird list on the drive to Toulouse but nothing obliged.

At the airport we overlapped with Chris's group for the following week and hurried instructions were given as to where the 'goodies' were to be found. We wished them well for their stay, secure in the knowledge that our 40 species of butterfly were unlikely to be matched. Perhaps next year....



Crested lark

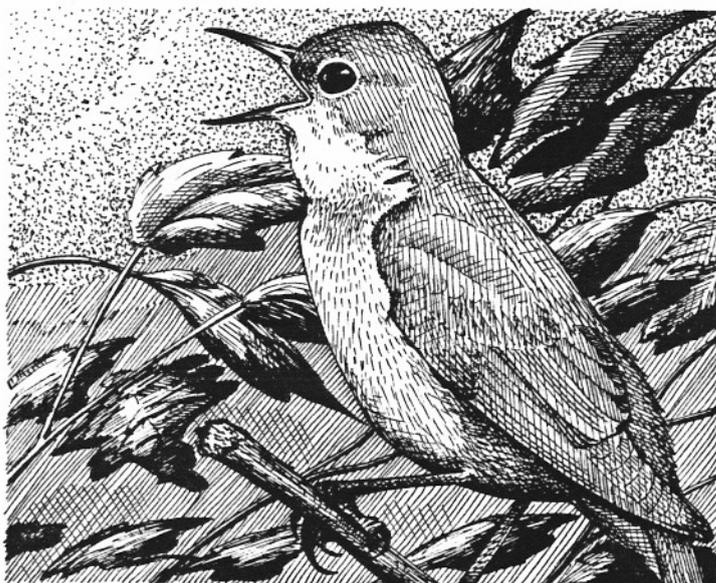
Week 2 with Chris Durdin

Saturday 29 May - Gatwick to Galoubet

Eleven of us left a busy Gatwick and arrived smoothly at a warm Toulouse airport. Eventually the penny dropped that the smiling and waving people through the glass in departures was last week's group. Sign language indicated they'd had a great time and that David Brewster, their leader, was in arrivals with advice for our group.

Jean-Claude, our driver for the week, was there with the coach and it wasn't long before we were watching swallows and magpies alongside the péage. A black kite by the toll station prompted the thought that with a combination of privately-run motorways and global warming this might be an English scene in a few year's time. The density of roadside pyramidal orchids seemed to increase as we headed north towards Galoubet.

Our hosts Lynn and Doreen helped us settle in, and a little later it was time for supper cooked by chefs Sacha and Sarah. Like every meal to follow, it was a four course masterpiece. This evening was *coq au vin*, as always local cheeses, accompanied by a red Gamay, a white *Côtes de Gascogne* and singing blackcap and nightingale.



Sunday 30 May - Around Galoubet

7.30 seemed like a civilised time for a pre-breakfast walk, and in the fields by Maison Meulet we soon found military, bee, lizard and pyramidal orchids, all a stone's throw from the back door. But it's more than just orchids; there were patches of yellow and green crosswort and purple meadow clary; we looked at shrubs like dogwood, the strange Mediterranean coriara, and the five-lobed leaves of field maple alongside the three-lobed leaves of Montpellier maple.

After breakfast at 9.00, we checked out the three ferns growing in the old well by the swimming pool; maidenhair spleenwort, rustyback and common polypody. Intermittent rain failed to dampen spirits as we passed the spindle and dogwood hedges and turned right towards Cayres. A stonechat on the wire; sainfoin and pretty dames violet just cut on the road verge; brown slugs with orange skirts; five geraniums, allowing comparisons between herb Robert, little robin and shining cranesbill and between cut-leaved and long-stalked cranesbill; golden orioles singing in the oakwoods. All this as we headed towards a row of four walnut trees in a field. There by a bracket fungus was the hole and in minutes a middle spotted woodpecker, black and white with a red crown, appeared to feed its brood.

