

# Jura Mountains

7th – 21st August 2012

Chris Harper

The route down to Lac de Chalain in the French Jura mountains produced a few interesting sightings. The campsite North of Paris had Black Redstart, Willow Warbler, Common Tern, Serin and both Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker in an overnight stop. Next day, south of Troyes was good for Black Kite and some very variable Common Buzzard shadings. Approaching the campsite area near the village of Passernans produced a Red-backed Shrike, whilst near Piccave a Stoat with prey ran alongside the car. On arrival in the campsite late on the 7th I was greeted with many Marsh Tits, overflying Crag Martins, tame Black Redstarts and a few Common Lizards.



Above: the campsite at Passernans



Above: Marsh Tit

First day chilling at the campsite by the lake saw one of many Black Redstarts frequenting the top of the caravan, Goosander and Great Crested Grebe with young on the lake, with a single Little Egret. Two Raven were being mobbed over the surrounding woodland. Also in the woodland were many Nuthatch, even more Marsh Tit and a few Green Woodpecker. Sunset from the beach provided nice silhouettes of a pair of flyover Red Kite.



Above: Black Redstart

Snook up early on the 9th and trekked up the cliff side via well marked paths to the village of Fontenu. Early start paid dividends with a close Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper and many of the more common species in the woodland. Around the village gardens were many Black Redstart, close Hawfinch, Yellowhammer and many Swallow. Also in the woodland were Red Squirrel and Beech Martin. A lazy afternoon by the pool enabled the birds to come to me. Highlights being Bonelli's Eagle, Melodious Warbler and a good selection of flyover birds of prey whilst shielding against the sun: Hobby, Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel.



Above: Hawfinch

The 10th saw the first day out of the holiday, with a trip to Mount d'Or on the Swiss border. Many Black but mostly Red Kites were seen en route, but no Chamoix, which we kept a keen eye open for. The summit produced the first of two lifers for the day with a pair of Citril Finch in the smaller trees. Many Black Redstart and Crag Martin were also seen. The second came



half way down the summit road with a very close flyover Nutcracker, its white tipped tail nearly hitting the windscreen. The rest of the trip was spent in Switzerland, with the highlights being three Glossy Ibis overflying Lake Neuchatel, and a great Kestrel nest near the Roman Mosaic site at Orbe. A day in Geneva a few days later saw a few Black Kites circling over the city.



Above: Mount d'Or

An early start on the 14th to explore more of the open country around Fontenu was worth it too. Other wildlife was showing well. After nearly standing on a Western Whip Snake the night before, two Red Foxes were up early, a Bank Vole, many Fritillary sp. butterflies, Wood Ant piles and more Red Squirrels. Bird species added to the holiday list included five Serin, Tree Pipit, Crested Tit and Garden warbler, as well as another Middle Spotted Woodpecker.

The next day I repeated the early start and a soaring Goshawk was a reward, along with a small herd of Chamoix in farmland, who needs to go to the top of Jura mountains?(Pics 7 and 8).



Above: Chamoix

On the 16th on a trip to nearby Cirque de Baume, two Red-backed Shrike allowed passable photos to be taken (well, for me). The best view near the village of Plasne. A spectacular view of the valley near the village of Granges produced probably my personal highlight of the holiday, with over 100 Alpine Swift screaming around the Gorge, some within a few meters. You may be able to spot a few in the photos. Later in the day a visit to picturesque Besancon Citadel gave an opportunity to photo a Wall Lizard at close quarters.



Above: Red-backed Shrike



Above: Alpine Swifts..in there somewhere





Above: Wall Lizard

The last day out of the holiday involved a trip South of Lake Geneva to the Alpine spot of Sixt-Fer-a-Cheval. Although Wallcreeper was not seen despite much scanning, the area itself was spectacular and three Alpine Chough, an Alpine Swift and a Chamoix were lovely to see. On the return near the waterfall at Gorges des Tines two circling Black Vultures were the day's highlight, but were soon out of sight after pulling in to view from the road. A display at the end of the road tells you about the reintroduction programme. Return to the campsite saw a quick visit to see the dinosaur footprints at Coisia, as well as a confiding Fieldfare.



Above: Sixt-Fer-a-Cheval



Above: Information display



Above: dinosaur footprints at Coisia

A deserved Sunday lazing by the pool all day was birding free by choice until an amazing flyover by the second Nutcracker of the holiday. There is a good deal of suitable habitat around the lake, but I didn't expect to see one this close to what is a lively campsite in the height of summer.

The final full day saw an early start again as I headed towards Chevrotaine and Songeson on a four hour wander. A Badger, Fox and more Red Squirrels were the mammalian highlights, but birds are what I was after most. The first Firecrest of the trip was as gorgeous as ever, there were three Bonelli's Warbler, many Goldcrest, Chiffchaff and Blackcap. I counted Marsh Tits by the score, as well as Bullfinch, Jay, Mistle Thrushes, Black Redstart, Green Woodpecker and Common Buzzard. Two Raven flew over the Limestone pavement area and around there were

many butterfly species (I must improve my knowledge, they were gorgeous). A lazy evening at the bar and caravan was accompanied by at least three Tawny Owls calling from the forest, together with a more 'bubbling' call which I have no idea about. Time to head back to monsoon affected Stockport.

The return trip saw a Grey-headed Woodpecker just South of the Foret d'Orleans, a Hobby over the campsite in Calais and a probable Grey Phalarope flying west through the Channel from the ferry, although it was so blustery my binoculars were difficult to hold against my head. Great bird watching all in all, now for a few days on the beach.

Chris Harper