

# The Camargue in Spring

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

### Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Montpellier/Marseille, transfer Arles
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- Day 2/4** Daily programme of birding walks and excursions in the Camargue region
- 
- Day 5** Drive Montpellier/Marseille; fly London
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### Departs

May

### Focus

Birds and other wildlife

### Grading

Grade A. Easy birdwatching walks only

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code FRA19) or brochure

### Highlights

- A perfect introduction to European birdwatching.
- Gentle & varied Mediterranean birding from a relaxed base.
- Enjoy lagoons laden with Flamingoes, Black-winged Stilts & Pin-tailed Sandgrouse at La Crau.
- Raptors including Short-toed Eagle, Honey Buzzard & Montagu's Harrier.
- Guided by expert Naturetrek ornithologists.



From top to bottom: Camargue Wild Horses, Black-crowned Night Heron, Flamingoes.



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## Introduction

The Camargue, in the Provence region of France, is arguably Europe's best known wetland. The Camargue itself, covering about 750 square kilometers, lies in the very heart of the vast Rhone delta, a few minutes south of Arles in south-central France. It is a veritable oasis for a great many resident and migratory species, in an area otherwise acclaimed for its sunny Mediterranean beaches, ancient Roman ruins and fine Provençal cuisine.

Throughout this relaxing spring break we will be based at the same pleasant family-run hotel just outside the historic town of Arles. We will use our hotel as a base from which to explore the different habitats of the Camargue and surrounding area, and to enjoy the exceptional variety of birds and other wildlife of the region. The programme outlined below must only be used as a rough guide, as so much will depend on the weather, and how we feel each day - there is such a choice of things to do in this area, and having possibly two vehicles (if the group size permits) will further extend our options.



Flamingos in the Camargue

## Itinerary

*Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.*

### Day 1

### Fly UK to Montpellier/Marseille

We will depart the UK on board a direct flight to either Montpellier or Marseille.



Black-winged Stilt

With luggage loaded into the minibus, we will make our way to Arles. Along the way we should see plenty of the typical species of the region such as Little Egret, Glossy Ibis and Black-winged Stilt. Depending upon the flight time, we may be able to stop at one of the birding locations in the area, after which we will make our way to our pleasant hotel near Arles, where we will enjoy the first of several tasty French meals.

## Days 2 – 3

## Arles

We will spend two full days exploring the Camargue proper, mostly within the 13,117ha nature reserve that encompasses the Etang de Vaccarès and the salt pans south towards the sea. As access is largely restricted, we will be sure to utilise various viewing platforms and parking areas, as well as visiting the nature reserve at Marais de Vigueirat and the Parc Ornithologique near Stes. Maries-de-la-Mer.

The viewing platforms on the banks of the Etang allow good views both into the brackish marshes on the water's edge, and into the shallows where the Flamingos feed. From these platforms we may also see Black, Whiskered, Gull-billed and Caspian Terns, together with any lingering waders.



White Stork with chick

Marais de Vigueirat is a huge reserve near the village of Mas Thibert. In the time available to us we will not be able to cover the whole area, but we will spend part of one morning exploring the marshes, wet grassland and wooded areas before using the shaded picnic area at lunchtime. The reserve is an excellent location for various species of herons and egrets, while Spoonbills often put in an appearance. Melodious Warblers and Nightingales sing from the trees and bushes, and Hoopoes, Bee-eaters and Rollers are frequently seen. A herd of the famous Camargue wild horses have the run of most of the reserve, so there is a good chance of seeing them close up.

The Parc Ornithologique is outside the boundary of the nature reserve to the west of Vaccarès. Originally a bird hospital caring for birds and animals which were sick, injured or shot, it looks at first glance like a small zoo with local species in cages, but these are either too maimed to be released or have been captive bred from injured birds. However those that have been released still come back to the area to feed and some nest (such as the White Storks which nest on top of the White Stork aviary!) Hundreds of flamingos visit the parc to feed and rest, and this is probably the best place in Europe to observe and photograph them at close quarters. Other attractions include several breeding colonies of Mediterranean Gulls, Common and Little Terns, various herons and egrets and Black-winged Stilts, plus numerous Avocets and the occasional Glossy Ibis.

During our two full days in the wetlands we will also make time to visit the rice fields and marshes at Mas d'Agon, which is the favoured area for Collared Pratincole and also a good site to watch Whiskered and Black Terns feeding, together with many heron species including Squacco. We will also visit the salt pans and brackish lagoons near the coast at Piemanson where we can expect to see good numbers of waders including Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint and Kentish Plover, and there is a good chance of finding Slender-billed Gulls here. Gull-billed Terns can often be seen

alongside the many Common Terns in this area, and on occasions we have found Caspian Terns as well.

## Day 4

## Arles

Other habitats are also within easy striking distance; the ancient delta of the River Durance – now a tributary of the Rhone – forms the area known as La Crau covering some 50,000 hectares. This dry, stony steppe has been extensively irrigated and supports such crops as melons and the famous Crau hay which is used to feed race horses. The surviving areas of original habitat support Little Bustard – rare elsewhere in France – and the country's only population of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse.



Spoonbill

Other noteworthy residents include Stone Curlew, Lesser Kestrel, Short-toed Lark, Calandra Lark, Tawny Pipit and Southern Grey Shrike, while the scrubby areas on the approaches to La Crau often produce Woodlark, Golden Oriole, European Roller, Hoopoe and Red-backed Shrike.

## Day 5

## Arles

Depending on the timings of the return flight to London, we may have time to have a final look at the Camargue, catch up with some species we may have missed or to enjoy a quick exploration of the ancient town of Arles.

## Tour Grading

Grade A (easy). On this holiday we are based at one hotel throughout. We will explore the wetlands, marshes, hills, steppes and ancient architecture of this attractive region with its varied natural history by means of regular stops in our minibus followed by short walks or simply pottering in the richer areas of which there are many. Our pace will be gentle to allow us to examine the birds and other wildlife.



European Roller



## Weather

The middle of May is the peak time for birds over the range of habitats we will visit. Butterflies should be active and birds will be busy on territory. The weather should be settling down, but we need to be prepared for some wet and cool days, so bring a range of clothing.

## Food & Accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the cost of this holiday. Our hotel is located around 10 minutes outside of Arles. All rooms have private facilities. While vegetarianism is much more common and can be accommodated on this tour, it should be noted that the evening meals are likely to have some repetition. The hotel receive all the dietary requirements of the group and serves a set meal based on those requirements.

## Train Travel

It is quite possible to reach Montpellier or Marseille via the Eurostar and TGV from St Pancras. Tickets can be booked on Eurostar's website at [www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com). On arrival in France it will be a taxi journey to the hotel located just north of Arles (at an additional expense) or alternatively you can meet the group in Montpellier/ Marseille airport and use Naturetrek's transport to get to the hotel. If you plan to use train travel please state clearly that your booking with us is on a 'land only' basis when you book.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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