After lunch it was up the "runner's track", so nicknamed as an early visitor to Maison Meulet had suggested that the wrecked building at its start was a nice little runner for conversion. Among the lizard orchids, the warmth was tempting the butterflies out and we caught niobe and knapweed fritillaries and black-veined white. A Bonelli's warbler sang well but was not seen well, this time at least. Buzzard, tree pipit and field gladioli were found, but special mention must go to a dwarf, lilac-coloured knapweed. This had puzzled *Honeyguide* groups since 1991 but a combination of Angela's 'Flowers of south-west Europe' (Polunin) and a plant with its distinctive pinecone-like seed head led to identification as *Centaurea conifera*.

Two crows mobbed a honey-buzzard as we returned to Maison Meulet. Later that evening both nightjar and Scop's owl could be heard from the house.

Monday 31 May - St Cirq Lapopie and the caves of Pech Merle

There were whitethroat, black redstart and ciril bunting near the Mayor's house this morning.

St Cirq Lapopie is a delightful hour's ride south of Galoubet. The last part of the journey is along the Lot valley, where St Cirq is the most striking of several cliff-top villages. Money from tourism has meant that picture postcard houses have been restored, adding to a naturally stunning setting. A stroll through St Cirq to the gateway on the other side of the village was followed by group photos. There was the odd alpine swift with the swifts overhead, then later crag martins looking down from the castle ruin on the highest point. It looked as though someone with a strimmer had been round recently, but several ivy broomrapes had been missed, along with the more usual pellitory-of-the-wall and ivy-leaved toadflax.

Lunch was in a glade of horseshoe vetch by the caves of Pech Merle. Only Gwenda missed the tour, having been there recently; the rest of us took in the prehistoric cave paintings of bison, elephant and horses, the girl's footprint cast in stone, the oak roots descending from the cave roof through space and into the floor. After emerging from the cool, a short stroll took us past banks of bloody cranesbill, sometimes mixed with bastard balm.

After supper we walked in search of nightjars which continued to churr but kept their distance. And these Scop's owls were quite unimpressed by your leader's impersonation which has worked so well to draw them in elsewhere!

Tuesday 1 June - Gourdon market; Vaillac-Beaumat-Galoubet

In the wood beyond the Mayor's house this morning, wood warbler and Bonelli's warbler sang and displayed prominently on their respective territories. A golden oriole flashed past; though we heard them all the time this was the only sighting and a poor one at that. There was nuthatch too, and we located the birdsnest orchids near the beehives.

A hoopoe flew alongside the bus for an age as we drove towards this week's local market at Gourdon. The fresh produce was on the square up by the church, the rest on the street below, with black redstarts on various rooftops all around. After an hour or so here, Jean-Claude took us to the pretty village of Vaillac from where we were to explore one of the local waymarked routes. Having passed the time of day with *une vieille femme*, we followed the stream round the back of the church. Kestrel and sparrowhawk were followed by a honey-buzzard which then did its amazing wing-clapping display flight. The honey-buzzard was joined by a second and both flew low over our heads.

From there it was a short walk to the yellow arrow that marked our route's start. In the shade over looking Vaillac's *chateau* we had lunch and strawberries from Gourdon market.

Walking through the woods there were soon narrow-leaved and red helleborines and fine lesser butterfly orchids. Woods turned to open scrubby areas with the yellow waymarks leading us on to a crossroads where the oak with the yellow marks lay sawn up on the corner. Inspiration suggested a right turn, fortunately correct, leading us down through more woods and to stepping stones, of sorts, through a wet bit by water meadows with early marsh orchids, round-headed rampion, pheasant-eye narcissus and mating black-veined whites.

After Beaumat it got hotter still; we later learned that Lynn had only just missed us with a car full of extra drinks. Corn buntings were singing as we walked towards Merle, then we dropped down to the shade of the road where a middle spotted woodpecker sat patiently for all to see. Then back to Galoubet for a much-needed swim!

Wednesday 2 June - Local walks

The 40th anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne would have passed us by, I'm afraid, but fortunately Jean-Claude had reminded us the day before.

