

A Spring in Provence

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report

12th-19th April 2025



Tour leaders David Fairhurst & Emmanuelle Juan

Trip report by David Fairhurst

(Images, clockwise from top left: Greater Flamingo © Mel; Provence Hairstreak © Ann;

Sardinian Warbler © Mel; Provence Orange-tip © Ann)



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Introduction

This tour covered a range of sites including the Camargue, La Crau, and Les Alpilles in search of birds, butterflies, and more besides, taking in some of the best locations for spring wildlife in this south-eastern region of France.

Joining us for the tour were Mel & Ben, Ann, Veronica, and Victoria.

What follows is a daily diary for the week, followed by species list, and gallery.

Day 1, 12th April



With the group arriving relatively early in the day we were at our beautiful hotel by mid- afternoon. Bags were soon dropped off, and we drove a short distance to spend the afternoon wandering through Les Alpilles. Under blue skies and in warm temperatures butterflies were much in evidence, and highlights included Baton Blue, Cleopatra, Green Hairstreak, and both Swallowtail and Scarce Swallowtail. Nightingales sang away whilst a pair of Bonelli's Eagles displayed overhead!

Day 2, 13th April

We headed south today into the wetlands of the Camargue. Our first stop was the flooded areas at Mas d'Agon. As expected, there were birds everywhere! Greater Flamingos fed in the shallow waters whilst Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns hawked up and down. A small group of isolated bushes was home to a heronry and contained many Cattle Egrets but also Purple, Night and Squacco Herons.

The muddy margins were busy with large numbers (160!) of Arctic-bound Wood Sandpiper, and other wading birds included Temminck's Stint, Ruff, and Collared Pratincole. Several Purple Swamphen were spotted lurking on the reedy edge, and many Glossy Ibises flew back and forth low overhead



In the late morning we arrived at the small reserve at La Capeliere. Here we took a short stroll around the visitor trails. The sound of Nightingales was very evident with at least a dozen birds singing their hearts out and some of this typically furtive species even showing well.

Lunch was taken in the nature reserve car park under the watchful eye of the White Storks on their nests, with Great Reed and Grasshopper Warblers singing nearby.



We then took the road that leads to Plage de Piemanson, stopping at promising spots along the way. A brief stop at the Saltpan View Point gave us wonderful views of a pair of breeding Kentish Plover. Further on, the large salt pans held large numbers of Avocet, Greater Flamingo, and Slender-billed Gull. Scanning through the flocks of birds Caspian, Sandwich, and Little Terns were located. A short walk at the end of road revealed a few migrant small birds including Northern Wheatear, Common Redstart, and good numbers of Yellow-type wagtails – Ashy-headed, Blue-headed and Yellow.

Day 3, 14th April

This morning we headed out onto La Crau. We had a very pleasant stroll on this normally barren-looking area – with all the recent rain in the region, it looked more like a meadow. Large numbers of Cattle Egret greeted us, and it wasn't long before we located several Lesser Kestrel, Tawny Pipit, White Stork, Corn Bunting, and several Stone Curlew.



We lunched in Les Alpilles under the pines before taking the track up to La Caume. With the sky brightening there were reasonable numbers of butterflies on the wing, and we had fabulous views of Provence Orange-tip, Baton Blue, Wall Brown, and Bath White. Singing Short-toed Treecreeper were heard but proved difficult to spot, but two Short-toed Eagles on the way back performed much better.

The trackside was good for flowers, and included Sombre Bee and Giant Orchids.

Day 4, 15th April

We headed back into the Camargue today, and started at the freshwater pools and reedbeds at Reserve du Scamandre. We spent the morning exploring the boardwalks and tracks with excellent numbers of flamingos and again masses of various herons - the large heronry here held Cattle, Great White and Little Egrets, and Purple, Grey and Night Herons – it was quite a sight. The shallow pool edges had good numbers of Wood and Green Sandpiper, and plenty more elegant Black-winged Stilt.



We lunched at the reserve centre before heading down to the coast at Saintes Maries de la Mer. Driving the road north from Saintes Maries towards Consecaniere we stopped at



various salt pans and lagoons to enjoy the masses of stunning flamingos and other birds. Gull-billed Terns were roosting on a dry lagoon with Little Tern, Slender-billed Gull, Wood Sandpiper, and yet more Black-winged Stilts.

