

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Flowers and birds in the Dordogne
10 – 17 May 2007

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Holiday participants

Pamela Ive

Jenn Milne

Ian Milne

Stan Lovett

Susan Staniforth

Richard Beswetherick

Sandra Beswetherick

Val Appleyard

Ron Fitton

Jenny Loring

Tom Wiseman

Colin Leggat – joined us on three days

Leader

Chris Durdin

It's a great pleasure to include in this holiday report the cover picture of 'Orchids of the Dordogne' plus several fine line drawing of orchids, all by group member Sue Staniforth. Cover picture, clockwise from top left: long-lipped serapias, lizard orchid, fly orchid, pyramidal orchid and woodcock orchid. The wryneck illustration is by Szabolcs Kokay from Gerard Gorman's *Woodpeckers of Europe* (Bruce Coleman Books) and reprinted here with their kind permission. Other illustrations by Rob Hume.

Report written by Chris Durdin.

Our hosts at Castang: Cathy and Keith Parker www.castang.info

This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. The conservation contribution this year of £25 per person towards the 'Refuges LPO' project was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust, leading to a total of €490 (£338). This was added to contributions through holidays in the Camargue and French Pyrenees making a total this year of £1228 (€1780) sent to La Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO, the French Bird Protection League).

This brings the total given to LPO to £10,064 (€14,560) since 1991. The total conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 was at £47,863 (roughly €69,400) at the end of June 2007.

The printed version of this holiday report includes a complete flower list (on an excel file and not included on this web version), which is available from the Honeyguide office.

Flowers and birds in the Dordogne 10 – 17 May 2007

Thursday 10 May – arrival at Castang



It was a smooth Ryanair flight for eight of us, stepping out onto the hot tarmac at Bergerac – 28°C, we heard. After Stansted's scale and security – like no liquids and shoe scans – the simple arrivals shed at Bergerac was appealing, especially the low-tech hatch and sloping rollers from which to retrieve our luggage. But posters on a wall showed expansion plans, and they've cottoned onto car park charges now. Gilles, our driver for the week, was there and he took us on a scenic back route to avoid road works, but still just an hour's journey. Two black kites at the airport turned into a steady sprinkling along the way.

Meadow clary and pyramidal orchids hinted at the botanical richness of Castang's meadow as we arrived, to be warmly greeted by Cathy, Keith and Olivia. A woodlark was singing as we found our rooms and met up with Ian, Jenn and Stan who'd flown from Southampton three hours earlier. There was time to unpack and have a potter, locate half a dozen orchid species and note swallowtails and the odd hornet.

The food is always a great feature of stays at Castang. Following aperitifs we were soon enjoying five courses: homemade tomato soup, cheese omelette, chicken & courgettes, a choice of six cheeses and apple & almond pie.

Friday 11 May – around Castang

There was an excellent turnout of nine people for the pre-breakfast birdwatching walk, today at 7:45, despite grey skies and thunder heard last night. A serin at Castang was in song flight and a firecrest was singing too, but only glimpsed. A potter round local lanes found a girl bunting, singing nightingale and blackcap. Then back just after 8:45 for a hearty breakfast of bread, boiled eggs and croissants.

Setting off at 10 – our usual departure time – today we were on foot for a short circuit via Lagrave village. Starting in the Castang drive we admired the fine growth of rustyback ferns on the wall and wild flowers like hedge bedstraw and bladder campion mingling with planted irises. Past the Indian bean and cherry trees we took in a range of wild flowers and studied the red and black 'hogweed bonking bugs', on cow parsley rather than hogweed. Though most of the area is limestone, there are occasional outcrops of more acidic soil, evidenced here by bracken, sweet chestnut and oak. Disturbed ground plants like bugloss and poppies are expected: a patch of cornflowers was an unexpected bonus. A sparrowhawk dashed through, disturbing starlings and white wagtails.