After thunder and lightning the previous night, a showery morning as we went past the Mayor's house. The wood warbler and Bonelli's warbler performed for the whole group as did a short-toed treecreeper. Further on, right by the ponds with the frogs with the amazing bass voices, a tame woodlark sat on the same post as it had for a previous early morning group. Skylarks and a crested lark put in appearances a little later. We also compared dog and field roses; the latter with a raised style, the former without. A woodlark sang gloriously and showed its distinctive short tail and bat-like flight.

The idea of a post-lunch siesta was warmly welcomed so it was quite late when we headed towards the hill opposite Maison Meulet. First stop though was the barns where a black redstart was nesting over Lynn's car and a swallow over Sacha's. Stories of electric fences in last year's report were recalled as we approached the herd of cows on the hill, but an earlier recce to find the off switch for the fence (and establish the lack of a bull) meant no shocking stories this year.

Large Venus's looking glass and a pair of adonis blues, neatly caught, were two highlights before the track took us past the farm with the barking dog to the road by Bel-Air. There was pale toadflax by the road somewhere near where a man was hosing the white fence around the property nicknamed Dallas.

Beyond La Croix Blanche, the 'wet-my-lips' song of a quail seemed to be coming from the field by the road. An attempt to find it suggested that it was in fact at least one field away. Rather than coming straight back, we then went past where we'd failed to see nightjars. Two roe deer shot across the road to our surprise, and perhaps theirs. Further along we located the man orchids and burnt-tip orchids Ralph had found the other day. Then back for another meal, inside on account of poor weather, and who could forget the banana pancakes?

Thursday 3 June - Rocamadour

The early morning walk took us past Michel's house then along the edge of the wood. An early purple orchid was still in flower by the path. At the far end, just beyond the road, a low lying field had a super show of loose-flowered orchids - our 19th orchid of the week. Though

one up on last year's total, we never found a 20th to match David's group of the previous week.

Coach double bookings sorted we headed north, stopping before Rocamadour at a fabulous area of limestone plateau for more butterflies and flowers including a bank of St Bernard's lily.

This visit to Rocamadour is, unashamedly, to see one of the sights of France: houses, shops and churches somehow part attached to, part hewn from a colossal cliff. Approaching from the top is less tiring but contrary to the pilgrimage role of Rocamadour as we had to follow the 12 stations of the cross in reverse. Further down there is the shrine of *La Vierge Noire* - the black virgin - where most visitors call and many light a candle. Then there are the shops and cafés for a drink before walking, or taking the *ascenseur*, back to the top.

Maurice, the Mayor of the commune of Beaumat, and Brigitte, his wife, joined us for supper at evening. Special mention in despatches must go to Joan and Kate who led the French speaking. As the local farmers, the quality of the local wildlife depends on the continuity of their traditional agricultural methods. This is what brings visitors to Galoubet as they know well, but this must have been reinforced during the course of a lovely evening with a delightful couple.

Friday 4 June - Labastide-Murat

Guy (of *Guy Transportes*) ferried us to Galoubet for a little shopping, sightseeing (the birth place of Napoleon's brother-in-law for one) and a drink in the charming town square. Lynn arrived to take our shopping off us before we started the five-mile walk back to Galoubet on the hottest day so far. After a couple of minor hitches, the whole group was off in the right direction, at least for a while..

Fly, burnt-tip and many other orchids were admired for the umpteenth time. There was an immaculate description of a melodious warbler seen over lunch; up to now we'd only heard its distinctly unmelodious song in the scrub near the Galoubet postbox.

Mavis was proving particularly adept at catching butterflies; beginner's luck, perhaps. This was somewhere near the start of a new road put in by a resident English couple, Alison and Paul. As it wasn't there last time we were setting off in the wrong direction until they rescued us, and in view of the heat most were happy to accept a lift back for an early dip.

Our last supper this warm evening was outside, as so many had been. Lynn took us up to Maurice's house to watch the sun set over the hill. A reasonably tuneful version of 'A Nightingale sang in Berkeley Square' (they were singing, as always) turned into a serious of songs and recitatives as we laughed until late. Finally, during a late stroll, there was a glow-worm in the drive, both tawny and barn owls put in appearances and Scop's owl was heard again.

