

THE CAMARGUE

DATES: SUNDAY 5TH MAY TO FRIDAY 10TH MAY 2019

Introduction

Another solo bird watching trip brought me to The Camargue at the start of May 2019. I flew into Nîmes on the Sunday afternoon with Ryanair arriving a little late and after three attempts to land. The wind that caused landing difficulties was to plague the region for the next two days, making an interesting introduction to this area.

Having picked up from Hertz set of for my base for the week at Saint-Gilles. I selected to stay at The Appartement Anatole France, booked through Bookings.com at a cost of £224 for five nights. The apartment provided to be an idea base. The accommodation was very good with the added benefits of having a secure garage underneath the first-floor apartment that meant I could leave the heavier equipment safely in the car overnight. Its location was idea for visiting the areas I wishes to get too with none of them more than 40 minutes away from this base. It was also only 15 minutes away from the airport.

Once again, I was indebted to Dave Gosney and his guide to Finding Birds in The South of France. As with his previous publications which I have used in other areas, I found his recommendations excellent, easy to find and accurate in description. I would highly recommend them to anyone visiting the area. I did spend a beneficial amount of time before visiting this area putting the grid references provided by Dave Gosney into my TomTom making locating and driving too them quick and easy.

Photos taken during this visit can be viewed at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/fenlandbirder/albums/72157707090573671/with/33993502738/>

Day 1: Monday 6th May

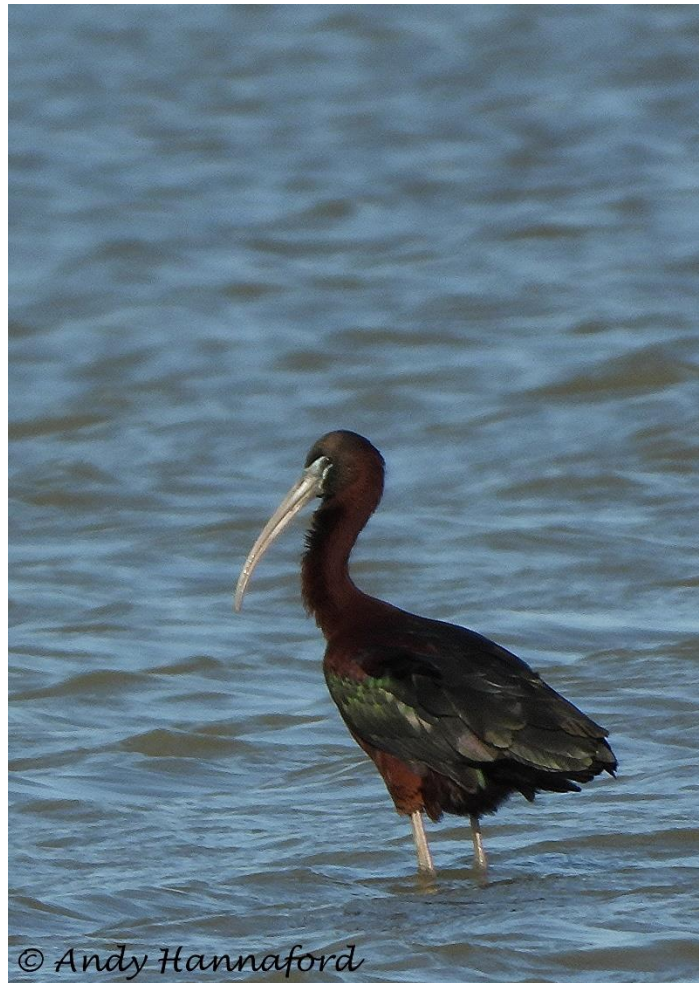
Wind! I had heard of the Mistral but this was the first time I had ever experienced it. Biting wind that within a short period of time resulted in a headache like I have never had before. This wind was to last all day and into the next day. However here to birdwatch so headed for the highly recommended **Marais Du Vigueirat**, which as Gosney states, is 'one of the best wetlands for birding in the whole Camargue region' (La Vigueirat Marshes, Gosney, page 20). I arrived before the centre opened but was still able to have access to the site and during the whole of my visit saw no-one at all.

The incessant wind I feel did have an impact on the birding with everything keeping low and hidden away out of the wind. However did manage good numbers of **Wood Sandpiper, Glossy Ibis, Squacco Heron** and **Great and Little Egret**.



In a more sheltered area had good views of **Black winged Stilt** and **Purple Heron**. **Cattle Egret** were feeding with the cattle in a nearby field.

Having departed this very pleasant reserve I headed south passing along the North-east side of the Etang de Vaccares towards **La Capeliere** and the **Reserve National de Camargue** passing good number of **Greater Flamingo** and **Glossy Ibis**. While watching one group of Flamingo I also located five **Green Sandpiper** and three **Kentish Plover**.



