

**FRANCE: BIRDS & ART  
IN PROVENCE  
APRIL 22–APRIL 30, 2018**



**European Roller, La Crau—photo by Rick Wright**

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## **FRANCE: BIRDS & ART IN PROVENCE**

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**By Rick Wright**

The life of the birder is a life of superlatives: we are always rejoicing in first-ers, in bests, in closests, farthest, fastest. Emotionally and intellectually, we leap from high point to high point, measured against chronological scales ranging from a lifetime to a week's excursion to since-you-got-back-from-grabbing-your-hat-out-of-the-vehicle.

It seems like wherever we turned on this spring's exploration of the natural and cultural history of Provence, we experienced yet another "-est." European Rollers, Eurasian Hoopoes, and European Bee-eaters were among the most-wanted species for several in our congenial and enthusiastic group, and each one performed well—though it took us an unprecedented couple of days to find a hoopoe sufficiently exhibitionist for all of us to watch it together, thus another superlative, the longest-delayed ever for this tour. The last of the three rollers we saw was perched on the very wire where the leaders had seen their first two decades before, making it if not the longest-lived individual of its species then at least the most evocative. Common Nightingales, loud, ubiquitous, and devilishly shy, lived up to their reputation for elusiveness only too well—except for one in the Petite Camargue that sang out in the open (the real, true, genuine open, not the usual "nightingale open" of brief and partial shaded views), becoming by far the best- and longest-seen of any bird of that species ever on this tour. A splendid male Bearded Reedling on the Cacharel Road was not just the first of this reclusive species to be seen on the tour for years but a high finisher in the contest for best views ever; yes, it was a matter of two or three seconds at a time, but each time this long-tailed creature popped up in the phragmites was occasion to see at stunningly close range more of the beautifully varied plumage that makes this one of Europe's most attractive birds.



**The ruggedly spectacular Val d'Enfer, seen from the castle walls of Les Baux—photo by Rick Wright**

The birds were superlative, and so was the experience of birding in the unique cultural landscapes of southern France. The first “lifers” for most of us were at the Pont du Gard, the Roman aqueduct that has graced the covers of elementary French textbooks for what seems nearly as long as it has stood across the rocky river. Our first Short-toed Snake Eagles, Crag Martins, and Alpine Swifts were here; grand birds all, but easily eclipsed by the tour’s only Golden Oriole, a male first heard at discouraging distance, then flying in to land obligingly in the top of a bare tree for lingering scope views. A moving visit to Van Gogh’s room at the psychiatric hospital of St-Paul turned up Eurasian Blackbird, nesting Great Tits, and a too briefly glimpsed but very noisy Green Woodpecker, while just down the road the atmospheric ruins of Les Baux were the setting for our longest and closest views of the lovely little Black Redstart and Blue Rock-Thrush; the impressive test firing of the castle’s trebuchet (complete with medieval water balloons) was a bonus, as was—for a brave few—the windy climb up the castle’s ramparts. Right in Arles, just a few blocks from our hotel, the cemetery of the Alyscamps was home to flute-throated Blackcaps, one of which was sloppy enough to permit great views as he fed above the sarcophagi lining the quiet path.



**A male Black Redstart on the windy cliffs of the Alpilles—photo by Rick Wright**

Culture takes many forms, and we were able to take full advantage of the thriving restaurant scene in Arles and the surrounding countryside, from homely lunch places in St-Gilles and Salin de Giraud to truly fine dining in the city (I only hope that our poor befuddled waitress at Bohème has got it all unraveled by now—happily, her confusion didn't affect the deliciousness of our meals in the least). It would be another judgment of Paris to name favorites, but surely the Jardin de Manon, La Paillotte, Brin de Thym, and the Gueule du Loup occupy the top slots in our lists.