We paused in the sleepy hamlet of Lagrave to look at the restored walk-in oven, village pond and some fine buildings. White and biting stonecrops were growing on roofs where and black redstarts also perched and sang. Beyond the village there was the scratchy, unmelodious song of a melodious warbler. Like they often do, it was perched in full view on a bramble while all admired it. Then Ian – slightly separated from the group – picked up on a distant flying white stork. Back at Castang, Cathy said she'd seen it locally quite recently.

After a generous salad lunch we set off for Coux and the river. Sunshine and clouds came and went, with it generally getting brighter all afternoon. A wall lizard was spotted in a hollow tree before the right turn that led us through a woodland walk. Then it was into an open area where brown argus and swallowtail butterflies were out and about and at least eight black kites. In Coux a serin sang and a carpenter bee buzzed around, harmlessly as these gentle giants typically do. We paused for ice creams at the village shop where a nuthatch fed on the trees nearby, then took a very small detour to look at the church. The floodplain of the Dordogne is typically flat, arable and with little of interest, but that's less true here as we looked at arable plants like henbit dead-nettle opposite espaliers of kiwi – the fruits of which from last year we enjoyed daily back at base. Just before the river there is a frieze of paintings of

fish of the Dordogne, done by Olivia's school. The Dordogne river itself is tree-lined, and we noted a distant black kite going onto its nest in an alder. A common sandpiper flitted across. Keith came to give a lift for two people and several bags, but most did the walk up the road. A paper wasp nest was found down the road from Castang where Keith had been grass cutting, leaving wonderful islands of wild flowers that made it even easier than usual to find orchids including man, tongue and, most surprisingly, two specimens of long-lipped serapias (right).



Tea and chocolate biscuits were served on the terrace. A very pale honey buzzard came through and several of the group prostrated themselves to peer in the hole by the step where a very large common toad lives. The evening routine is an aperitif at 7:30 followed by dinner at 8:00, today pumpkin soup, smoked salmon, beef cooked in rosemary and beans, cheeses and strawberries.

Saturday 12 May – Woodland walk and Limeuil

A promising sign: a male red-shrike appeared, but sadly before the rest of the group gathered at 7.45 near the walnut tree with the blue tits nesting. When the pre-breakfast birders were assembled there was instead a whinchat on a wire and cirl buntings as usual. We walked down the hill, past the old mailbox with a great tit nest in it, and we heard a golden oriole as we walked towards the hamlet of Lingle. In Lingle a strident *pi-pi-pi* alerted us to a wryneck that perched briefly in view above the farmhouse. On the road that leads to the chateau of Cazenac five woodlarks fed on the road. Two hoopoes flew through and one perched on the pyramid-shaped top of a building. A loud nightingale sang for us as we returned. Colin arrived at breakfast to join the group for the next two and half days, having come up from his home in the neighbouring department of The Lot.

