

Winter birding in the Mediterranean

This tour covers the French region of Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur – a beautiful area close to the Mediterranean Sea – and the island of Corsica. We visit the limestone hills of Les Alpilles and the wetlands of the Camargue which in winter offer some superb birding for desired species such as Wallcreeper, Citril Finch, Alpine Accentor, Little Bustard and spectacular concentrations of wildfowl from further north and east. This area is bound to produce a few surprises in winter, with recent tours encountering Greater Spotted Eagle and wintering Richard's Pipit. Corsica is located further south in the Mediterranean Sea and offers memorable birding amid some spectacular mountainous landscapes. In particular it hosts two endemic birds: Corsican Nuthatch and Corsican Finch, with other exciting possibilities including Marmora's Warbler, Audouin's Gull and maybe even Bearded Vulture.

Day 1: We take an early morning flight to Marseille and transfer to our base at Beaucaire. En-route we should see our first Little and Great Egrets, White Storks, and birds of prey such as Common Buzzard and Western Marsh Harrier. If time permits we will make an initial exploration of the northern part of the Camargue.

Days 2-4: During our stay we explore three main areas with our daily routine determined by the weather and our success in finding our target species.

We have plenty of time to explore the world-famous Camargue, France's largest wetland. Greater Flamingos are among the most famous inhabitants and are present in good numbers. Wintering species from northern Europe include Ferruginous Duck and Red-crested Pochard, Common Crane and perhaps Bewick's Swan. Raptors include Western Marsh and Hen Harriers, with White-tailed Eagle and Greater Spotted Eagle also occurring on an annual basis. The extensive reedbeds host Eurasian Bittern and Glossy Ibis with passerines including Eurasian Penduline Tit, Cetti's Warbler and, with luck, Moustached Warbler.

Inland from the Camargue is La Crau a steppe-like habitat that is home to groups of Little Bustard and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse. Great and Iberian Grey Shrikes, Eurasian Thick-knee and

Dates

Saturday March 6th – Saturday
March 13th 2021
Leader: Simon Papps
Group Size: 8
Birds: 120-135

Calandra Lark are further possibilities.

Les Baux-de-Provence is a small town dating back to medieval times which is perched on top of a huge rocky outcrop with high cliffs. It is known as a regular wintering site for Wallcreeper, with other possibilities including Alpine Accentor, Eurasian Crag Martin, Black Redstart, Wood Lark, European Serin and Blue Rock Thrush.

On one day we visit the impressive forest and montane habitats of Mont Ventoux. The road passes through areas of forest home to Firecrest, Crested and Coal Tits, Short-toed Treecreeper, Common Crossbill and with luck perhaps the impressive Black Woodpecker. The upper slopes of the mountain above the tree-line offer us Alpine Accentor and the uncommon White-winged Snowfinch. Nearby the Pont du Gard, an ancient Roman aqueduct, is a regular site for Rock Petronia.

Day 5: This morning we return to Marseille and fly to Bastia in the north-east of Corsica. Etang de Biguglia is our first bird-



Black-winged Stilt
 Photo:
 Simon Papps

ing stop. Spotless Starlings and Red Kites should be easily encountered. The lake is important for waterbirds and we should find Tufted Duck and Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes. A few Sandwich Terns can usually be found, whilst we have an excellent chance of seeing Audouin's Gull. Transfer to the old, historic town of Corte, our base for the next three nights.

Day 6-7: Corte is conveniently placed for exploring the mountainous centre of Corsica which is dominated by pine woods, rocky gorges and areas of maquis. Our main interest is in locating the island's two endemic birds: Corsican Nuthatch and Corsican Finch. We also expect to find a selection of woodland species including the local *koenigi* subspecies of Eurasian Wren. In the low maquis scrub we search for Marmora's Warbler and Eurasian Wryneck. The mountains of central Corsica hold a few pairs of Bearded Vulture. Other species we hope to see include Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Golden Eagle, Blue Rock Thrush, Cirl Bunting, Northern Raven, White-throated Dipper and on the highest slopes Yellow-billed Cough. A visit to the coastal lagoons of the east coast should reveal Common Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover. Areas of scrub host Sardinian Warbler, Common Chiffchaff,

Blackcap and perhaps some early returning spring migrants. If there are onshore winds we may see Scopoli's and Balearic Shearwaters and the local race of European Shag.

Day 8: We return to Bastia and fly back to Marseille on the French mainland. In the early afternoon, we fly back to London where the tour concludes.

Prices

Ground Price: £1,995
 Single room: No Charge
 Deposit: £200
 *Air Fare: £320

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation, meals, transport and permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, baggage and credit card charges, items of a personal nature and any relevant fuel surcharges.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*