**An especially appetizing appetizer, at the wonderful Jardin de Manon—photo by Rick Wright**

Even as memorable as the food and wine on this year's tour were, our lasting impressions will certainly be of the birds: implausibly colorful Rollers perched for our appreciation at the Etang des Aulnes and in the parking lot of an Arles nursery; elegant Lesser Kestrels and weird-eyed European Stone-curlews on the steppes of La Crau; and dashing Collared Pratincoles and breathtaking Greater Flamingos over the bird-filled marshes of the Petite Camargue.





A young Greater Flamingo on the flats of the western Camargue—photo by Rick Wright

It was obvious at every moment of our tour that Provence has something for everyone: birds, art, culture, history, and a landscape that will always linger in the mind's eye. It was a pleasure to explore this beautiful region with such a cheerful and excited group of friends, and I look forward to the next excursion we make together.

### **ITINERARY:**

**April 22:** In transit.

**April 23:** 7:00 pm introductory meeting in hotel, then dinner at **La Paillotte**, 7:30 to 9:50 pm. Cool (50s F), calm, high clouds.

**April 24:** Breakfast in hotel. 8:15 am departure; Pont du Gard 9:00 am to noon, followed by lunch at **Les Terrasses**, 12:00 to 2:00 pm. Warm (80s F), bright, calm. Arrive hotel 3:00 pm; optional walk to St-Trophime and Arles Arena 4:00 to 5:15 pm. Met for checklist and review 7:00 pm. Dinner at **La Bohême**, 7:45 to 10:20 pm.

**April 25:** Breakfast in hotel. Warm, calm, cloudy. 8:30 am departure; eastern Camargue including La Capelière, Fangassier. Lunch at **La Camargue**, 1:40 to 2:55 pm. Hot (high of 87 F), bright, light winds. Le Verdier at Sambuc 3:10 to 5:10 pm. At hotel 5:30 pm. Met for checklist and review 6:30 pm. Dinner at **Café Malarte**, 7:00 to 9:15 pm.

**April 26:** Breakfast in hotel. Cool (50s F), bright, faint breeze. 8:45 am departure. Les Baux 9:30 am to 12:30 pm. Lunch at **Trois Mages**, 12:30 to 2:50. Glanum and St-

Paul de Mausole 3:10 to 5:00 pm. Warm (high 75 F), bright, very windy starting in the late morning. Met for checklist and review 6:45 pm. Dinner at **Cafe Malarte**, 7:00 to 8:55 pm. Cool (55 F), clear, slight breeze.

**April 27:** Breakfast in hotel. 7:30 am departure. Petite Camargue at Pont des Tourradons 8:25 am to 12:05 pm. Lunch at **Café du Gare**, St-Gilles, 12:25 to 2:05 pm. Warm (high 70 F), bright, light breezes. Adventurous drive to St-Gilles abbey church; crypt and upper church 3:00 to 4:00 pm. Camargue Discovery Center at Scamandre 4:35 to 5:20 pm. Arrive hotel 6:00 pm. Met for checklist and review 7:00. Dinner at **Brin de Thym**, 7:30 to 10:00 pm.

**April 28:** Breakfast in hotel. Arles Market. Alysamps (part of group) 9:00 to 10:10 am. Cool (low 50s F), bright, clouds moving in by 10:00 am. Free time for market, shopping, etc.; lunch on our own. Met at hotel at 12:30. Cacharel Road and western Camargue 1:30 (first van), 2:20 (second van) to 5:00 pm. Warm (68 F), breezy, mostly cloudy. Arrived hotel 5:40 pm. Met for checklist and review 6:45 pm. Dinner at **Jardin de Manon**, 7:30 to 10:05 pm. Clear, cool, breezy.

