MULTIPLE HABITATS FOR **A MULTITUDE OF BIRD**

A flock of birds takes off and forms an undulating ribbon in the blue skies of Provence, inviting us on a birding journey around the Camargue, Crau, Alpilles and Montagnette.

A golden triangle of biodiversity, this destination offers a surprising variety of natural habitats and ecosystems. Hundreds of species of birds are resident, with others resting here on migration or arriving in the spring to nest.

With the Greater flamingo as its mascot, the Camargue enjoys an international reputation amongst ornithologists. Its marshes and lagoons form major sites for reproduction as well as an important resting place for birds migrating between Africa and Europe. The areas of dry steppe and hedged fields of the Crau plain are the only nesting site in France for the **Pin-tailed sandgrous**e, a year-round resident.

Just a few wing-flaps away, the valleys and summits of the Alpilles and Montagnette hills, are the realm of Wallcreeper, European Roller, European Bee-eater, together with raptors including the majestic **Bonelli's** eagle and the Eurasian Eagle-owl

This rich birdlife is all to be found within a small area, which is accessible by non-motorised transport: you can walk, cycle, ride a horse or travel in an open horsedrawn carriage to easily reach the various birdwatching sites that are all within thirty minutes from each other.

HOME FOR SOME **ALL YEAR ROUND**

Greater flamingo, Marsh sandpiper, Little bittern, Collared pratincole, **Red-crested pochard**, are all resident in the heart of the Camargue marshes. The attractive **Bearded ti**t is also at home in the marshy reedbeds, just like the Marsh harrier as its name suggests. Glossy ibis, with their exotic look and curved beak, are a familiar sight in the rice paddies in the spring.

In the Alpilles and la Montagnette, the Eurasian eagle-owl and the Egyptian vulture are the aerial monarchs and nest in the crevasses and fissures of the cliffs as do Crag martin. Mediterranean warblers such as the Western Subalpine warbler or Sardinian warbler favour the garrigue habitats of these two hill ranges whereas the Scops owl and Nightjar are more at home in farmland. Small numbers of Ortolan bunting are summer visitors to the Alpilles.

The Little owl prefers low vegetation for hunting and cavities for nesting, as does the European Roller, which also selects the hollows of old trees to make its nest. The ever-discreet **Bonelli's** eagle needs rocky escarpments with wooded areas. Its hunting grounds can cover between 70 and 140 square kilometres.

On the Crau plain, birding favourites include Little bustard, Lesser kestrel, Red-footed falcon and Pin-tailed sandgrouse. Finding the sandgrouse can be quite a challenge, as its ochre and olive-green plumage provides perfect camouflage in the Crau landscape.

Resident bird species unfurl a year long ribbon across the area!



Bee-ente

Pin-tailed sandgrouse

European rolle

LA CRAU A SANDY COLOURED CARPET WITH A GREEN BORDER

The Crau plain is the fossilised delta of the Durance river, which for thousands of years has deposited pebbles washed down from the Alps. This Mediterranean steppe, unique in Europe and known as the Coussoul, is the bastion of Provence-style pastoralism. Initially transformed by farming, irrigation has been introduced around the edges of the dry steppe. The Crau has now become a contrasted landscape where arid steppe and green vegetation co-habit. An equilibrium where sheep farming and hay production are mutually beneficial activities in a very rich natural environment.

LA CAMARGUE **A PATCHWORK OF MARSHES PEPPERED** WITH SMALL ISLANDS

The Camargue biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO listed site, is bordered by the Rhone and the Petit-Rhone. At the heart of the Delta, covering an area of the 140,000 hectares, lies a mixed habitat of marshy reedbeds, lagoons, dunes, beaches and footpaths. It represents one of the largest wetland areas in Europe and is host to an extraordinarily rich diversity of flora and fauna.

LA MONTAGNETTE COLOURFUL AND FLOWER-RICH HILLS

The hills of la Montagnette run along the edge of the Rhone river. Although they do not reach more than 150 metres in altitude, their abrupt contours do include cliffs. The plains are home to market gardens and orchards. The valleys host fruit, olive and almond production. The garrigue - with its kermes oak, rosemary and Holm oak - is interspersed with open areas of bunch grass, clumps of Phoenician juniper and stands of Aleppo pine.