Saturday 5 June - Galoubet-Toulouse-Gatwick

There was time for a short walk between packing and an early lunch so we headed for the final time past the Mayor's house. Our destiny was the pond in the field, and there it was: a large pool frog, croaking away. Ralph's dragonfly expertise meant we all recognised the broad-bellied chasers; also there were common blue damselfly and emperor dragonfly.

Then lunch, farewells, in Guy and Jean-Claude's safe hands to Toulouse and home.

BIRDS

A total of 78 species of birds was seen or heard on the two holidays combined; the first week's total was 72 and the second 69, both higher than last year's total of 66. The fairly modest differences include the group in week 1 scoring with red kite and red-backed shrike, with those on week 2 seeing barn owl and wood warbler. Species marked with a 1 or 2 were seen only on the first or second week respectively, otherwise they were seen on both weeks.

Highlights are a personal choice but might include the inquisitive black kite (week 1) or wing-clapping honey-buzzards (week 2), but the middle spotted woodpecker nest in the walnut tree took a lot of beating for everyone. Marked in bold, however, are birds that a UK-based birdwatcher might consider special.

Mallard 1	Nightingale
Honey-buzzard	Black redstart
Black kite	Stonechat
Red kite 1	Blackbird
Sparrowhawk	Song thrush
Buzzard	Mistle thrush
Kestrel	Melodious warbler
Red-legged partridge 1	Whitethroat
Grey partridge 1	Blackcap
Quail (heard only)	Bonelli's warbler 2
Coot 2	Wood warbler
Black-headed gull 2	Chiff-chaff
Rock dove/feral pigeon	Spotted flycatcher
Stock dove 1	Long-tailed tit
Woodpigeon	Willow tit
Collared dove	Coal tit 1
Turtle dove	Blue tit
Cuckoo	Great tit
Barn owl 2	Nuthatch
Scop's owl (heard)	Short-toed treecreeper
Tawny owl	Golden oriole
Nightjar	Red-backed shrike
Swift	
Alpine swift	
Hoopoe	Jay
Green woodpecker	Magpie
Great spotted woodpecker	Jackdaw
Middle spotted woodpecker	Carrion crow
Lesser spotted woodpecker (heard) 2	Raven 1
Crested lark	
Woodlark	Starling
Skylark	House sparrow
Crag Martin	Tree sparrow 2
Swallow	
House martin	Chaffinch
Tree pipit	Serin
Grey wagtail	Greenfinch
White wagtail	Goldfinch
Wren	Linnet
Duncock 1	Cirl bunting
Robin	Corn bunting

BUTTERFLIES

Although a number of the larger species such as scarce swallowtail and black-veined white are readily identifiable on the wing it took agility and patience with the butterfly net to put names to the numerous blues and fritillaries. Martin and Keith on week 1 were particularly energetic and this group recorded an estimated 40 species (details on some are still awaited). Week 2 recorded 27 species (marked *), nine of which are additional species (marked **), with rather less effort! 45 species seen during the fortnight are listed below.

- * Swallowtail
- * Scarce Swallowtail
- Small White
- Green-veined white
- Bath white
- * Wood white
- * Black-veined White
- ** Marbled white
- * Orange tip
- * Clouded yellow
- * Pale Clouded Yellow
- * Brimstone
- Cleopatra
- * Southern White Admiral
- * Red admiral
- Painted lady
- * Small Tortoiseshell
- High brown fritillary
- Pearl-bordered fritillary
- * Meadow fritillary
- * Glanville fritillary
- Spotted fritillary
- Marsh fritillary
- Duke of Burgundy fritillary
- ** Niobe fritillary
- ** Knapweed fritillary
- Small heath
- ** Dusky heath
- ** Large heath
- Pearly heath
- * Speckled wood
- ** Meadow brown
- * Wall brown
- Large wall brown
- ** Gatekeeper
- ** Ringlelet
- Green hairstreak
- Small Blue
- * Adonis Blue
- Common Blue
- Idas blue
- ** Black-eyed blue
- Brown argus

Grizzled skipper
Dingy skipper



Other insects

Although no systematic attempt was made to identify the myriad of other insects, several of the more distinctive ones were named. For sheer volume of sound, pride of place must go to the field crickets, while in the air it was the graceful black and yellow lacewings *Ascalaphus libelluloides* that attracted great interest. Then there were the lovely black and red striped shieldbugs sitting on top of cow parsley flowers; they were *Graphosoma italicum*.