**April 29:** Early group departed 5:00 am, snacks and drinks, arriving Peau de Meau 5:25 am. Second group, breakfast in hotel, departed 8:00, arriving Peau de Meau 8:45 am. Cool (high 50s F), partly cloudy, wind rising. St-Martin McDonald's 11:05 to 11:35 am; weird lenticular clouds, winds increasing. Baisse des Railles 11:40 to 12:05; first rain drops, strong winds. Lunch at **Restaurant-Hotel La Crau**, 12:30 to 1:50 pm. Short bursts of heavy rain. At hotel 2:20 pm. Gray, moist, rain letting up. Met (part of group) 4:15 pm for cloister of St-Trophime; light rain. Arrive hotel 5:25 pm. Met for checklist and review 6:30 pm. Dinner at **Gueule du Loup**, 7:00 to 9:55 pm. Clear, cool, light breeze.

**April 30:** Breakfast in hotel. End of tour.

## **BIRDS**

### **Waterfowl**

**Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*:** small numbers on ponds, lakes, and marshes throughout; all birds present at this date are almost certainly local breeders.



**A male Common Shelduck in the Camargue—photo by Rick Wright**

**Common Shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*:** conspicuous and fairly common on lakes and marshes throughout the Camargue. One pair in the middle of a pasture was probably prospecting for nest sites.

**Garganey:** a fine male at the Petite Camargue. Possibly a rare breeder at the location, but the date was exactly right for migrants of this uncommon and often secretive little teal.

**Gadwall, *Anas strepera*:** small numbers at several sites.

**Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*:** scattered throughout. Unusually, this was probably the commonest duck species of the tour.

**Red-crested Pochard, *Netta rufina*:** small numbers in the Little Camargue, with three at the Baisse de Raillon, a less expected locality for this bird of the coastal marshes.

**Common Pochard, *Aythya ferina*:** three or four at the Little Camargue, one drake at the Baisse de Raillon. These numbers are more or less in line with expectations in late spring.

### **Pheasants**

**Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*:** very few this year; one or two near Gallician on the way to the Little Camargue, a pair seen by the late group near La Crau.



## Grebes



**An adult Little Grebe searches for food in the matted vegetation—photo by Rick Wright**

**Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*:** seen well feeding in the marsh at Scamandre.

**Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*:** common on deeper marshes and lakes throughout. Our best views were on the Etang de Vaccarès and at the Baisse de Raillon, where a pair was seen in attendance on a nest.

## Flamingos

**Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus roseus*:** abundant and conspicuous throughout the Camargue, with especially dramatic views from the dike road at Fangassier, where hundreds were feeding in the shallow water as far as the eye could see.



## Storks

### **White Stork,**

#### ***Ciconia alba*:**

common throughout, including on nests. This species has increased dramatically in the Camargue over the past generation, and is now virtually expected on any large field or pasture.

## Cormorants

**Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*:** small numbers in all aquatic habitats; commonest on the Camargue marshes, but several seen this year at the Pont du Gard as well.

## Hérons

**Gray Heron, *Ardea cinerea*:** common throughout in marshes and fields.

**Purple Heron, *Ardea purpurea*:** good numbers and good looks at this usually furtive reed-dwelling ardeid; most were seen in flight, but one landed at close range at the Verdier sanctuary near Sambuc.

**Great Egret, *Ardea alba*:** scattered individuals in the Camargue; this species continues to increase over much of Europe, and is now common in southern France.

**Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*:** common and conspicuous in all aquatic habitats, from lake edges to rocky river beds to roadside ditches.

**Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*:** common in the Camargue and on La Crau, associating indiscriminately with horses, cattle, and sheep.

**Squacco Heron, *Ardeola ralloides*:** only two this year, both seen in flight and rather fleetingly in the Camargue.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*:** good numbers this year in the Little Camargue and the western Camargue; our trip total exceeded half a dozen, one of the highest tallies ever for this tour.

## Ibises and Spoonbills

**Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*:** a rare sight less than twenty years ago, this species is now very common in the Camargue, where it was seen more or less constantly on rice paddies and overhead.

**Eurasian Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*:** our first views of very distant birds in the shallow waters off the Mejanes dike were followed quickly by excellent sightings of several individuals at close range overhead. Like several other species of long-legged waders, spoonbills have increased notably in the Camargue this century.

