

The Swiss Alps in Summer

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 24th June 2026



Alpine Marmot



Glandon Blue



The Matterhorn



River Crane's-bill

Tour report by Fernando Romão



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Summary

This nature tour explored the Swiss Alps, combining birdwatching with observations of butterflies, alpine flora and mammals. The itinerary included glacial valleys (Arolla, Ferpècle, Derborence), the Grand Dixence dam, the Gornergrat summit (3100m) with access to the Matterhorn, and wetland areas near Leuk and the Bird Island in Lausanne. Highlights included the observation of 101 bird species, such as the rare Bearded Vulture, Golden Eagle, Alpine Chough, Alpine Accentor and White-winged Snowfinch. Mammals such as the Alpine Ibex and Alpine Marmot were also seen, along with a vast diversity of butterflies and alpine flora (such as orchids, gentians and saxifrages).

Day 1

Wednesday 17th June

After arrival in Geneva, formalities were relatively smooth, and we set off on the motorway, heading east, initially skirting Lake Geneva and then following the Rhône river upstream. Along the route, we saw some bird species, mainly Black Kites and some Carrion Crows. About an hour after leaving Geneva, we stopped at a service station, Le Chablais, to eat and rest a little. We took advantage of the rear of the building, facing a small lake, where we observed an interesting number of species: Grey Heron, Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant and Coot. A Kestrel and a Black Kite were also seen passing by. A Common Reed Warbler was heard, among others.

We returned to the motorway and, in the Sion area, exited to head up the mountain, now on a more winding but equally scenic road, passing through typical villages. Finally, we reached our destination, Les Haudères, in the Arolla region, the village just after Evolène (where we have stayed in previous years).

We arrived with time to rest and freshen up before going out for dinner at the end of the day. As the hotel does not have a restaurant, we went out every day to dine at one of the several restaurants in this village, but also in Evolène. At dinner, we took the opportunity to discuss the programme for the coming days.

Day 2

Thursday 18th June

Around 7.00am, we met for a short birding session before breakfast. I decided to point the telescope far away, up the opposite slope, on a stony area with some meadows, and we saw some Alpine Chamois grazing. We took a path almost opposite the hotel, which crosses part of the village, hearing Black Redstarts along the way. We reached the bank of the La Borgne stream, which we followed upstream. However, due to the sound of the water, we could not hear the birds' songs. A little further ahead, at the road bridge leading to Arolla, we observed a White-throated Dipper prospecting the stones on the bank upstream.

After breakfast, and having made some purchases for the picnic, we set off around 9.00am to climb the mountain to the south, following the valley of the same stream from the morning. In about twenty minutes, we reached the Arolla area, and we stopped suddenly, as a pair of Bullfinches was in the middle of the road. We parked slightly above 2000m and started our hike, climbing in zigzags through the Arolla Pine forest. Along the forest path, the slope was covered with Rusty-leaved Alpenrose and Bilberry. Scattered White False Hellebores were visible, but were not yet in bloom. We found several orchid species: Fragrant, Dark Vanilla, Frog, and Small White. Martagon

Lilies were also around, but less common. Although the tour's focus was mainly on birds and butterflies, it was impossible not to notice the flowers. During the morning, we made some observations of other characteristic alpine plants: Alpine Clover, Bearded Bellflower, Moss Campion, Mountain Avens and Shrubby Milkwort.

We observed several birds along the hike, most notably Nutcrackers. We had good and multiple observations of this species today. We also observed Black Redstarts in several locations, and could hear Coal and Willow Tits. Along the route, we also saw a flock of Alpine Choughs high up over the slope. Near the car park, we had good observations of Tree Pipits.

In terms of butterflies, we observed the Alpine Grayling, False Heath Fritillary, Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Northern Wall Brown. In the car park area, some Almond-eyed Ringlets and Small Tortoiseshells were flying.