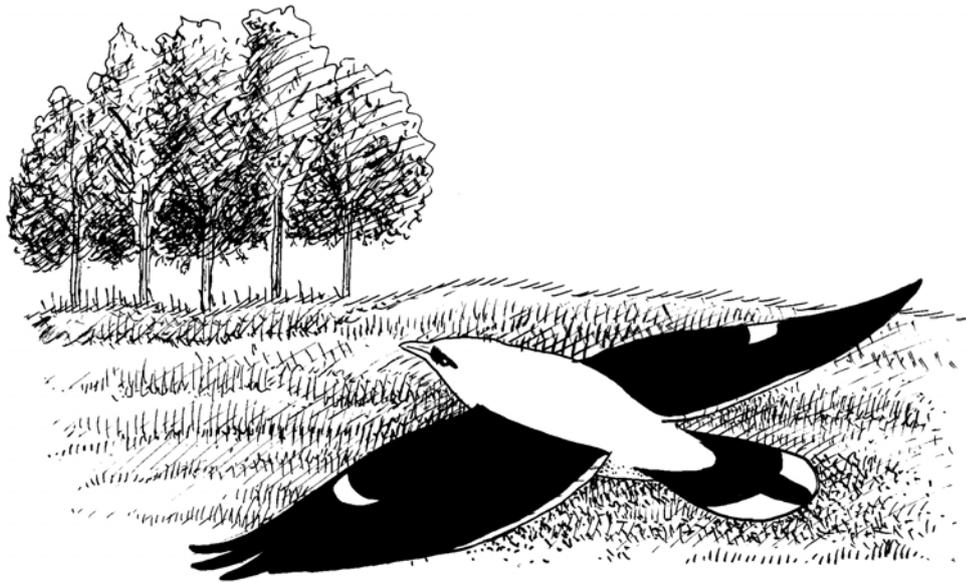
The woodland walk starts all of 10 minutes drive away by Bigaroque. It's a quite country lane with woodland on one's left and an open, though narrow, river valley on the right. Beautiful demoiselles – both male and female – caught the eye, and we heard the fluty tones of a golden oriole. Some spied a red squirrel and everyone saw twayblades and our first ascalaphids. In a shady spot some Nottingham catchfly was still flowering; the petals roll up during the day. A surprise was the southern European pink convolvulus *Convolvulus cantabricus*; no doubt it's always here but flowering earlier than usual due to the long warm April. Fumana and yellow rockrose could be compared growing side-by-side. A micro-moth with extraordinary ling antennae was much appreciated and we even found it in the book: *Nemophora degeerella*. A less obscure moth was the pretty burnet companion. Pearly heaths were on the wing and caught, and we saw orange-tip, many black-veined white and wood white butterflies. Towards the end of the mornings walk we heard the female golden oriole's 'cat call' and the more familiar cuckoo and turtle dove too. A short-toed eagle flew over and we found our first woodcock orchids (left) on the roadside.



Our usual meadow for lunch was in full sun so we found a shady spot opposite. Three new orchids were added here: burnt-tip, loose-flowered and a gone-over lady. Glanville and knapweed fritillaries, small heath, brimstone and common blue were added to the growing butterfly list.

Limeuil, high on the hill above the confluence of the Dordogne and its sister river, the Vézère, is aptly described on its sign as one of the most beautiful villages of France. We were dropped at the top, checked out view and loo there, and walked down through the steeply sloping village to meet Gilles at the car park at the bottom, a descent welcome on a hot day. Observant members of the group noted sand martins going in and out of holes in a wall or saw tree sparrows round the loo at the bottom of the village. Most stopped for an ice cream and a binocular health check before we took the journey, less than half an hour, home.

The male red-backed shrike was there on one of Castang's birch trees as we arrived. Then tea, checklist and later the usual round of aperitifs before our supper of spinach soup, melon and port, beef in Dijon mustard, cheeses, coffee ice cream tart. We were then able to take a look on the screen on Jenny's clever gizmo of some of the digital photos taken so far.



Sunday 13 May – Berbiguières, Two Views Walk, Montalieu Haut and Beynac

An earlier 7.30 start for the pre-breakfast birdwatching walk was rewarded when two golden orioles flew over at Castang and a female red-backed shrike was found. Knowing both male and female shrikes were there is encouraging as Honeyguide groups have not seen them in more recent years, but oddly we didn't see either again, though possibly that was related to poorer weather. We went via Langle again to Cazenac: twice golden orioles flew over, woodlarks and hoopoes showed well again and there were excellent views of nightingale too.

Gilles dropped us in the village of Berbiguières. We popped into the compact but pretty church with its bell-shaped bell tower. The village's death toll from the First World War outnumbered that of the Second World War: no doubt much the same as many villages in France, as in the UK. Many clambering roses add to the village's charm. Just a few yards on and there's a right turn up a wooded side of the hill where we climbed to the crest of the ridge of the 'two views walk' – the second, with Berbiguières behind us, being towards the broad sweep of the Dordogne valley. A white helleborine in bud was an indication of the early season – normally they aren't out or, indeed, found. The field at the top of the track had lots of brown vetch – actually an attractive brick-red – which led us into the meadow with many hundreds of pyramidal orchids plus a lizard orchid (*left*) mostly out in flower,

another early season indicator, as were the mostly gone over spikes of violet birdsnest orchid. Two tree pipits tumbled together in the sky. We walked to the west end of the ridge, a walk dominated by the number of orchids, especially man and pyramidal with a good sprinkling of fly, bee and woodcock orchids plus our one-and-only monkey orchid of the holiday.