### Hawks

**Short-toed Snake Eagle, *Circaetus gallicus*:** two nice fly-overs at the Pont du Gard were overshadowed by a perched individual on the road to Salin de Giraud.

**Eurasian Marsh-Harrier, *Circus aeruginosus*:** several in the eastern Camargue and in the Petite Camargue included handsome golden-headed female-plumaged birds and at least two tricolored males, a plumage seen much less often.

**Black Kite, *Milvus migrans*:** the commonest raptor, virtually omnipresent in the lowlands; especially abundant around St-Martin, where a dozen or more followed us around our walk on La Crau. The first individuals of this species we saw were a pair building a nest at the Pont du Gard.

**Red Kite, *Milvus milvus*:** much less abundant in southern France than the Black Kite, but the early group had very good looks at one on La Crau this year.

**Common Buzzard, *Buteo buteo*:** in very small numbers throughout. At this season, many are staying close to their nest sites, making the species seem less common than it probably is.

### Rails

**Western Swamphen, *Porphyrio porphyria*:** one disappearing into the dense reeds in the Little Camargue, where this absurdly large and improbably purple marsh bird is especially common—but never easy to see.

**Eurasian Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*:** small numbers at the Little Camargue and Baisse de Raillon.

**Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra*:** common and noisy on marshes, lakes, and ponds throughout.

### Thick-knees

**Eurasian Stone-curlew, *Burhinus oedicnemus*:** very good looks for both groups at Peau de Meau on La Crau. Overall, this handsome thick-knee appears to be thriving on La Crau, while other steppe birds seem to be in decline.





A Eurasian Stone-curlew paces off the rocky plain of La Crau—photo by Rick Wright

### Stilts and Avocets

**Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*:** common and noisy throughout the Camargue, with occupied nests seen at Cacharel.

**Pied Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta*:** a good count of 65 or more in the eastern Camargue marked the peak of spring migration for this elegant species, whose numbers seem to be increasing.

### Oystercatchers

**Eurasian Oystercatcher, *Haematopus ostralegus*:** it was surprising to see only one of this usually common and conspicuous species, in the shallow waters of the eastern Camargue.

### Plovers

**Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*:** dozens in the eastern Camargue, most in flight with other shorebird species but several on the marshes as we approached the Fangassier.

**Northern Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*:** a couple seen by some on the road to Le Sambuc.

**Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus*:** common on the sparsely vegetated flats of the Camargue, many giving good close views. One pair near Cacharel was busily excavating a nest scrape just a few yards from the busy highway. Once “lumped”



with the American Snowy Plover, this badly declining beach plover is again recognized as a distinct species.

**Common Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*:** several in the eastern Camargue and the western Camargue, where this species is a reliable migrant.

**Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius*:** about five birds at the Pont du Gard included one pair in frantic flight low over the water much of the time we were there; the river was quite high, and it seems likely that the birds' nest site (or even, perhaps, their nest) had been submerged.

### **Sandpipers**

**Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*:** many in flocks overhead in the eastern Camargue, totaling probably in the low 100s.

**Little Stint, *Calidris minuta*:** two fast flyovers at the eastern Camargue.

**Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*:** one well seen in flight at close range in the Petite Camargue as we enjoyed our mid-morning snack.

**Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos*:** one at the Baisse de Raillon; usually present on the shores of the Etang de Vaccarès, but missed there this year. This poorly named bird is decidedly uncommon in most of its range, including southern France.

**Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*:** common on the flats of the Camargue. Like its close relative the Greater Yellowlegs, this is an abundant and hardy species, one of the most frequently observed migrant shorebirds.

**Wood Sandpiper, *Tringa glareola*:** small numbers throughout on the marshes; with Dunlin, this is one of the commonest migrants at this season.

### **Pratincoles**

**Collared Pratincole, *Glareola pratincola*:** a very heartening count of five or six over the Little Camargue; in recent years, it has been easy to miss this rapidly declining species entirely, making this year's experience welcome indeed.