LES ALPILLES **RIBBONS OF WHITE STONE**

A succession of limestone ridges, the highest of which reaches 498 meters, the Alpilles range is famous for the valley bottoms where olive trees and vineyards thrive. The garrigue and the pine forests cling to the white rocks and form a harmonious landscape with the cyprus trees that protect crops from the Mistral wind.

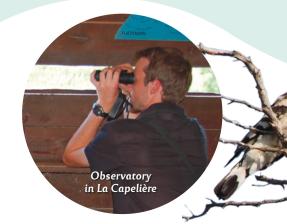
SEASONAL WILDLIFE

Other species add colour to the ribbon of birds from season to season. Spring and autumn migration offer opportunities to see species resident elsewhere, as they move around the world in pursuit of their food sources.

In the Camargue, Red kite, Black stork and Marsh sandpiper can be seen during migration. In the spring, the lagoons are occupied by various species of tern including Gull-billed, Little, Caspian and Sandwich. Whereas these same habitats provide overwintering habitat for Eurasian teal and Shoveler

The European roller is one of the migratory species present on the Crau plain from April to September. In October many **Stone-curlew**, leave the Coussoul and head south to warmer climes such as Spain. A small bird but a long-distance migrant is the Ortolan bunting, which leaves the Montagnette garrigue to overwinter in tropical Africa.

Some species also change ecosystems according to their needs, without leaving Provence. This is true for the **Hoopoe**, which spends the spring on the Crau plain and in the Alpilles, but heads to the Camargue for the summer The **Short-toed eagle** consumes large numbers of snakes and reptiles and occupies a variety of different ecosystems. Whilst it nests in the Alpilles and Montagnette hills, it can also be seen hunting down on the plains and in the marshy habitats of the Camargue.



Greater flamingo

FERTILE ECOSYSTEMS

With the Camargue's alternating ecosystems of dry land and fresh or brackish water, the Crau plains and the upland areas in the Alpilles and Montagnette, a wide variety of food sources are available for insectivorous species and for raptors.

For birds that feed on fruit, the Alpilles and Montagnette valleys offer an abundant supply of food in the Provence orchards of apricot, peach, fig, apple, pear and olive trees. Hedgerows with their wild berries such as elderflower. rowan and blackberry, also constitute a major food bank.

Insectivorous birds find plenty to feed on in the orchards where insects are plentiful. Whereas it is spiders that are a particular favourite of the Tawny pipit, which nests on the Crau plains. Spiders are also a favourite of the overwintering Wallcreeper that uses its fine curved beak to seek them out in the nooks and crannies of walls and cliffs in the Alpilles.

The Crau grasshopper, crickets, cicadas, dragonflies, butterflies, flying beetles and ants all provide bountiful food for numerous bird species.

In the lagoons and marshy areas of the Camargue, birds feast on aquatic larvae, frogs, fish, molluscs, worms and crustaceans.

In the green hills of the Alpilles and Montagnette hill ranges, raptors hunt rodents, reptiles and birds. The hay meadows and open grass pastures that are home to the flocks of sheep on the Crau plain, in the Alpilles and Montagnette hills provide seed eating birds with plenty of food, but also building material for many species during the nesting season.

FROM ONE SITE TO ANOTHER... **AS THE CROW FLIES!**

THE CAMARGUE MUSEUM This cultural museum is managed by the Camargue regional park and is an essential starting point for any visit to the area. Artefacts, images and sounds introduce visitors to the unique relationship between man and nature in the Camargue. At the start of the 3.5 ilometers discovery trail, an observation hide that is a work of art by Tadashi Kawamata, provides a moment to pause and contemplate the landscape.

Entrance fee – Shop.

THE SAINT LOUIS TOWER

One of Port Saint-Louis' emblematic monuments, the tower is home to an impressive collection of 165 preserved birds. A map is available showing visitors where the best spots are to watch the various species and how to find them in their habitat. Entrance fee.

THE CRAU ECO-MUSEUM

This museum introduces the complementary nature of the arid areas and the fields and hedgerows of the Crau plain. A themed trail invites visitors to discover the fauna and flora of the Coussouls de Crau National Nature Reserve. Three paper chases that can be followed on foot or by bicycle are available free of charge from the site entrance.

Entrance and trail access fee. Shop with local produce, books and souvenirs.

