

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Cévennes reccy 20 – 24 October 2008

These are some notes from a reccy visit to the Cévennes by Robin and Rachel Hamilton, their daughter Nell, and Chris Durdin. The purpose of the visit was to check several elements of the programme for June 2009. One of these was to stay in our hotel for the holiday, the Hotel la Gare aux Ânes (<http://lagareauxanes.free.fr>), near Nant, which was being restored during Robin and Rachel's most recent visit in June 2008, and very good it was too.

This isn't the usual full holiday report, rather a summary of where we went (written by Robin and Rachel) and some wildlife lists (collated by Chris), as much as anything for our own interest to record what we saw, well out of the usual holiday season for this area. After a warm arrival at Rodez airport, the weather was rather wintry, as the list of just two butterfly species illustrates; the landscape was coloured with an autumnal palette. The flower list should be read with that caution in mind: these were either last lingering blooms, or flowers on roadsides where plants had been cut, and had re-grown and flowered.

Pictures by Chris Durdin, all taken during the reccy. Above: autumn colours at Cantobre.

Day 1: Monday 20 October, arrival

Arrived Rodez airport, clear and sunny; headed for junction with A75 towards Millau; stopped for tea/coffee at Hotel de la Gare, Severac le Chateau; A75 towards Millau; stopped at Aire de Vision for the Millau Viaduct; over the viaduct, across the Causse du Larzac leaving at junction 48 for Gare aux Ânes. Dinner: onion soup or leek and Roquefort tart, dorade, puds and cheese.

Day 2: Tuesday 21 October, Nant, down Gorges de la Dourbie, Gorges de la Jonte Causse Méjean and Radio Mast

Very low cloud, rain, generally horrid weather. Nant: visited information centre; drove down River Dourbie to Cantobre. Brief exploration of Cantobre – weather improving. Continued down R Dourbie to la Roque Ste Marguerite: quick look at Hotel des Gorges, steep drive from la Roque up onto Causse Noir. Weather had cleared and good views; brief stops – first on top, looked at buzzard in pine, second at viewpoint on road down into the Jonte Valley overlooking Peyreleau and le Rozier; Italian Maple *Acer opalus*. Stopped to buy lunch in le Rozier. Up Gorges de la Jonte to vulture centre and viewing point at le Truel; continued up gorge then drove up onto Causse Méjean; over Causse Méjean to Aven Armand: short stop to look at facilities and for coffee. Further across cause Méjean to see Przewalski's horses (*below*), also finding hen harrier; returned over cause and down towards Meyrueis: stopped to photograph hyssop and hare's ear. Brief exploration of Meyrueis; drove up over Causse Noir then down to Trèves; along the Trévezel to Cantobre; up onto Causse Begon to Radio Mast. Late afternoon (rather dull) view over the Dourbie valley and Causses towards Mt Aigoual; brief exploration of grassland; returned to Gare aux Ânes via Nant. Dinner at Auberge L'Agora, at Sauclières: salad and pizza.

**Day 3: Wednesday 22 October, Sauclières for dinosaur footprints, up Gorges de la Dourbie to Dourbies, on to the Mont Aigoual massif, Nant, River Walk from Nant to Val de Cantobre campsite**

More nasty weather; visited quarry office for dinosaur footprints and info; over the river and up to Dourbies and on to summit of Mont Aigoual; intermittent views but very cold and misty; nothing open. Stopped at National Park Information Centre (excellent exhibits on lichens and fungi). Stopped at river bridge below Dourbies (dipper, grey wagtail); returned to St Jean on other side of the river. Back to Nant, tea/coffee in the square. Weather improved so drove across Nant bridge and along track and then Robin drove to other and of the path and Chris, Rachel and Nell followed river path through wood beside Dourbie to 'Camping Val de Cantobre'. Returned to Gare aux Ânes for dinner: magret salad, duck, cheese and puddings.