### **Gulls and Terns**

**Slender-billed Gull, *Chroicocephalus genei*:** outstandingly close views of several in the eastern Camargue. Happily more common than it once was, this beautiful small gull is still one of the most highly desired specialties of the Camargue, and we were very fortunate to have such good and prolonged views.



Slender-billed Gulls, more beautiful in the field than any photograph can show—photo by Rick Wright

**Black-headed Gull, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*:** common throughout.

**Mediterranean Gull, *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*:** common in the Camargue, though numbers were slightly lower than in some years. The largest flock was a scant fifty over the Petite Camargue; the most unexpected locality was the parking lot of a nursery in Arles, where five passed over as we were watching a roller.

**Yellow-legged Gull, *Larus michahellis*:** common throughout.

**Little Tern, *Sternula albifrons*:** half a dozen on the eastern Camargue, a reliable nesting area for this noisy species.

**Gull-billed Tern, *Gelochelidon nilotica*:** half a dozen at the Little Camargue. This is an uncommon bird in the Camargue but reliably seen.

**Whiskered Tern, *Chlidonias hybrida*:** obviously just arriving for the summer, with no more than a dozen at the Petite Camargue and Scamandre.

**Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*:** small numbers throughout.

**Sandwich Tern, *Thalasseus sandvicensis*:** one at the Etang de Vaccarès with Common Terns.

### Doves

**Feral Pigeon, *Columba livia*:** common in urban and agricultural settings throughout.

**Common Wood-Pigeon, *Columba palumbus*:** rather small numbers throughout, with daily counts only in the single digits.

**European Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia turtur*:** we were fortunate to see two individuals in the western Camargue, obviously tired after the flight across the Mediterranean; this once abundant bird is declining rapidly in France, as elsewhere in Europe.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto*:** common throughout in relatively open habitats.



A European Turtle-Dove rests after the long Mediterranean crossing—photo by Rick Wright

### Cuckoos

**Great Spotted Cuckoo, *Clamator glandarius*:** one seen briefly by some in the lead van on the roadside along the way to Cacharel. This species, always scarce, is extremely elusive at this season.

**Common Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*:** heard throughout and seen a couple of times in flight.

### Owls

**Little Owl, *Athene noctua*:** briefly but well seen from the sheep barn at Peau de Meau, where a single bird dropped out of the kestrel box to take some unseen prey item from the ground. This species is still doing well in Spain and Mediterranean France, but harder each year to find in northern Europe.

### Swifts

**Alpine Swift, *Apus melba*:** a good two dozen at the Pont du Gard were followed by lesser numbers at Les Baux; the views were very good, especially at the former locality, where we saw very close birds several times from above and below as they flashed through the arches of the aqueduct.

**Common Swift, *Apus apus*:** abundant throughout.

### Hoopoes

**Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops*:** this year's April dates were just a bit early for this species, which we ended up seeing only three times: the first a leader-only bird near the Pont du Gard, followed by great looks at three or four on the way to the Petite Camargue and one feeding unconcernedly on the path at Peau de Meau.

### Bee-eaters

**European Bee-eater, *Merops apiaster*:** just arriving during the week of our tour, there were fly-overs in small numbers at a couple of sites early on, with good views of perched and hunting birds finally on the road from Cacharel to Méjane.

### Rollers

**European Roller, *Coracias garrulus*:** a quick sighting by a couple of us in the second van on the way to the Petite Camargue was followed by excellent views of a perched bird in the parking lot of an Arles nursery and prolonged studies of another at the Etang des Aulnes. This spectacular species appears to be increasing again in the Camargue after a period of apparent decline.

### Woodpeckers

**Eurasian Green Woodpecker, *Picus viridis*:** a very brief leader-only sighting at the Pont du Gard was followed at St-Paul de Mausole by an encounter with a very loud individual; unfortunately, this bird too proved visually elusive, with only quick views to be had.