Lunch was by the bus the met at the east of the ridge. Dingy skipper and green hairstreak were found as we picnicked. Walking down the road off the ridge we found birdsnest orchids among the trees, plus butcher's broom and pignut.

Montalieu Haut offers the unusual combination of limestone *causse*-type vegetation and shade, welcome on a hot day. Perhaps the best discovery was the Mediterranean species blue houndstongue *Cynoglossum creticum*; other plants included Mediterranean buckthorn, the pretty (despite its name) bastard balm, wild candytuft, Montpellier maple and the leaves of the lungwort *Pulmonaria longifolia*. Near the bottom was the yellow pea with silvery leaves called argyrobium – another from the Mediterranean flora. We caught a southern white admiral and many Adonis blues were feeding on mud near the bus, which met us at the bottom of the downward slope.

The stunning, if touristy village of Beynac was on route home, so we paused for a drink in a river side café. Crag martins and jackdaws flew around the

cliffs but alpine swifts were just distant dots.

After supper – leek and potato soup, pork terrine & tomatoes, salmon in hollandaise sauce, cheeses, apple tart – our after dinner stroll followed the gentle *poo....poo....poo* of midwife toads to the other end of the hamlet of Castang. A lady called Anne-Marie kindly locked her dogs in the house to let us search her garden, where we found about six of these tiny amphibians, though no males with eggs, and several fine leopard slugs. Venus was shining brightly at first, but soon became covered in cloud, an ominous sign ...

Monday 14 May – Keith’s walk

It rained overnight but happily was dry as we set off with our leader co-opted for the morning, namely Keith, which gives us a chance to see his favourite walk and to get some insights into the buildings and way of life round here.

We went through the meadow in the field opposite the end of the Castang drive and stopped to look at the ancient *pigeonnier* or dovecote. It’s an elegant beautiful building but in poor repair. They are often set well away from the house or farm buildings partly due to pigeon droppings (that are used as manure) but also as an architectural feature.

We walked into the woods where there is an *abreuvoir*. A sign on this stone structure across the course of a stream, today dry, says: “*Les vanes amovibles servaient de régler la hauteur de l’eau*” – movable dropboards used to regulate the flow of the water – and they also used to hold water in it for livestock.

Beyond the *abreuvoir* in the woods there were lady and fly orchids (*right*) and narrow-leaved helleborines and the leaves of lungwort and wild service tree were noted. We turned into a small quarry where sand had been extracted to help fix the pylons running through here, and noted fossils in the rocks. Tile types were debated and we watched a whitethroat and a melodious warbler, the latter in Christmas trees. The final stone structure as we neared home was a *laverie*, designed for communal washing and stock watering, and now populated by frogs and newts.

It rained over lunch but was fine enough a little later on the ‘free’ afternoon to tempt a few birdwatchers to repeat the first morning’s walk via Lagrave. We were rewarded with super views of a common redstart – or ‘real’ redstart as we preferred: ‘common’ doesn’t quite do it justice – and a hobby.

More rain, so apertifs were inside, before dinner of carrot soup, mixed starter with fried goats cheese, beef and green beans, cheeses and almond cake. Talk of the A-Z of songs with birds in them noted in last year’s holiday report led onto an A-Z of songs about flowers – though those on the afternoon walk had already started to puzzle over these so had a head start. And here are some of them, in the hope that posterity is again grateful.

