

Winter birding in the Mediterranean

This tour covers the French region of Provence-Alpes-Cote-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. The latter is an important area for wintering birds of prey and wildfowl from colder climates in Europe. Camargue in winter offers you some superb birding for sought after species such as Wallcreeper, White-winged Snowfinch and spectacular concentrations of wildfowl from further north and east. This area is bound to produce a few surprises in winter, with recent tours observing Greater Spotted Eagle. Corsica is located further south in the Mediterranean Sea and has two endemic birds: Corsican Nuthatch and Corsican Finch, plus the localised Marmora's Warbler.

Day 1: Early morning flight to Nice and transfer to our base at Beucaire. En route, we may see Cattle and Little Egrets, Marsh Harrier and the first returning White Storks.

Day 2: Our destination this morning is the lower slopes of Mount Ventoux for White-winged Snowfinch and Citril Finch. In the upper pines we may find Woodlark, Crested and Coal Tits, Common Crossbill, and Firecrest whilst patches of grass and snowmelt attract Citril Finches. In the lower beech woods Black Woodpeckers are often observed. Vineyards are dormant during the winter months but attract Brambling, Hawfinch and Southern Grey Shrikes. Nearby is the steppe-like habitat of La Crau with winter gatherings of Little Bustard, Pintailed Sandgrouse, Eurasian Thick-knee, Peregrine Falcon and Calandra Lark.

Days 3-4: We start the day by visiting Les Baux de Provence, a small town perched on top of a huge cliff. The streets are a reliable place to see Alpine Accentor and Black Redstart whilst the cliff itself is a regular haunt of Blue Rock Thrush and Wallcreeper, the latter sometimes numbering several birds. Later in the morning, we visit the Camargue, France's largest wetland. Greater Flamingos and waders feed in shallow lagoons. Wildfowl may include Ferruginous Duck and Red-crested Pochard. With thousands of ducks present, raptors including White-tailed Eagle and Greater Spotted Eagle use the area regular-

Dates

Saturday March 3rd - Saturday March 10th 2018

Leader: Chris Bradshaw

Group Size: 8

Birds: 100 - 120

ly. Rice paddies lure Mediterranean and Slender-billed Gulls and, perhaps, over-wintering Sandwich Terns. L'Etang de Vaccarès is an important area for Bewick's Swan, various ducks, Bittern, Glossy Ibis, Little Gull and other marshland birds.

Day 5: This morning we return to Nice and fly to Bastia in the north-east of Corsica. Etang de Biguglia is close to Bastia and an important area for waterbirds including Greater Flamingo, Black-necked Grebe, Ferruginous Duck and Audouin's Gull. We make the short journey to the old, historic town of Corte, our base for the next three nights.

Day 6: Corte is conveniently placed for exploring the mountainous centre of Corsica which is dominated by pine woods, rocky gorges and areas of abandoned agriculture. Our main interest is in locating the island's two endemic birds: Corsican Nuthatch and Corsican Finch, the latter often forming winter flocks. The mountains of central Corsica still have a few pairs of Lammergeier, although we would be fortu-



Blue Rock Thrush Photo: Birdwatching Breaks

nate to locate one of these magnificent birds. We are also on the lookout for the local *arrigonii* subspecies of Common Buzzard, *wolterstorffi* Eurasian Sparrowhawk and *koenigi* Eurasian Wren. Other species using the mountains include Golden Eagle, Red Kite, Blue Rock Thrush, Yellow-billed Chough and Cirl Bunting.

Day 7: Today we explore the east coast of Corsica which has several coastal lagoons, scrub and dormant vineyards. Birds we hope to find in the 'lowlands' include Marsh Harrier, Zitting Cisticola, the localised Marmora's Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Firecrest, Spotless Starling and Spanish Sparrow. If the winds are blowing onshore we have a chance of European Shag, Cory's and Yelkouan Shearwaters and Yellow-legged Gull. On our return to Corte, we check the cliffs and mountain passes for returning Alpine and Pallid Swifts and the resident Eurasian Crag Martins.

Day 8: After breakfast we return to Bastia

and fly back to Nice on the French mainland. In the early afternoon, we fly back to London where the tour concludes.

Prices

Ground Price: £1,695

Single room: £150

Deposit: £250

*Air Fare: £320

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and 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