### Falcons

**Lesser Kestrel, *Falco naumanni*:** three or possibly four males hunting and exploring at the kestrel box at Peau de Meau. At least one female kestrel was also present, presumably a lesser. As usual, the best views were to be had when the birds landed on the ground to take insects.

**Eurasian Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*:** very small numbers throughout, daily counts in the low single digits. Again and again we noticed how large this bird is compared to the familiar American Kestrel.

**Eurasian Hobby, *Falco subbuteo*:** a dashing bird over the Petite Camargue.

### Old World Orioles

**Eurasian Golden Oriole, *Oriolus oriolus*:** only one this year, but a fantastic view of the male perched in the dead treetops at the Pont du Gard after it had been heard singing in the distance. This flashy species and all the Old World orioles are only rather distantly related to their American namesakes, but it is easy to see why the name was transferred.



## Crows and Magpies

**Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica*:** common throughout.

**Eurasian Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula*:** common to abundant throughout, in farmland and along the sycamore-lined allees of towns and cities.

**Rook, *Corvus frugilegus*:** fairly common throughout, including right in Arles, where especially good views were had of birds over the Alyscamps.

**Carrion Crow, *Corvus corone*:** small numbers throughout. In the Camargue region, this is a “wilder” bird than the Rook, seen more frequently in the countryside than that urban-nesting species.



**A Carrion Crow with its cheeks full—photo by Rick Wright**

**Common Raven, *Corvus corax*:** one over the cliffs of the Val d’Enfer at Les Baux was expected, but the perched bird in the eastern Camargue was not; we usually see this species only in or at the base of the Alpilles.

## Larks

**Greater Short-toed Lark, *Calandrella brachydactyla*:** heard only at dawn at La Crau. This species has become extremely uncommon in the area, and may be destined to follow the Calandra into local extirpation.

**Eurasian Skylark, *Alauda arvensis*:** heard in most wide-open habitats, and several times seen well as males climbed high into the sky to sing their nearly endless buzzing and trilling songs.

**Crested Lark, *Galerida cristata*:** small numbers on roadsides and in saltmarshes; badly declining in northwestern Europe, and possibly in Provence, too.



Sunrise on La Crau—photo by Rick Wright

### Swallows

**Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia*:** migrants throughout, with a single flock of several dozen near Méjane.

**Eurasian Crag Martin, *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*:** common at Pont du Gard, with pairs entering nest holes in the aqueduct and repeatedly visiting damp spots on the cliffs of the riverbanks. Numbers were smaller, perhaps only two pairs, at Les Baux, where the strong winds may have kept the birds down.

**Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*:** common throughout in open country.

**Common House-Martin, *Delichon urbicum*:** seen well only a few times this year, and almost always when there was something else to distract us from watching them. The best views were at the Baisse de Raillon.

### Tits

**Eurasian Blue Tit, *Cyanistes caeruleus*:** there were a few brief sightings after our first encounter with a very obliging bird feeding on the woodland edge at Les Terrasses, where we had lunch at the Pont du Gard.

**Great Tit, *Parus major*:** small numbers throughout, including a pair at a nest on the walk to St-Paul de Mausole.

### Bush Warblers

**Cetti's Warbler, *Cettia cetti*:** explosively conspicuous in any wet lowland habitat, the startling song quickly familiar. Though this species is notoriously hard to see, we had good if brief looks at several individuals in flight and perched.

### Leaf Warblers

**Willow Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochilus*:** one seen at La Capelière.

**Wood Warbler, *Phylloscopus sibilans*:** one seen at La Capelière.

### **Reed Warblers**

**Eurasian Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*:** typically enough, this species was heard only, at Verdier north of Le Sambuc and along the Méjane dike.

**Great Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*:** generally easier to see than its smaller congeners, this enormous warbler managed to remain invisible each time we heard it, at Verdier and on the Méjane dike, where we were within just a few feet of a particularly insistent and persistently invisible bird.

