

Ornithological Stay :

Crau, Alpilles and Camargue



Duration : 7 days

Best time : Spring and Autumn

Number of People (mini /max) : 8-12

Olivier Eyraud is a mountain guide, naturalist guide and passionate ornithologist. After having worked in ornithological expertise in the field, in France and abroad, the desire to return to the PACA region and develop the activity of accompany and nature guide has become a reality. Today, Olivier offers ornithological stays adapted for both beginners and ornithologists wishing to improve their knowledge, especially for birds frequenting certain environments such as wetlands, Mediterranean or mountain areas.

His training courses include listening to calls and songs enabling you to identify and locate species, as well as observation using appropriate equipment such as binoculars or telescopes.

Behavioural and ecological aspects of birds are discussed during observations and discussions. He can give you advice on taking photos, especially digiscoping. His knowledge in the field, acquired over several years of field expertise, allows him to take you to the most interesting and unusual places.

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Strengths :

- Discover the exceptional birdlife in internationally renowned areas: Camargue, Crau and Alpilles ;
- An area of the south of France rich in birds due to varied environments and unique landscapes;
- Supervision by an Ornithological Guide specialised in the region;
- Stay in fixed accommodation for more comfort.

DESTINATION: Ornithological stay in Camargue, Crau, Alpilles

This stay allows you to get to know the birds in three remarkable environments:

- the Camargue, an internationally important wetland for waterbirds, located in the Rhône delta;
- the Crau, a vast steppe area constituting the former Durance delta and presenting unique assets for species with conservation challenges, so the distribution is limited overall;
- the Alpilles, an islet of limestone that dominates the vast surrounding plain, a territory of raptors and birds of the dry and sunny hillsides, with Mediterranean affinities.

This stay is for people wanting to discover ornithology or deepen their knowledge through daily surveys. Not very difficult (a few km and positive altitude difference per day). Priority is given to research, listening and observation. This stay also allows photographers to immortalise animal encounters. However, even if good opportunities present themselves to photographers, this stay is not a photo safari, but a stay of observation and discovery of birds and their environment.

The planned routes can be adapted according to the periods of reproduction and weather conditions. They can be modified at the last moment by the guide alone in order to guarantee an optimal ornithological observation experience, which remains the main purpose of this stay. The lists of species mentioned in the programme or in the photo gallery are not contractual and may vary from year to year.

Day 1 : Welcome and first walk

Reception, then departure to the accommodation followed by the installation in the rooms and information on your stay. A first bird walk, not far from the accommodation, will allow you to get to know each other better and get a glimpse of the local bird life.

- Walking time: 2 hours
- Positive altitude difference: 10 meters
- Negative altitude difference: 10 meters

Day 2 : The Camargue

During days two and three, we will travel through the heart of the Camargue, between Grand and Petit Rhône, to discover its different treasures. The Camargue areas are mainly composed of wetlands with a whole network of ponds and marshes (grebes, ducks, laro-limicoles), canals, reed beds (star Bittern, kestrels, malaria warblers, reed bunting), salicornia, groves and tree hedges (heronries, Rolliers) and shrubs (reproduction of many passerines) and the great Camargue coast (pelagic birds).

We will explore these areas that make the ornithological reputation of the Camargue internationally renowned with its Natural Reserves, Regional Natural Parks and RAMSAR Wetlands: the pond of Vaccarès and the Imperial Reserve, the Mas d'Agon, Beauduc, the Gacholle and Grau de la Comtesse, the Fangassier, Piémançon, Salin de Badon, the Grenouillet...