Pick up the Crau-Camargue PASS!

MARAIS DU VIGUEIRAT

300 species of birds have been observed within this vast area that is a National Nature Reserve. In winter, the ducks are king! All the European species of heron are present. These marshes benefit from a unique geographical position, forming the link between the vast marshy areas of the Camargue and the semi-arid plains of the Crau. A 5km marked walking trail connects several observation towers. Guided visits on foot or in an open

horse-drawn carriage if booked in advance.

Fee for guided tours and trail access. The shop stocks a range of local produce, books and souvenirs. In the warmer months, a café offers light snacks made with locally sourced organic produce. Pick up the Crau-Camargue PASS!

Pick up your **Crau-Camargue PASS**

to explore the environmental identity of these areas with trips to 3 signature sites: Écomusée de la Crau. la Maison de la Chasse et de la Nature and Marais du Vigueirat.

THE HUNTING AND NATURE CENTRE

Located in Saint-Martin-de-Crau, the centre provides visitors with a singlestop opportunity to discover the environmental diversity of this exceptional destination. Exhibitions highlight the biodiversity golden triangle: the Crau, the Camargue and the Alpilles. Pick up the Crau-Camargue PASS!

THE PONT DE GAU ORNITHOLOGICAL RESERVE Originally set up by a local

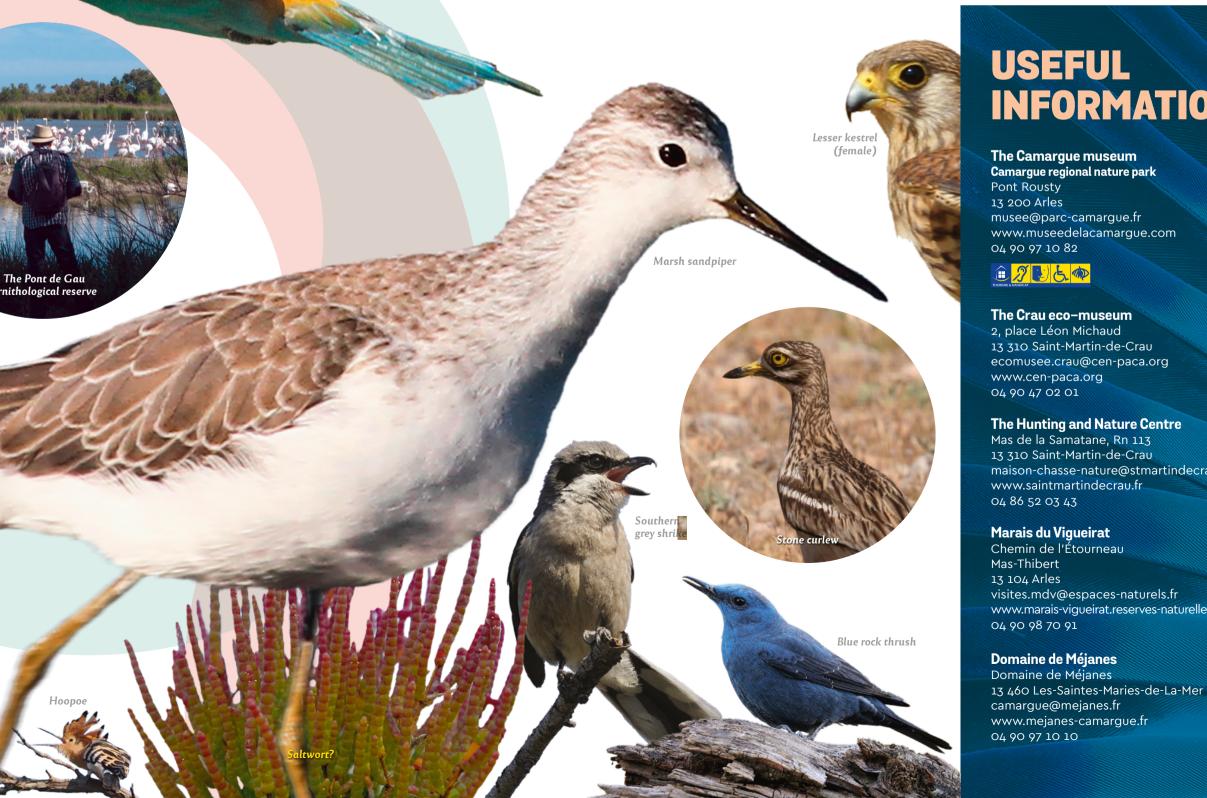
Camargue personality, the Reserve covers 60 hectares and is equipped with over 7 kilometers of trails through a preserved natural environment that allows unrivalled proximity to the birds. This site provides opportunities to see most of the Camargue species and in particular the pair bonding displays of Greater flamingo in winter. Themed information boards, natural history events, workshops and exhibitions are organised throughout the year. A rescue centre, not open to the public, takes care of injured birds. The reserve is open all year round.