### **Cisticolas**

**Zitting Cisticola, *Cisticola juncidis*:** seen just a couple of times in the eastern Camargue and in the Petite Camargue.

### **Sylvia Warblers**

**Eurasian Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla*:** heard at La Capelière and seen well in the Alysamps in Arles.

**Sardinian Warbler, *Sylvia melanocephala*:** seen at close range on the road north of the Fangassier, likely a breeding pair.

**Spectacled Warbler, *Sylvia conspicillata*:** a bright male in the Salicornia at Cacharel.

### **Old World Flycatchers**

**European Robin, *Erithacus rubicula*:** heard only, on the entrance path at St-Paul. An especially convincing imitation was issued by a Common Redstart at the Pont du Gard.

**Common Nightingale, *Luscinia megarhynchos*:** common and noisy virtually throughout, with amazing leisurely views of two singing birds in the Petite Camargue; it is easy to go an entire spring without so much as a good glimpse of this shy species.

**European Pied Flycatcher, *Ficedula hypoleuca*:** one male at the Pont due Gard, another at La Capelière; migrants were just arriving.

**Common Redstart, *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*:** several seen well at the Pont du Gard, the most reliable place to encounter this species.

**Black Redstart, *Phoenicurus ochruros*:** common throughout, including in our Arles neighborhood, where its gristly, gravelly song was among the first sounds each morning. The best views by far were at Les Baux, where a male sang within just a few feet of us on the ruins.

**Blue Rock Thrush, *Monticola solitarius*:** first seen at great distance looking across the Val d'Enfer from Les Baux, then by some at much closer range.

**Whinchat, *Saxicola rubetra*:** one at the north end of the Méjane road, most likely a migrant.

**European Stonechat, *Saxicola rubicola*:** single males seen twice by most, in the eastern and the western Camargue.

**Northern Wheatear, *Oenanthe oenanthe*:** a single migrant on the way to the eastern Camargue.

### **Thrushes**

**Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula*:** well seen at St-Paul de Mausole feeding in a walled garden. Abundant and conspicuous not far to the north, this is a very local species on the edges of the Camargue.

### **Starlings**

**European Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*:** small numbers throughout, with daily high counts in the low double digits; this species is more characteristic of agricultural lands than of cities in southern France.

### **Wagtails and Pipits**

**Western Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla flava*:** common and conspicuous on sparsely vegetated saltmarsh flats. All birds seen well had gray heads with broad white supercilium and white throat, characters of the expected (sub?)species *iberiae*, the **Iberian Wagtail**.

**White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba*:** seen in the river at the Pont du Gard and at the Baisse de Raillon, typical sites for this waterside species.

**Tawny Pipit, *Anthus campestris*:** briefly seen in the eastern Camargue and then, in better views, at Peau de Meau.

### **Old World Buntings**

**Corn Bunting, *Emberiza calandra*:** seen well at several lowland sites, but it was windy on our visits to some of the areas where this species most abundant.

### **Finches**

**Common Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs*:** heard and seen in the woods along the river at the Pont du Gard, and heard at Les Baux.

**European Greenfinch, *Chloris chloris*:** small numbers throughout, including in the shade trees of Arles and the Alyscamps.

**European Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis*:** fairly common throughout, with the best views of a blithe singer in the parking lot at the Camargue Discovery Center in Scamandre.

**European Serin, *Serinus serinus*:** good views of a male at the Pont du Gard.

### **Old World Sparrows**

**House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*:** small numbers throughout.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus*:** small numbers throughout, including a single bird around the corner from our Arles hotel; this species is unusual in urban habitats.



## **MAMMALS**

**Nutria, *Myocastor coypus*:** common in the marshes of the Camargue, where it was introduced as a furbearer.

**Brown Hare, *Lepus europaeus*:** two or three at Peau de Meau.

**Polecat, *Mustela putorius*:** one loping across the path at dawn at Peau de Meau, a first for this tour.



**Nutria--photo by Rick Wright**