We parked up and enjoyed a lovely stroll between the lagoons with many (many) more flamingos and also quite a selection of small migrant birds passing through. The latter included male Pied Flycatcher, Whinchat, Chiffchaff, an assortment of subspecies of Yellow Wagtail, and a stunning Woodchat Shrike.

Day 5, 16th April

With completely calm weather we headed back out onto La Crau and spent the morning wandering around this remarkable place. The parking spot held several singing Nightingale, Green Woodpecker, and Fan-tailed Warbler. As we entered La Crau Tawny Pipits and Corn Buntings gave wonderful views. A Hebe Tiger moth was a pleasant surprise.

Small groups of male Little Bustards periodically would get up and fly but were always a wee bit distant, though we did managed to scope a couple on the ground.

Skylarks were singing everywhere, and other birds seen included Stone Curlew, Short-toed Lark, Hoopoe, Southern Grey Shrike, and Lesser Kestrel. The latter breed in the sheep barns that are scattered across the plain.



With a bit of perseverance we eventually located a couple of singing Calandra Larks. These huge larks with striking dark underwings are a very rare breeding bird in France, and are only found here on La Crau.

As we headed back to the minibus a smart female Montagu's Harrier quartered across in front of us.

The afternoon was spent at the world heritage site of Pont du Gard. This impressive Roman aqueduct held good numbers of Crag Martin, with one or two Alpine Swifts whizzing about for good measure. Both Common and Black Redstart were singing in the visitor areas, and a real surprise was a flock of 20 European Bee-eater over the car park as we were leaving.

Day 6, 17th April

Our first stop this morning was at the picturesque hilltop town of Les Baux. We took the footpath below the cliffs, and in the sunshine enjoyed Crag Martin, Alpine Swift, Serin, and Sardinian Warblers. An early Western Marbled White butterfly was lovely to see, and we soon found a stunning pair of Blue Rock Thrush. We had a short time in the town exploring the narrow streets, and taking in the spectacular views.



We lunched at the start of the track at La Caume, and had a short walk, but the weather was cool and cloudy so we decided to head south and into the lowlands, and to Etang des Aulnes. Here we had a fabulous few hours pottering in the lakeside scrub with various butterflies including Baton Blue, Dingy Skipper, and Green Hairstreak.



Flowers included countless Early Spider Orchids and Yellow Bee Orchids. Birds on the Etang included Caspian Tern, Little Gull, Great Reed Warbler in strident song, and hundreds of hirundines. A treat as we headed back to the mini-bus was a large flock (30+) of European Bee-eater feeding from wires along the track, even bashing the bees on the wires – what a sight!

Day 7, 18th April

Today was unashamedly about butterflies. Our weather throughout the week had been mixed, and finally today's was forecast to be very fine. After an early breakfast we travelled east and into the neighbouring department of Var.



The morning was spent in a sheltered forest ride in glorious

sunshine. As a Nightingale blasted its song out we were delighted with over 30 species of stunning butterflies.

Highlights included Southern and Spanish Festoon, Provence Orange-tip, Cleopatra, Brimstone, Southern White Admiral, Nettle-tree Butterfly, and a Camberwell Beauty. One of the main targets was Provence Hairstreak, despite the name a very localised species in France – they kept us waiting, but we visited an old orchard area in the afternoon and were rewarded with at least four individuals. What a day!



Day 8, 19th April

With everybody in the group having late afternoon flights home we were able to steal a few hours back in the Camargue. We visited Mas d'Agon again, and despite the gusty winds saw a lovely selection of birds. Highlights included Purple Swamphen, Red-crested Pochard, and yet more Wood Sandpiper. Two Black Terns were hawking with the Whiskered Terns, and it was great to be able to compare the two species.

We had a hassle-free journey back to Marseille airport, and everybody continued home without incident.

Footnote and acknowledgements

David and Emmanuelle would like to thank everybody for their great company and good humour during the week, and look forward to seeing you all again someday soon.

