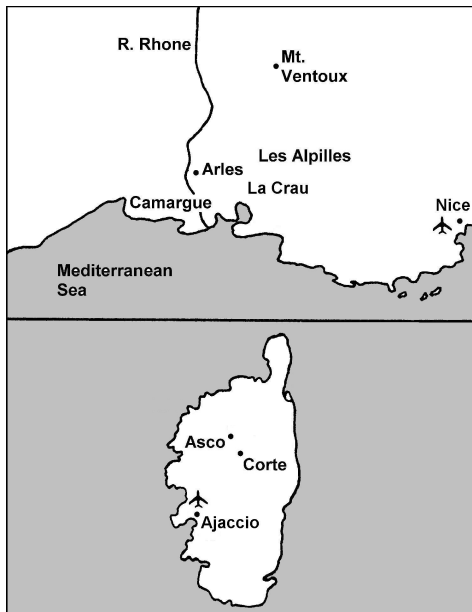


CAMARGUE AND CORSICA

two beautiful destinations in one exciting trip



French folklore and literature are strewn with tales and references to the wild white horses, the gypsies and the fighting bulls for which the Camargue is famed. The most discerning birdwatcher will, however, find that the region has even more to offer. There is a very satisfying range of habitats, from reedbeds and marshes to open stony plains. Add to these riparian woodland, limestone hills and imposing mountains and you will appreciate why this is one of our most popular destinations.

Breathtaking mountain scenery, scented hillsides, an interesting coastline and unique birdlife combine to make Corsica one of the most attractive Mediterranean islands.

The Camargue and Corsica complement each other perfectly. We will spend five nights at Arles, just north of the Camargue, visiting all the sites we have come to love in this part of Provence. On day six we will catch a flight to Ajaccio, spending three nights at Corte in Corsica's mountainous interior.

ITINERARY

CAMARGUE

Having arrived at Nice we will make the two hour drive to Arles, our base for the first five nights.

We discovered the Hotel des Granges back in 1990. It is in the perfect location for visits to the Camargue, Les Alpilles, La Crau and Mont Ventoux.

During our time here we will spend two days in the famous Rhone delta, the Camargue. The area is dominated by the Etang de Vaccares, a large inland sea. It is nowhere deep, and provides a perfect habitat for wading birds, notably Avocet, Black-winged Stilt and Little Egret, with Kentish Plover in the drier areas. In the southern part of the vast complex of lakes there is a huge colony of Greater Flamingos. The 14,000 pair colony will be a hive of activity at the time of our visit and flights of these wonderful birds will be a regular sight, leaving a lasting memory with all visitors. Equally interesting, if not so spectacular, are the many other birds which breed in this area. Bitterns are heard and occasionally glimpsed as they fly low over a reedbed. Gull-billed, Whiskered and Black Terns can be watched feeding over the marshes. A whole host of species compete for the sound waves including Melodious, Spectacled and Fan-tailed

Warblers. They are, however, drowned out by three of the loudest songsters, Great Reed Warbler, Cetti's Warbler and Nightingale.

Marsh Harriers hunt low over the reedbeds to the concern of nesting ducks, which include Red-crested Pochard, Garganey and Shelduck. For anyone new to foreign birdwatching the sight of large numbers of Little Egrets, Cattle Egrets, Purple Herons and Night Herons with the occasional Squacco Heron or Little Bittern is simply wonderful. That is not to say that the seasoned traveller will not be equally impressed. However, they will probably be more concerned with finding a range of scarce visitors such as Great White Egret, Glossy Ibis, Collared Pratincole, Slender-billed Gull or White-winged Black Tern.

To the east of the Camargue is a stony desert-like area, known as La Crau. Once the delta of the River Durance, the area is now very dry and has been taken over by sheep farmers. Three species of shrike are possible; Red-backed, Woodchat and Southern Grey. Birds of prey are often encountered, the most common being the ubiquitous Black Kite. Common Buzzards, Short-toed Eagles and Montagu's Harriers frequent this area too.

Little Bustards will be seen displaying on a morning visit and we may also see the superb Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, a bird on the very edge of its range. In contrast to the rather pale brown plumage of most birds here, the striking metallic blue Roller and beautiful Bee-eaters will add a welcome splash of colour.

To the north of the Camargue the beautiful limestone hills of Les Alpilles are famous for their ancient remains, particularly the spectacular rock fortress of Les Baux. Set against these impressive remains we will watch superb Alpine Swifts hurtling across the skies. Birds of prey are frequent here and with a little luck we will see Bonelli's and Short-toed Eagles and Egyptian Vulture.