The Reserve itself proved rather popular with school parties with three coaches waiting to off load. I therefore passed by and headed towards Le Sambuc and the observation tower over the Marais de Grenouillet. Again, the wind proved very challenging and although there were good numbers of **Greater Flamingo** present the wind resulted in a return to base to recover. However, a passing female **Montagu Harrier** made up for the early retreat.

By evening time, the wind had dropped so set off to explore the flooded fields around Saint-Gilles and down to the area around Mas D'Agon. The flooded fields attracted good numbers of **Wood Sandpiper** and **Glossy Ibis** in groups up to fifty strong. The fields around Saliers were particularly attractive with good numbers of **Black-headed Gull** and **Mediterranean Gull**.

While exploring the area between **Saliers** and **Gimeaux** for pratincole (Gosney: The Camargue: point 10) a group of seven **Honey Buzzard** passed over moving from south to north. This was one of the wonderful highlights of the whole trip! Sadly, no pratincole.

Moving on to the area around Mas D'Agon (Gosney: The Camargue: point 12) proved to be another highlight of the day. While the north marsh produced a couple of **Purple Heron** and several calling **Great Reed Warbler**, the marshes on the other side of the road were teeming in bird and animal life. As this road is very quiet, it was possible to stop at a number of points along it and by standing on the car door sill, get excellent views of the area. **Greater Flamingo** were visible in good numbers

with 87 being counted. Mixed in with them were **Black-winged Stilt** with nine showing well and numerous **Wood Sandpiper**. Numerous gull species were present including **Slender-billed, Mediterranean, Black-headed and Yellow-legged Gull** and Terns were represented by **Common, Whiskered and White-winged. Great Egret** were showing well along with **Cattle, Squacco** and **Black-crowned Night Heron**. Two **Hobby** stirred up the numerous **Wood Sandpiper** on a couple of occasions. A distant view of a **Collared Pratincole** hawking over the far side to the marsh proved to be the only sighting of this species during the visit.



Day 2: Tuesday 7th May

The wind had dropped during the night so the visit to **Centre de Découverte du Scamandre** (Gosney: The Camargue: point 1) was made on a pleasant, warm morning. Arriving early allows you to avoid the crowds as by lunch time the place was busy with school parties and what seemed to be walking groups.

I was very impressed with the layout of this reserve with pathways taking you through a variety of habitats and well placed hides and screens. As entry was free this was a bonus. I could imagine that this would be a great place to visit during the migration season but was rather quiet in May.

The nesting **White Stork** attracted a great deal of interest from the many visitors. **Red Crested Pochard** were present in good numbers as were **Glossy Ibis, Great, Little, Squacco** and **Cattle Egret**. **Purple Swamphen** and **Water Rail** were heard calling from the reeds on a number of occasions.

Highlight of the visit was a male **Pied Flycatcher** showing well as it darted from bush to bush.



Returned to **Mas D'Agon** (Gosney: The Camargue: point 12) in the evening, finding two **Turtle Dove** feeding along the road to the marshes. Over 150 **Greater Flamingo** were feeding, with small parties coming and going. **Glossy Ibis** were also moving around in great numbers.



Day 3: Wednesday 8th May

Woke to rain and it stayed around for most of the day, being torrential at times. This resulted in a day birding from the car as to venture out would result in a soaking.

First stop was the flooded fields around **Albaron**, where again **Glossy Ibis** were present in good numbers as were **Black-headed, Mediterranean and Yellow-legged Gull**.



Moved on to **Domaine de Mejanes** (Gosney: The Camargue: point 7), an area in which pratincole had been found in the past. No such luck this time but did find a **Melodious Warbler** skulking in the undergrowth.

Retreating to the car as the rain came down again, I decided to drive south down the track towards **Santes Maries**, (Gosney: The Camargue: point 7 to 6), a journey of 10 km along the shoreline of the **Etang du Vaccaries**. The rain continued throughout most of this drive but did not spoil the birdwatching. I counted over 200 **Greater Flamingo** feeding in various locations.

A female **Wheatear** was feeding along the road edge and a pair of **Tawny Pipit** were observed moving around. Three **Kentish Plover** were skulking behind tufts of grass trying to keep out of the wind along with a couple of **Little Ringed** as well as **Ringed Plover**. **Avocet** were feeding together on the large pool at the end of the track where it joins the main road.

Being a quiet track there was plenty of opportunity to stop and scan for birds. However, the weather was foul with increasing high winds and torrential rain, making for difficult conditions.