Entrance fee.

LA CAPELIÈRE **VISITOR CENTRE FOR THE CAMARGUE NATIONAL RESERVE**

Installed on the edge of the Vaccarès lagoon, the Capelière visitor centre is a site that allows birdwatchers to see 285 species of protected birds and numerous species of waterbirds. There are four hides on the site and two conference rooms.

Natural history boutique and a walking trail with an entrance fee.



THE DOMAINE DE LA PALISSADE

The aims of the Domaine de la Palissade, located at the mouth of the Rhone river, are to preserve and study the natural environment thanks to ecological and scientific research. Several species of colonial waders and shorebirds nest on the islets.

Fee-paying visit.



THE ALPILLES REGIONAL PARK CENTRE

Situated in the very heart of Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, the old la Cloutière estate has been fully renovated and converted to the Maison du Parc des Alpilles. It has a public reception area, exhibitions spaces and an educational garden. A true resource centre for the park's natural and cultural heritage, the centre's ambition is to encourage visitors to explore all of the 16 towns and villages that make up the park. Free entrance.

By choosing products, tourism services or accommodation that is labeled 'Valeurs Parc naturel régiona des Alpilles ou de Camargue' <u>you will be</u> supporting and encouraging professionals who are committed to the sustainable development of the area: www.consommer-parc.fr

INFORMATION

maison-chasse-nature@stmartindecrau.fr

www.marais-vigueirat.reserves-naturelles.org

The Domaine de la Palissade Route de la Mer - RD36D, 13 129 Salin-de-Giraud www.palissade.fr 04 42 86 81 28

The Pont de Gau ornithological reserve Route Arles – Quartier Pont de Gau 13 460 Saintes-Maries-de-La-Mer contact@parcornithologique.com www.parcornithologique.com 04 90 97 82 62

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La Capelière national nature reserve La Capelière C 134 De Fielouse - Route Fiélouse 13 200 Arles camargue-rn@espaces-naturels.fr www.snpn.com/reservedecamargue 04 90 97 00 97



The Alpilles regional nature park centre Syndicat mixte de gestion du Parc Naturel Régional des Alpilles 2, boulevard Marceau 13 210 Saint-Rémy-de-Provence contact@parc-alpilles.fr www.parc-alpilles.fr 04 90 90 44 00



TAILOR MADE BIRDING TRAILS!

A whole series of walking trails have been designed specially with birdwatching in mind and these will bring you close to the birds you want to see.

Discover all the trails available on the Tourist information partner websites, the Région Sud Regional parks website and especially on the dedicated birdwatching app that you can download: "Balade Nature, les oiseaux des Alpilles" (English option inside the app).

Accessible on foot or by mountain bike, these trails include different length circuits, and can be combined into a birding trail covering one or more days.

COME **AND DISCOVER** THE ABUNDANCE OF WILDLIFE IN THIS NATURAL **HISTORY TREASURE TROVE!** This unique destination offers a wealth of birding experiences that many only dream of You will be astonished by the wonderful wildlife!

Eurasian eagle-ov

BE YOUR OWN BIRD!

A. 360 species of bird have been listed in the area, which enjoys 300 days of sunshine a year. True or False?

B. 1/3 of all European species, resident or migratory, are present in the Camargue. True or False?

- C. La Montagnette is not on a migratory flyway. **True or False?**
- D. The Hoopoe eats pine nary caterpillars. True or False?
- E. Passerines are also known as "song birds". True or False?
- F. Egyptian vultures arrive every year from Egypt. True or False?