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SPRING IN PROVENCE 12 th -19 th April 2025									
	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	Butterflies								
1	Mallow Skipper <i>Carcharodus alceae</i>	✓						✓	
2	Dingy Skipper <i>Erynnis tages</i>						✓	✓	
3	Rosy Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus onopordi</i>								
4	Southern Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus malvoides</i>							✓	
5	Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus armoricanus</i>								
6	Sage Skipper <i>Muschampia proto</i>								
7	Red-underwing Skipper <i>Spialia sertorius</i>								
8	Lulworth Skipper <i>Thymelicus acteon</i>								
9	Brown Argus <i>Aricia agestis</i>						✓	✓	
10	Holly Blue <i>Celastrina argiolus</i>							✓	
11	Small Blue <i>Cupido minimus</i>								
12	Green-underside Blue <i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>								
13	Black-eyed Blue <i>Glaucopsyche melanops</i>							✓	
14	Lang's Short-tailed Blue <i>Leptotes pirithous</i>								
15	Long-tailed Blue <i>Lampides boeticus</i>								
16	Short-tailed Blue <i>Cupido argiades</i>								
17	Common Blue <i>Polyommatus icarus</i>						✓	✓	
18	Chapman's Blue <i>Polyommatus thersites</i>							✓	
19	Baton Blue <i>Pseudophilotes baton</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
20	Provence Chalkhill Blue <i>Polyommatus hispana</i>								
21	Small Copper <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓	
22	Provence Hairstreak <i>Tomares ballus</i>							✓	
23	Green Hairstreak <i>Callophrys rubi</i>	✓					✓	✓	
24	Weaver's Fritillary <i>Boloria dia</i>								
25	Pearl-bordered Fritillary <i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>								
26	Marsh Fritillary <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>								
27	Queen of Spain Fritillary <i>Issoria lathonia</i>								
28	Provençal Fritillary <i>Melitaea deione</i>								
29	Glanville Fritillary <i>Melitaea cinxia</i>								
30	Spotted Fritillary <i>Melitaea didyma</i>								
31	Knapweed Fritillary <i>Melitaea phoebe</i>								
32	Small Tortoiseshell <i>Aglais urticae</i>								
33	Large Tortoiseshell <i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>								

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
34	Camberwell Beauty <i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>							✓	
35	Nettle Tree Butterfly <i>Libythea celtis</i>							✓	
36	Peacock <i>Inachis io</i>							✓	
37	Comma <i>Polygonia c-album</i>							✓	
38	Red Admiral <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
39	Painted Lady <i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
40	Scarce Swallowtail <i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>	✓						✓	
41	Swallowtail <i>Papilio machaon</i>	✓						✓	
42	Southern Festoon <i>Zerynthia polyxana</i>							✓	
43	Spanish Festoon <i>Zerynthia rumina</i>							✓	
44	Orange Tip <i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>							✓	
45	Provence Orange Tip <i>Anthocharis euphenoides</i>			✓				✓	
46	Western Dappled White <i>Euchloe crameri</i>								
47	Portuguese Dappled White <i>Euchloe tagis</i>								
48	Black-veined White <i>Aporia crataegi</i>								
49	Berger's Clouded Yellow <i>Colias alfajariensis</i>							✓	
50	Clouded Yellow <i>Colias crocea</i>							✓	
51	Cleopatra <i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>	✓						✓	
52	Brimstone <i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>							✓	
53	Wood White <i>Leptidea sinapis</i>							✓	
54	Large White <i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓	
55	Green-veined White <i>Pieris napi</i>						✓	✓	
56	Small White <i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓	
57	Bath White <i>Pontia daplidice</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
58	Duke Of Burgundy <i>Hamearis lucina</i>								
59	Small Heath <i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			✓			✓	✓	
60	Wall <i>Lasiommata megera</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
61	Speckled Wood <i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
62	Spanish Gatekeeper <i>Pyronia bathseba</i>								
63	Spring Ringlet <i>Erebia epistygne</i>								
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	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	Birds								
1	Great-crested Grebe		✓		✓		✓		
2	Black-necked Grebe								
3	Little Grebe				✓				
4	Great Cormorant		✓		✓	✓	✓		
5	Great Bittern								
6	Grey Heron		✓	✓	✓	✓			
7	Purple Heron		✓		✓				
8	Night Heron		✓		✓				
9	Little Egret		✓	✓	✓	✓			
10	Great Egret		✓		✓		✓		
11	Cattle Egret		✓	✓	✓	✓			
12	White Stork		✓	✓	✓		✓		
13	Glossy Ibis		✓		✓				
14	Greater Flamingo		✓		✓				
15	Eurasian Spoonbill		✓		✓				
16	Mute Swan		✓		✓				
17	Common Shelduck		✓	✓	✓	✓			
18	Mallard		✓		✓	✓			
19	Gadwall				✓				
20	Eurasian Wigeon								
21	Garganey								
22	Common Teal								
23	Northern Pintail								
24	Northern Shoveler		✓		✓				
25	Red-crested Pochard		✓		✓				
26	Common Pochard								
27	Tufted Duck								
28	Red-breasted Merganser								
29	Golden Eagle								
30	Bonelli's Eagle								
31	Red Kite								
32	Black Kite	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
33	Booted Eagle								
34	Short-toed Eagle			✓			✓		
35	Eurasian Marsh Harrier		✓	✓	✓				
36	Eurasian Sparrowhawk						✓		
37	Common Buzzard		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
38	Kestrel		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
39	Lesser Kestrel			✓		✓			
40	Hobby					✓	✓		
41	Red-legged Partridge								
42	Common Pheasant	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
43	Water Rail		✓						
44	Purple Swamphen		✓	✓	✓	✓			