More than 300 species of birds have been recorded. If the Pink Flamingos win the hearts of the general public, we will be looking for much more discreet species such as the Spectacled Warbler in the salicornia. We will have time to observe, during our stay, a varied procession of waterbirds: herons (Purple heron, Hairy crab...), White stork (young to nest), ducks (Tadornes de Belon, Teal, Red-necked net...), waders (Oystercatcher, Elegant Avocet, White Stilt, Ringed Pratincole, gravel, sandpipers, knights, snipes, curlews, Barges...), Larids (Laughing Gull, three species of terns, terns including Hansel and Caspian Tern), Malaria warblers (Rousserolles, Cetti's Bush-Warbler...) and also late migratory birds (Ants Torcol, Shrikes, Flycatchers, Warblers...).

- Walking time: 2 hours
- Positive altitude difference: 10 meters
- Negative altitude difference: 10 meters

Day 4 : The Crau

Nearby the Camargue is the fossil delta of the Durance, now called the Crau. A unique and magical place, with its pebbles and steppe vegetation of the brachypod, thyme, euphorbia and asphodel types. You will be told about the history of this plain, so you can better understand it and be more amazed by it. The birds we will be looking for here are rare and specific to the steppe environments. They are monitored in the heart of the National Nature Reserve. The kestrel falcon, the duck bustard, the odicnemus criard, the catfish Ganga, the European Rollier, the fasciated Huppe, the calender lark and calender, the red mullet Pipit, and others, such as the migrating kobez falcon, will be explored. At first sight you may think this sector is lifeless, but don't be fooled, we will see that it is quite the opposite!

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- Walking time: 1 hour
- Positive altitude difference: 10 meters
- Negative altitude difference: 10 meters

Day 5 : The Alpilles

This day is devoted to the last hills before the vast Rhône delta. This limestone "island" of the golden triangle we are travelling through this week (Camargue - Crau - Alpilles triangle) has been a Regional Natural Park since 2007. Its territory offers a complement of natural habitats rarely observed, where wetlands (canals, temporary ponds...) blend intimately with the dry spaces of the hills that we will travel through. This site has magnificent landscapes and heritage sites as well as natural environments and a wide variety of native species. The mornings are devoted to a walk on the heights of the Alpilles chain, looking for the flight of the king bird: the Bonelli's Eagle whose numbers in France have cruelly decreased, as well as the Egyptian Percnopter. The Griffon Vulture is regularly observed as well as the Circaète Jean-le-Blanc. Mediterranean passeriformes will be in the spotlight (sound and visual observations) such as the Pipit rousseline, the southern shrike, etc. As for heritage, we will walk through one of the most beautiful places in France, Les Baux de Provence, a village perched with its medieval castle and listed monuments. This will be an opportunity to look for the Blue Monticulture on the cliffs, as well as the Mediterranean warblers (melanocephalus, passerinette...).

- Walking time: 3 hours
- Positive altitude difference: 300 meters
- Negative altitude difference: 300 meters

Day 6 : In the heart of Camargue Gardoise



We will take advantage of this day to discover new, less well-known, but just as interesting areas. To get to know the rich and varied birdlife of the Camargue. On the other side of the Petit Rhône is a pretty environment with its banks frequented by the European Beaver. We will explore different areas of rice fields and reed ponds. We will see the falcinella ibises, that are numerous here, and different species of breeding herons and most of the species that "are" the Camargue. Regularly the rice fields are frequented by a whole procession of waders (White Stilt, Knights...). We will try to see the Sultan's Talève, regularly observed along with other species that we have not yet been able to admire during our stay. We will therefore have to travel through the best sectors again, in the heart of the Camargue, to review certain species and complete our list of observations.

- Walking time: 1 hour
- Positive altitude difference: 10 meters
- Negative altitude difference: 10 meters

Day 7 : End of stay

Breakfast and Goodbyes. Return by minibus to Arles station in the morning or direct departure from the accommodation for people with a vehicle.

Accommodation

Accommodation is in a comfortable Camargue gîte, near the Etang du Vaccarès, between Arles and Saintes-Maries de la Mer. The meals are hearty and gourmet, prepared by Eric, our cook - mountain guide who is also in charge of organising logistics. The rooms are very comfortable, with one to three beds depending on the groups (couples or individuals).

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