Day 4: Thursday 23 October Causse du Larzac, la Couvertoirade, more Causse du Larzac, Lapanouse de Cernon, Roquefort

Clearer weather; first stop on cause du Larzac at track leading to 'pine' tree; second stop on Causse du Larzac: followed nature trail to *lavogne* – a lined pond for livestock. La Couvertoirade (*right*): brief tour then lunch. Third stop on Causse du Larzac beyond la Couvertoirade; crossed A75, through Ste Affrique, Ste Eulalie de Cernon and Lapanouse de Cernon to derelict station at Lapanouse; explored tracks to find route into hidden 'orchid' valley. Drove down Cernon valley to



Roquefort; sampled 'visite' to the Caves of Gabriel Colet – useless; visited showrooms of Papillon Roquefort – much more promising; explored Roquefort village to recce potential parking. Headed back by the direct route passing slate scree reminiscent of ammonite sites: scabbled about and found some. Returned to Gare aux Ânes for dinner: vegetable soup, steak in Roquefort sauce, puddings and cheese.

Day 5: Friday 24 October, St Jean de Bruel, Jassenove, Millau, Rodez and Home

Clearer again; electrics shop in St Jean de Bruel for online check-in. Brief exploration of St Jean; followed north side of Dourbie through Dourbias to Nant then drove up onto the Causse du Larzac, through Montredon: stopped at *lavogne*. Drove on to look at Ferme Auberge Jassenove; stopped at *buissière* – a box hedge alley protecting a winter path (*right*) – and walked 100yds or so down it and back; main road closed so took hairpins down from St Martin du Larzac to Millau. Lunch from take-away; returned to A75, Severac le Chateau, Rodez and home.



Species lists

BIRDS

Cormorant
Grey heron
Mallard
Griffon vulture – the reintroduced population is doing well and small groups were seen regularly
Short-toed eagle – a late bird over the Causse Méjean
Hen harrier – two 'ringtails' (females/immatures)
Sparrowhawk
Buzzard – common
Kestrel
Peregrine
Red-legged partridge
Feral pigeon
Collared dove
Green woodpecker
Great spotted woodpecker
Woodlark
Skylark – flocks on lucerne stubbles
Crag martin – several in Cantobre
Meadow pipit
Grey wagtail
White wagtail
Dipper
Wren
Robin
Black redstart - abundant
Wheatear
Stonechat

Blackbird
Song thrush
Mistle thrush – several small flocks
Blackcap
Chiffchaff
Goldcrest
Firecrest
Long-tailed tit
Blue tit
Great tit
Coal tit
Nuthatch
Southern grey shrike – Causse Méjean
Jay
Magpie
Jackdaw
Carrion crow
Raven
Chough – quite common, with flocks in several places
Starling
House sparrow
Chaffinch
Serin
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Linnet
Hawfinch
Cirl bunting – quite common and some were still singing

INVERTEBRATES

A hoverfly that mimics a hornet: *Milesia crabroniformis* (right)

Large white butterfly
Clouded yellow

Red-winged grasshopper
Blue-winged grasshopper
Field cricket

Graphosoma italicum – a black and red shield bug
(below, left)

Lygaeus equestris – a black and red ground bug
(below, right)



MAMMALS

Wild mammals

Badger
Roe deer

Other interesting mammals

Brebis sheep – abundant on the *cause*
Aubrae cattle
Przewalski's horses – a herd from captive stock
established on the Causse Méjean prior to
reintroduction to the Mongolian steppes.

PLANTS

Those listed below were all in flower. Common UK flowers, eg scarlet pimpernel, white melilot, mostly not included.

Mountain sesili – *Sesili montanum*
Wild carrot
Field eryngo
Cévennes hare's ear

Harebell
Globularia

Striped toadflax *Linaria repens* (= *L. striata*) (right, above)

Ivy-leaved toadflax

Small toadflax *Chaenorhinum minus*

Chaenorhinum *Chaenorhinum organifolium*

Aaron's rod *Verbascum thapsus* ssp *crassifolium*

Hoary mullein *Verbascum pulverulentum*

Viper's bugloss



Yellow woundwort (right, below)

Thyme

Hyssop (bottom)

Common scabious

Small scabious

Pale scabious *Cephalaria leucantha*

Pyrenean (= hedgerow) cranesbill

Round-leaved cranesbill

Heather

Chicory



Ferns

Rustyback

Maidenhair spleenwort

Common polypody

Wall rue

Bracken

Selected interesting (or abundant) trees and shrubs

Italian maple *Acer opalus*

Montpellier maple

Field maple

Juniper

Box

Dogwood

Smoke tree

Spindle

Downy oak

Scots pine

Black walnut (planted)