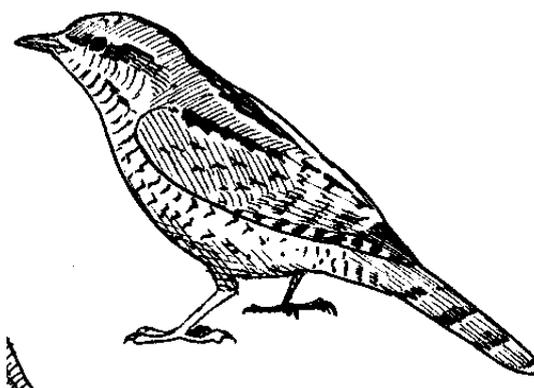
The Ash Grove
Banana boat song
Cherry ripe
Daisy daisy
Eidelweiss
Flower of Scotland; Figgy pudding; Forget me not
Kookaburra sits in the old Gum tree; English Country Garden
Misalliance by Flanders & Swann about the Honeysuckle and the birdweed
Holly and the Ivy
Jennifer Juniper
K – failed!
Lavender’s blue; Lily Marlene
Here we go round the Mulberry bush
I had a little Nut tree; here we go gathering nuts in May
Oranges and lemons
A lovely little Petunia in an onion patch; Lonesome Pine
Quince in Owl and the Pussycat



Ring a ring of **R**oses; **N**ew **R**ose; Green grow the **R**ushes oh (and others)
Strawberry fields forever; **S**trawberry fair; parsley sage rosemary and thyme in Scarborough Fair
Tea for two; **T**ulips from Amsterdam
Underneath the spreading chestnut tree
Roses are red, **V**iolets are blue
Tit **W**illow (the only nomination also on the birds A-Z!)
Oh **X**mas tree
Yellow rose of Texas
 And various doubtful attempts to make **Z**ing went the strings of my heart(sease) vaguely botanical.

Tuesday 15 May – Le Bugue and the Cave Walk

Blue sky and the redstart was again in Lagrave before breakfast, accompanied by a fine wryneck. The supporting cast in song was pretty good too: nightingale and melodious warbler. Starling juveniles had suddenly appeared yesterday; this morning we saw one disappear in the talons of a kestrel.



It's a longstanding tradition of these holidays in France that we visit a local town on market day and so the pretty and compact town of Le Bugue was today's destination. But we started we some natural history on the hill overlooking the town. White flax was flowering on the steep slope by the road. The trees are quite open so when a trill alerted us to a Bonelli's warbler we were all able to see it well, which can be quite difficult, as for any leaf warbler. We found ivy broomrape as we walked down the hill towards the town: broomrapes are always tricky but the host plant and yellow stigma lobes make this one easier than most.

The market has an attractive mix of food and gifts with many of the former available for tasting. Pam acquired a splendid red beret ready for an up-and-coming beret party. Down the stairs by the bridge and there's a short walk along the Vézère river to a large picnic site, which we shared with some very well-behaved schoolchildren. Sand martins nest in a wall by the river and little ringed plover, common sandpiper and grey wagtail were seen by various group members.

This afternoon's walk was another orchid-rich path by open woodland: lots of woodcock, fly and greater butterfly orchids especially. But it was a bit cool for butterflies, though happily staying dry, and we were quite quickly to the meadows at the top of the wood. These are our reliable site for long-lipped serapias, which were there, though less remarkable this year with their discovery at Castang, plus lots of yellow rattle and sulphur clover. One field was cut but the stronghold here for the other unusual orchid, sombre bee orchid, is along a fence line and there were many, albeit mostly going over with this year's early spring. Great patches of the peculiar scorpion vetch – another Mediterranean species – were a feature here too.

Most of the group visited the Gouffre de Proumeyssac, a spectacular underground crystal cavern. Sure, it's a tourist spot and the light and sound show is a slightly corny to start with, but the commentary from a guide in French or in English through earphones most thought excellent. It began to rain as we drove home. Dinner was vegetable soup, pastry parcels with ham, cheese or spinach in sorrel sauce, and *confit de canard*.