We have rarely failed to find the magnificent Eagle Owls which breed in the area. Luck has been on our side in recent years with the discovery of an Eagle Owl site just 15 minutes from our hotel, where we have been treated to excellent views. Other species typical of this beautiful place include European Nightjar, Crag Martin and Blue Rock Thrush. In the bushes singing warblers include Sardinian, Subalpine and Dartford.

Mont Ventoux is the highest mountain in the area and supports a range of birds quite different from those in the surrounding land. To see all its species you must ascend the full 6262 feet, but fortunately this can be done in the vehicle, as there is a metalled road to the café at the summit. Regular stops on the way up will produce a good variety of birds, some in unusually high densities for this altitude.

The first birds which we will come across may remind us of home and it will be the first time during the week that we will see Common Chiffchaff, Northern Wheatear, Mistle Thrush, Coal Tit, Wren, Dunnock and Chaffinch. The British connection is further emphasized by Crested Tits, Black Redstarts, Crossbills and Woodlarks, but when you see your first singing male Rock Bunting or Western Bonelli's Warbler you will know that this is no British mountain. Citril Finches are one of Mont Ventoux's specialities and are found in very good numbers towards the summit. With a little patience we can normally get good views of this sprightly yellow, green and grey jewel. A superb male Rock Thrush provided what we expected to be the highlight of one trip, until, as we sat having our picnic in a lovely alpine meadow the shout of 'Black Woodpecker!' went up. Sightings of this spectacular species have been obtained on most subsequent visits.

On day six we will leave Arles and fly to Ajaccio on Corsica.

CORSICA

On arrival in Corsica we will make the one and a half hour drive to Corte, our base for the next three nights. From here we will visit nearby mountains and forests, as well as the stunning north coast.

On the doorstep of Corte is the scenically magnificent mountain valley of Restonica. Our excellent hotel nestles at the base of the gorge, providing outstanding scenery in every direction. Equally impressive is the Lammergeier, one of the star birds in this area and we shall spend some time scanning ridges in order to see one. The species is holding its own here, testament to just how rugged and wild these mountains are. Also to be found is the Corsican Citril Finch, a beautiful pine-loving bird which is only found on this island and neighbouring Sardinia and Elba.

Golden Eagles may be seen soaring over distant crags and Red Kites are found throughout the area. Lower down, both Scops Owl and Nightjar can be seen on short evening excursions. In the surrounding villages we will see Italian Sparrow, a localized bird, with an appearance in between House and Spanish Sparrow.

Scenically even more stunning and remote than Restonica, the valley at Asco offers us another chance of those high altitude specialities such as Lammergeier, Corsican Citril Finch, Golden Eagle and Alpine Chough. However, the main prize here is the endemic Corsican Nuthatch which breeds in good numbers in areas of mature Corsican Pine. This smart bird is fairly inconspicuous in behaviour, although its distinctive calls should help us to locate it. Related to both Kruper's and Algerian Nuthatch, this active little bird is found nowhere else in the world.

On one afternoon we will drive to the north coast. Mediterranean Shags sit on rocks by the surf and Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwaters can be seen offshore. Nearby hills are covered in extensive maquis scrub, home to a number of interesting birds. Marmora's Warbler is the prize bird; they should be showing themselves well at the time of our visit. Cirl Bunting, Woodchat Shrike, Spotless Starling, Tawny Pipit, Sardinian Warbler, Stonechat, Turtle Dove and Hoopoe are all likely too.

Finally, on day nine we will drive back to Ajaccio, flying back to the UK via Nice.

PACE

Breakfast will be taken at about 7.30am most mornings. Basic fitness is all that is required. Day long birdwatching excursions will be made and short/medium length walks on the flat will be undertaken regularly. Visits to Les Alpilles and Mt Ventoux will involve some uphill walking, but at a sensible pace.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full-board accommodation is provided, with five nights at the Hotel des Granges, on the outskirts of Arles and three nights at the Hotel Dominique Colonna in Corte. All rooms have en suite bathrooms. Packed lunches will be taken every day.

PRICE INCLUDES

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 13th, ending with breakfast on 21st), soft drinks at meal times, local transport by mini-bus, return flights to Nice, domestic flight to Ajaccio and airport taxes.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flight from Leeds/Bradford to Nice using the scheduled services of Jet2. Outbound flight departs midday, return flight arrives back mid-afternoon. It is also possible to join this trip on direct flights from Manchester and London. Please call for details.

8 nights:	13th to 21st May 2012
Principal leader:	Paul J. Willoughby
Maximum group size:	7 clients with one leader or 13 clients with two leaders
Cost with discount (if you book before 28th January 2012):	£1920 per person sharing
Full Cost:	£2020 per person sharing
Single supplement:	£260
Deposit:	£300