Crested

The Pont de Gau **Ornithological reserve**

A Camargue collection. More than 200 species have been spotted here! The site includes 7 km of marked pathways amongst the marshes, salt-marsh, reedbeds and lagoons. Seven birdwatching hides and four tower hides enable you to get up close and personal with the Camargue birdlife. Watch Caspian tern, Booted eagle and the comings and goings of the hundreds of Greater flamingo that can be seen here all year round.

Domaine de la Palissade

This is the only site in the Camargue unprotected by dykes. Along the main Rhone river, explore the Domaine de la Palissade, home to hundreds of species of birds including 167 that are protected. Throughout the year you can see Kentish plover and Avocet amongst others. Slender-billed gull and Spectacled warbler are also present as nesting summer visitors.

La Capelière

In the southern part of the Camargue and on the banks of the Vaccarès lagoon, you will find yourself at the headquarters of the Camargue National Nature Reserve, which covers 13,200 hectares. La Capelière offers the full range of Camargue landscapes (forest, open dry grass pasture, saltmarsh and reedbeds), the habitats they represent and the species that inhabit them (in particular the 285 species of birds of which 269 are of particular interest). Over the course of a 1.5 km nature walk, 4 observation hides for the wetland fauna, of which including 2 observation platforms equipped with telescopes, will allow you to discreetly observe the Blackwinged stilts, Spotted Redshank, and Cetti's warbler amongst others...

The Starling trails (Sentiers de l'Etourneau) at the Marais du Vigueirat

Several trails are waymarked. The "Sentier des Cabanes" is one suitable for all the family. Eight interactive huts along the trail provide a comprehensive presentation of the surrounding environment. The 2.5 km "Sentier de la Palunette" is perfect for birdwatchers and includes three hides. In this reserve, you might spot the irridescent **Glossy Ibis**, as well as the striking **Eurasian hoopoe** with its long curved beak, and possibly the **Squacco heron** with its shades of buff plumage.

September. from mid-March until early in the clifts of the Alpilles Africa, returning to breed overwinters in sub-saharan B. False! This small white vulture

are known as song birds. Tits, Warblers and Buntings E. True. Many passerines such as

teed on these caterpillars. and insects. The Blue tits also creatures together with larvae The Hoopoe eat these harmful form cocoons in the pine trees. around in a procession and and urticant caterpillar moves D. True. This highly allergenic

migratory corridor. highly important Rhone valley la Montagnette is part of the Rhone and Durance rivers, C. False! Situated between the

> in the Camargue. species are present B. False! 2/3 of European

A. True for both figures!



herdsman's hut.

Mas du Pont de Rousty



At the heart of the Camargue regional park, a birdwatching trail follows the edge of the rice paddies and the marshy reedbeds and leads to a traditional "gardian" or mounted

Along this trail you can spot reedbed birds such as **Purple heron** or the more discreet **Bearded tit**.

Trails and hides at the Salin de Badon

Three trails called "Aigrettes" (Egrets) "Flamants" (Flamingo) and "Foulques" (Coots) take you around a former royal saltworks, providing the opportunity to see a limited access nature conservancy area (permission for access is obtained at La Capelière). The site can only be visited as part of a guided tour for groups of more than 10 people, which makes visiting the protected environment a memorable trip

Domaine de Méjanes

A 2.5 km walking trail provides access to the full diversity of flora and fauna in the domain, which covers 600 hectares and was set up by Paul Ricard. Natural history information boards and telescopes are available along the trail.

The Peau de Meau themed trail

Accessible only with permission from the Crau Eco-museum. Visitors will enjoy two hours of marked paths along the Draille des Coussouls (or drovers way), which has 15 information boards along the route. An exceptional site for seeing the Pin-tailed sandgrouse, and other well known species of la Crau such as Calandra lark, Stone curlew and Little bustard.

The Marais du Verdier

Located in Le Sambuc, and surroun ded by a major dyke system that is accessible on foot, the 120 hectares site is made of up old fish farming ponds offering a range of habitats (reedbed, bulrush beds, saltmarsh pasture, ponds, tamarisk groves). Le Verdier is a favourite for the 170 species of birds that have occurred here: Moustached warbler Purple swamphen, Penduline tit, Great reed warbler and especially the waterbirds. Two hides will allow you to watch these marshy areas from a better height. Free access.

Bonelli's eag

Blackcap