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
45	Common Moorhen		✓		✓				
46	Common Coot		✓		✓				
47	Little Bustard					✓			
48	Pied Avocet		✓		✓				
49	Black-winged Stilt		✓		✓				
50	Stone Curlew			✓		✓			
51	Oystercatcher				✓				
52	Northern Lapwing				✓				
53	Collared Pratincole		✓						
54	Golden Plover								
55	Grey Plover								
56	Ringed Plover								
57	Little Ringed Plover		✓						
58	Kentish Plover		✓						
59	Curlew Sandpiper								
60	Dunlin								
61	Little Stint								
62	Common Snipe		✓		✓				
63	Jack Snipe		✓						
64	Ruff		✓		✓				
65	Greenshank		✓		✓				
66	Common Redshank								
67	Spotted Redshank								
68	Green Sandpiper		✓		✓				
69	Wood Sandpiper		✓		✓				
70	Common Sandpiper		✓						
71	Black-tailed Godwit								
72	Eurasian Curlew								
73	Ruddy Turnstone								
74	Slender-billed Gull		✓						
75	Black-headed Gull		✓		✓				
76	Mediterranean Gull		✓	✓	✓				
77	Yellow-legged Gull		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
78	Sandwich Tern		✓						
79	Caspian Tern		✓				✓		
80	Common Tern		✓		✓				
81	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse								
82	Feral Pigeon		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
83	Wood Pigeon		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
84	Collared Dove		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
85	Eurasian Eagle Owl								
86	Tawny Owl		✓	✓		✓			
87	Little Owl								
88	Alpine Swift					✓	✓		
89	Common Kingfisher								

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
90	Eurasian Hoopoe			✓		✓			
91	Great-spotted Woodpecker			✓		✓	✓		
92	Lesser-spotted Woodpecker								
93	Black Woodpecker								
94	Green Woodpecker			✓		✓			
95	Skylark			✓	✓	✓			
96	Calandra Lark					✓			
97	Crested Lark		✓		✓	✓			
98	Crag Martin					✓	✓		
99	House Martin				✓	✓	✓		
100	Barn Swallow		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
101	Sand Martin		✓		✓	✓	✓		
102	Tree Pipit								
103	Meadow Pipit								
104	Richard's Pipit					✓			
105	Yellow Wagtail				✓				
106	Ashy-headed Wagtail		✓		✓				
107	Blue-headed Wagtail				✓				
108	White Wagtail				✓				
109	Grey Wagtail								
110	Winter Wren								
111	Common Nightingale	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
112	European Stonechat								
113	European Robin								
114	Northern Wheatear		✓			✓	✓		
115	Black Redstart						✓		
116	Common Redstart		✓				✓		
117	Blue Rock Thrush						✓		
118	Common Blackbird		✓	✓		✓	✓		
119	Mistle Thrush								
120	Song Thrush								
121	Cetti's Warbler		✓		✓		✓		
122	Moustached Warbler								
123	Sedge Warbler								
124	Reed Warbler				✓				
125	Common Chiffchaff								
126	Western Bonelli's Warbler						✓		
127	Willow Warbler		✓						
128	Blackcap	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
129	Common Whitethroat					✓			
130	Lesser Whitethroat								
131	Sardinian Warbler	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
132	Subalpine Warbler								
133	Dartford Warbler								
134	Fan-tailed Warbler		✓		✓	✓			

