

# CAMARGUE AND CORSICA

## WINTER BIRDING

## IN THE MEDITERRANEAN



Merlin (Rosie Green)

Saturday February 9th – Saturday February 16th 2013

Leader: Mark Finn

Group Size: 8

Birds: 100 – 120

This tour covers the French region of Provence-Alpes-Cote-d'Azur, a beautiful and natural 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 in 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 Beaucaire. 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 attracting 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-



Eurasian Bittern (Rosie Green)

tailed Eagle and Greater Spotted Eagle use the area regularly. 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 Bearded Vulture, although we would be fortunate to locate one of these magnificent birds. We are also on the lookout for the endemic subspecies of Common Buzzard, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Eurasian



Eurasian Spoonbill (Rosie Green)

Wren. Other species using the mountains include Golden Eagle, Red Kite, Blue Rock Thrush, Yellow-billed Cough 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. Early afternoon we fly back to London where the tour concludes.

Ground Price: £1450 (provisional)

Single room: £150

\*Air Fare: £300

Total Tour Price: £1750

Tour Price Nice/Bastia: £1450

Deposit: £150

\*please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights on pages 5 and 71

This holiday is fully inclusive of flights, 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.

Good accommodation in Beaucaire and Corte with en-suite facilities. Evening meals based on Provençal cuisine. In Corsica the food is more rustic and based on local produce.

Transport by minibus. Short walks over undulating terrain. Stout footwear and warm waterproof clothing recommended.