Wednesday 16 May – Font de Gaume and Roque St Christophe

Rain meant no pre-breakfast walk but it was drying off steadily as we headed for Les Eyzies. We had half an hour to walk along a roadside path under some of the many cliffs of this area, from where our first peregrines of the holidays flew round, a pair, plus crag martins. We were at Font de Gaume by 11:00 for our pre-booked 11:30 tour. First one has to take a short but steep walk up a slope to the cave's entrance and botanical-rich it is too, including pink convolvulus *Convolvulus cantabrica* (another Mediterranean plant), yellow woundwort, Mediterranean buckthorn, Montpellier maple, holm oak, woodcock orchids, white rockrose and bloody cranesbill. Our husky-voiced English-speaking female guide was as strict as they come about not touching the cave walls, but this is well-founded and

reinforced the sense of privilege of seeing cave paintings from 14,000 years ago. The elegance and accuracy of bisons and reindeer, for us seen with the benefit of artificial light, remains breathtaking and mysterious. Was it one artist or many? is just one of many unanswered questions. And for how long will it be possible to see these at first-hand – rather than as a Lascaux-type facsimile – one wonders?

It remained cool but dry as we moved to Roque St Christophe where we picnicked under cover. A firecrest sang in the trees. A short walk took us to a viewpoint over the valley and the cliffs in which the holes from the former troglodyte habitations can be seen. Basil thyme and the tiny bur medick *Medicago minima* were found. Jenn then left the group to take the tour of the site – she said it was very good, especially the reconstruction of the medieval village on the cliffs – while the rest of us went in search of natural history. The meadow here held two new orchids, military and common spotted, and it was just warm enough for a fine marsh fritillary to be emerging, yet still.

A short walk along a wooded path led to a dry limestone slope where several tiny bug orchids had their first flowers. Berger's clouded yellow was in flight as was a grizzled skipper, probably Oberthur's grizzled skipper.

In the meantime Gilles had made an enquiry and was able to take us to the exact part of the cliffs where the peregrines were nesting and we enjoyed fine views. Two pairs in one day? No, as we stopped again a short way along the return road at Maison Forte de Reignal where there was a *third* pair – and easy-to-see chicks in the nest. The hillside here was pinky-purple with dame's violet flowers.

There was pink champagne for aperitifs and Pam wore the splendid red beret she'd bought in Le Bugue for our final meal (mixed vegetable soup, seafood terrine, chicken in tarragon sauce). Limericks were traded and we collected everyone's nominations for highlights of the week, which were as follows:

Ian: Bonelli's warbler; young peregrines; when Keith came rushing in with the news that the Ospreys (a rugby team!) had won the Celtic League!

Sue: the meadow at the start of the two views walk; catching a cream spot tiger moth while listening to nightingales and midwife toads.

Pam: the common redstart – no, 'real' redstart is better – in the rain

Sandra: sound of the midwife toads; close-up view of a nightingale.

Ron: peregrine chicks; wall paintings at Font de Gaume; decent coffee.

Val: midwife toads; peregrine chicks, wild flower meadows; robin outside her room.

Richard: peregrine, whinchat, 'real' redstart, wryneck; sound of nightingales; sound of the midwife toads; Font de Gaume.

Jenny: flowering lizard orchid; bison, reindeer and mammoth at Font de Gaume; peregrine chicks.

Jenn: hoopoe; ascalaphid; Sue catching moths on Ian's bed.

Stan: meadow on the two views walk; Bonelli's warbler.

Tom: lush hay fields filled with flowers he knew as a child; honey-coloured sulphur clover; wryneck last seen 40 years ago on the Suffolk coast.

Chris: 'real' redstart – a mystery solved; Castang's meadow; Pam's beret; Sue's paintings.



Thursday 17 May – Castang and home

Rain, rain, rain. Rain stopped the pre-breakfast walk again and it continued so steadily there was no point in going out this morning, so we sat tight until departure time: mid-morning for the Southampton contingent and after lunch for the rest. A nuisance, but thank goodness it hadn't done this any of the other days. Black kites were still hunting over Bergerac's airfield. The flights were on time and we were back at Stansted ahead of schedule.