Week 1 recorded hummingbird hawk-moth; other day flying moths included 6-spot burnet, cinnabar moth and latticed-heath moth (week 2). Ralph's dragonfly expertise on week 2 meant we all recognised broad-bodied chaser by the week's end; common blue damselfly and emperor dragonfly were also noted near the pool frog pond.

PLANTS

The Lot region has a mosaic of small fields, scrub, scree, woodland, rocky outcrops and valley meadow and therefore with this rich diversity of habitats a rich flora could be expected. An impressive total of some 300 species were recorded, including several new to the *Honeyguide* list for the area.

Highlights were many, and a few that come to mind include: meadows of sainfoin and meadow clary; showy field gladioli and tassel hyacinths with its top-knot of purple flowers; ivy broomrape on the ivy at St Cirq; the beautifully simple crimson flowers of brown vetch; the rolled petals of Nottingham catchfly. A long standing mystery was solved on week 2 when the centuary *Centaurea conifera* was identified with the help of flowers and the distinctive cone-like seed head side by side, and the assistance of Polunin's Flowers of SW Europe.

But the orchids, as always, stole the show. The previous year, 18 orchid species were found, all of which were seen again by the first group, and those marked * by the second.

* Bee orchid	* Man orchid
Early spider orchid	* Lizard orchid
* Fly orchid	* Twayblade
* Early purple orchid	* Lesser butterfly orchid
* Lady orchid	* Red helleborine
* Military orchid	* Narrow-leaved helleborine
* Burnt-tip orchid	* Broad-leaved helleborine
Monkey orchid	Dark red helleborine
* Violet birdsnest orchid	* Pyramidal orchid

The first group added these two species; both groups saw the birdsnest orchids close to Maison Meulet.

Greater butterfly orchid	* Birdsnest orchid
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The second group added a further three species, bringing the area list to 23!

** Common spotted orchid	** Early marsh orchid
** Loose-flowered orchid	



Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux

Association reconnue d'utilité publique

Dear Holidaymaker,

By joining Chris on his Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays, you are helping our national campaign "*Créez un refuge LPO chez vous*" (Create a LPO haven for wildlife on your land). We greatly appreciate your support in this action.

What exactly is a *Refuge LPO* ? It can simply be a garden, a field for horses or perhaps several hectares in an area of marshland or woodland, which the owner, a member of the LPO, has decided to protect and not to shoot over nor to let anyone else.

The purpose of this haven is to give animals, and in particular birds, a place of peace and quiet. *La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux* advises, guides and gives legal assistance to its members who wish to create a wildlife haven.

This action would be very simple if in France the law protected those who choose not to shoot. The *Verdeille* law (1964), applies in 29 out of 96 *départements* (equivalent of a large county), does not allow landowners of 20 ha (up to 60 ha in some *départements* !) or less (dry land) or 3 ha or less (marsh) from preventing shooting over it by someone else.

More simply put, in certain parts of France you cannot stop hunters shooting on your land !

This national campaign of "*Créez un refuge LPO chez vous*" has another objective, which is to get this undemocratic law repealed. The LPO has, therefore, invested in the long term issue by giving legal assistance for their members to create wildlife havens and in lobbying the government and members of parliament.

In 1991 we thought we had won, 150 members of parliament supported our argument. The hunters, however, managed to put a block on it. The *Office National de la Chasse* (the official hunting office) lies within the Ministry of the Environment. So it is a complex and difficult situation !

Thanks to you, and with our members, we will continue this work of gaining respect of the right of property and the natural environment.

Once again many thanks and *vive l'Europe*.

Yours sincerely

Jackie CHEVALLIER
Refuges department