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
135	Firecrest			✓		✓	✓		
136	Crested Tit			✓		✓	✓		
137	Blue Tit				✓				
138	Coal Tit								
139	Great Tit		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
140	Long-tailed Tit	✓							
141	Penduline Tit								
142	Bearded Tit								
143	Pied Flycatcher		✓		✓				
144	Spotted Flycatcher								
145	Eurasian Nuthatch								
146	Short-toed Treecreeper			h	✓				
147	Southern Grey Shrike			✓		✓			
148	Woodchat Shrike				✓				
149	Eurasian Jay	✓		✓					
150	Eurasian Magpie		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
151	Common Raven								
152	Rook			✓					
153	Carrion Crow		✓	✓	✓		✓		
154	Eurasian Jackdaw		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
155	Common Starling		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
156	House Sparrow		✓		✓	✓			
157	Eurasian Tree Sparrow				✓				
158	Chaffinch		✓	✓	✓		✓		
159	Citril Finch								
160	Siskin					✓			
161	European Goldfinch		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
162	Eurasian Linnet		✓						
163	European Serin		✓	✓	✓		✓		
164	Hawfinch								
165	Common Crossbill			✓					
166	Reed Bunting								
167	Rock Bunting								
168	Corn Bunting		✓	✓	✓	✓			
169	Cirl Bunting								
#	Squacco Heron		✓		✓				
#	Common Swift		✓	✓	✓		✓		
#	Temminck's Stint		✓		✓				
#	Gull-billed Tern		✓		✓				
#	Whiskered Tern		✓						
#	Little Tern		✓		✓				
#	Great Reed Warbler		✓		✓				
#	Greenfinch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
#	Short-toed Lark		✓						
#	Tawny Pipit			✓		✓			

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
#	Little Gull				✓				
#	Spectacled Warbler		✓		✓				
#	Wood Warbler		✓						
#	Bee-eater					✓	✓		
#	Montagu's Harrier						✓		
#	Whinchat				✓				

Galleries

All images that follow were kindly shared by tour participants



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Images © Mel



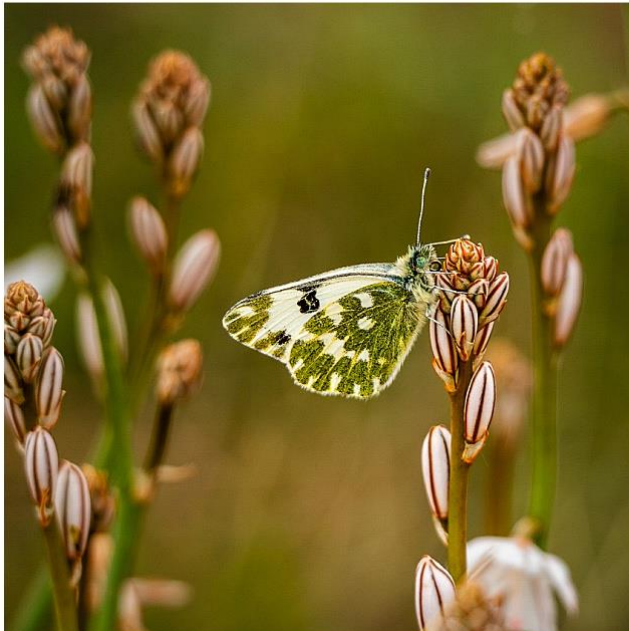
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