WILDLIFE LISTS

BIRDS (H = heard only)

Grey heron
White stork
Mute swan
Mallard
Honey buzzard
Black kite
Short-toed eagle
Sparrowhawk
Buzzard
Kestrel
Hobby
Peregrine
Pheasant
Moorhen
Little ringed plover
Common sandpiper
Feral pigeon
Woodpigeon
Collared dove
Turtle dove
Cuckoo
Tawny owl H
Nightjar
Swift
Alpine swift
Hoopoe
Wryneck
Green woodpecker
Great spotted woodpecker
Woodlark
Tree pipit
Skylark
Sand martin
Crag martin
Swallow
House martin
Grey wagtail
White wagtail
Wren
Dunnock
Robin
Nightingale
Black redstart
Common redstart
Whinchat
Stonechat
Blackbird
Song thrush
Mistle thrush
Cetti's warbler
Melodious warbler
Whitethroat
Blackcap
Bonelli's warbler
Chiffchaff
Firecrest

Long-tailed tit
Coal tit
Blue tit
Great tit
Nuthatch
Short-toed treecreeper H
Golden oriole
Red-backed shrike
Jay
Magpie
Jackdaw
Carrion crow
Starling
House sparrow
Tree sparrow
Chaffinch
Serin
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Cirl bunting

Mammals

Rabbit
Hare
Red squirrel
Shrew sp (dead)
Wood mouse
Mole (dead)
Hedgehog (dead)
Wild boar (rootings)
Pipistrelle sp
Lesser horseshoe bat

Reptiles and amphibians

Grass snake
Wall lizard

Palmate newt
Pool frog H
Common frog
Edible frog
Midwife toad
Common toad

BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail
Scarce Swallowtail
Black-veined White
Large White
Small White
Green-veined White
Orange-tip
Pale Clouded Yellow
Clouded Yellow
Berger's Clouded Yellow
Brimstone
Cleopatra
Wood White

Green Hairstreak
Small Copper
Small Blue
Brown Argus
Adonis Blue
Common Blue

Southern White Admiral
Peacock
Red Admiral
Painted Lady

Glanville Fritillary
Knapweed Fritillary
Heath Fritillary
Marsh Fritillary
Spotted Fritillary

Meadow Brown
Small Heath
Pearly Heath
Speckled Wood
Wall

Dingy Skipper
Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper (probably)

MOTHS – mostly day-flying

* nocturnal

British checklist numbers given from Waring & Townsend

169 6-spot burnet moth
1690 Small blood vein *
1709 Satin wave
1742 Yellow shell
1867 Treble bar
1894 Latticed heath
1906 Brimstone (moth)
1937 Willow beauty *
1937a Feathered beauty
Carpet sp (common?)
1968 Yellow belle
1994 Buff-tip *
2028 Pale tussock

2058 Cream-spot tiger *
2060 White ermine *
2063 Muslin
2089 Heart & dart *
2147 Shears
2192 Brown-line bright-eye
2194 White point *
2284 Grey dagger *
2291 Coronet *
2380 Treble lines
2463 Burnet companion

Micro-moths (from Chinery)

Nemophora degeerella
(v. long antennae)
Spindle ermine (caterpillar/tent)

Dragonflies & damselflies

Beautiful demoiselle *Agrion virgo*
Emperor dragonfly

Other insects

Ascalaphid *Libelluloides longicornis*
Paper wasp *Polistes gallicus*
Ruby-tailed wasp
Hornet
Violet carpenter bee
Bee-fly sp
Ichneumon fly sp
Great diving beetle
Graphosoma italicum Hogweed bonking bug
7-spot ladybird
Field cricket
Green bush cricket
Meadow ant

Other invertebrates

House centipede *Scutigera coleoptrata*
Crab spider *Misumena vatia*
Slug *Arion ater*
Leopard slug *Limax maximus*