Day 4: Thursday 9th May

At last a decent day for bird watching! Warm and sunny with only a gentle breeze. Being impressed with yesterday's route from **Domaine de Mejanès** to **Saintes Maries** (Gosney: The Camargue: points 7 to 6) I decided to repeat this route again in fine weather, giving myself more time to stop and have a good look around to see what was about.

First stop was the area around **Domaine de Mejanès** and the lane identified by Gosney as being good for Collared Pratincole. Checking out the bushes and ditches resulted in a male **Pied Flycatcher**, two **Cetti's Warblers** and a **Willow Warbler** but no pratincoles. I did chat to one of the farm workers and he confirmed that they were in the area but neither of us were able to spot any. We did have great views of a passing **Short-toed Eagle** being harassed by two **Booted Eagles**.

A stop by the railway line produced two **Spoonbill** flying over and a group of twelve **Cattle Egret** in a nearby field. Throughout the run there were good numbers of **Greater Flamingo** feeding or flying in or out of the area, a total of 549 being recorded. **Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler)**, **Sardinian** and **Cetti's** were all present as was a single **Black Redstart**.

Given yesterday's poor weather today was a real treat with the whole area teeming with birds but the highlight of the day must have been the two **Wild Boar** which had climbed into a feed trough and were having a good meal.



That evening returned to the area around **Saliiers** (Gosney: The Camargue: point 10) again looking for Pratincole but without luck. Despite that was able to hear and record a **Scops Owl** calling and between distant gun fire (?) the boom of a **Bittern**.

Day 5: Friday 10th May

Last day so after packing the car and checking out of the apartment I had a couple of hours to kill before flying back to the UK. I decided to return to **Centre de Découverte du Scamandre** (Gosney: The Camargue: point 1). I was able to get some good photos of **Black-crowned Night Heron**



And in the same location where I found the male Pied Flycatcher I photographed a female **Pied Flycatcher**.



While waiting for the plane I watched a pair of **Redstart** moving around the bushes just outside the terminal and a **Hoopoe** in the car park.

Summary

This was a first visit to The Camargue, and I would certainly consider returning especially during the migration season. I would highly recommend using Dave Gosney's *Finding Birds in The South of France*. I found the information accurate and informative.

Saint-Gilles proved to be a useful location, giving easy access to all the areas I wished to visit.

I was impressed by the nature reserves visited. They were areas of great interest, superbly laid out with paths and hides and some very interesting displays.

I particularly like exploring the many flooded fields which held a wide variety of birds. I was great to be able to stop and view from the car without a constant flow of passing traffic. Although I did find that a lot of areas had signs restricting access this did not spoil scanning such places for what might be around.

Species List: 100 bird species recorded and 2 mammals

Birds

Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
Carion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>

Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus
Great Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus arundinaceus
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major
Great Tit	Parus major
Great White Egret	Ardea alba
Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus roseus
Green Sandpiper	Tringa ochropus
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea
Gull-billed Tern	Gelochelidon nilotica
Hobby	Falco subbuteo
Honey-buzzard	Pernis apivorus
House Martin	Delichon urbicum
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus
Jackdaw	Corvus monedula
Kentish Plover	Charadrius alexandrinus
Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus
Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis
Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta
Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis
Little Owl	Athene noctua
Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius
Little Tern	Sternula albifrons
Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus
Magpie	Pica pica
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos
Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus
Mediterranean Gull	Larus melanocephalus
Melodious Warbler	Hippolais polyglotta
Merlin	Falco columbarius
Montagu's Harrier	Circus pygargus
Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor
Night-heron	Nycticorax nycticorax
Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos
Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus
Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus
Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula hypoleuca
Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea
Red-crested Pochard	Netta rufina
Redshank	Tringa totanus
Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus
Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula
Sand Martin	Riparia riparia
Sardinian Warbler	Sylvia melanocephala
Scops Owl	Otus scops

Serin	Serinus serinus
Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna
Short-toed Eagle	Circaetus gallicus
Skylark	Alauda arvensis
Slender-billed Gull	Chroicocephalus genei
Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia
Spotted Redshank	Tringa erythropus
Squacco Heron	Ardeola ralloides
Starling	Sturnus vulgaris
Swallow	Hirundo rustica
Swift	Apus apus
Tawny Pipit	Anthus campestris
Teal	Anas crecca
Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus
Turtle Dove	Streptopelia turtur
Water Rail	Rallus aquaticus
Western Swamphen	Porphyrio porphyrio
Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe
Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias hybrida
White Stork	Ciconia ciconia
Whitethroat	Sylvia communis
White-winged Black Tern	Chlidonias leucopterus
Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus
Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola
Woodpigeon	Columba palumbus
Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava
Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis

Mammals

Coypu	Myocastor coypus
Wild Boar	Sus scrofa