As lunchtime approached, we decided to return. As it was still early, we decided to explore another spot. We drove down to a place near the stream and followed it a little upstream. Immediately ahead, we walked on a wide path, initially in a pine forest. Coal Tits could be heard, and at one point, we saw a Red Squirrel. We spent some time observing it as it moved among the trees, until it climbed into the treetops and disappeared from our sight. Suddenly, I detected three silhouettes crossing the sky. They were Golden Eagles, possibly an adult pair with a juvenile. We took photographs as they passed.

We continued on the path to a bridge over the Borgne d'Arolla stream, in a wide, open area where there were some interpretation panels and a picnic table: here we rested. We saw several Geranium Argus butterflies here showing mating behaviour, around their food plant, Wood Crane's-bill. A Mountain Dappled White also appeared (laying eggs). We spotted a Jay, and saw the Golden Eagles again at the top of the slope. Returning to the van via a trail closer to the stream, we saw an Asian Fritillary feeding on the pollen of some yellow flowers.

I set up the picnic "table" at the back of the van; the group sat on a wall, in the shade, and we had lunch. In the background, we heard a Cuckoo from time to time.

Afterwards, we went up to the village to go to a café, but the establishment was full with a group of visitors. We decided to go down the valley to the locality of La Gouille, next to a small lake. We sat on the terrace of the village's only café, where we enjoyed beers, coffees and teas. While we were there, we saw, on the other side of the valley, a large flock of about thirty Alpine Choughs, which flew in circles above the ridge before disappearing.

Next, we returned to Arolla and parked near some more isolated houses, in the highest part. Here we took a different forest path, which would take us a little further south, and up to 2,160m. The route took about two hours. Despite the heat (it must have been around 28°C), the path was almost entirely in the shade. We observed more Nutcrackers, and a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers, which seemed busy with a nest. In the middle of the woods, a Chiffchaff could be heard. Along the ascent, in the forest undergrowth, we found River Cranesbill (*Geranium rivulare*), a species endemic to the Alps.

We reached a high point (and the limit of the route we intended to do) in an open area, formed by meadows and protected by steep slopes, with a magnificent view of Mont Collon (3637m) and its glacier. Here we saw the Whinchat and Nutcracker, using a post or treetops to make themselves more visible. We also detected a Lesser Whitethroat, which was more elusive and hiding in the bushes. In the distance, we discovered an Alpine Marmot,

below the cable car handle, emitting an alarm signal. A Moorland Clouded Yellow pass by over the meadow and, along with the Little Blues, there were some Grizzled Skippers and a Green-underside Blue. Some Trumpet Gentians also grew here.

We returned to Les Haudères around 5.00pm, and on the mountain road down, a client drew our attention to an animal on the slope that “looked like a cat”. We stopped, reversed, and realized it was a Marmot. It was very close, on top of a rock, and enjoying the heat of the stone. We were able to observe and photograph it very well. Further down, we stopped again to photograph a group of local cows, which carried the traditional large bells around their necks.

Later, after a short rest, we met to review the day's checklist, and then went to dinner at one of the village restaurants. Meanwhile, it rained and thundered a little. At night, after the rain stopped, we heard a Tawny Owl in the distance.

Day 3

Friday 19th June

We again went out at 7.00am for a morning bird walk, along the main street and then towards the river. Along the route, we saw White Wagtails and several Black Redstarts. Serins were heard, but only seen in flight, and in a nearby meadow, we observed a Fieldfare.

After breakfast, and after a quick visit to the supermarket, we set off for the Grand Dixence dam. The journey took about thirty-five minutes, requiring us to descend almost the entire valley to Euseigne, where we diverted west to enter the adjacent valley where the dam is located. The road took us south to the dam, after a final ascent in tight zig-zags. Along the trip, we had few observations, except for a Marmot seen by the roadside, perched on a stone.

The dam, in addition to its strategic importance for the region's hydroelectric network, is at a junction of several mountain trails, and the cable car that makes trips to the top of the wall is much used by tourists. Therefore, we found several facilities here, such as a tourist office, toilets, a hotel and a restaurant. We parked in the closest car park and prepared our equipment to go up by cable car. The first departure was at 10.00am. While we waited, we saw Crag Martins and an Alpine Chough perched at a distance, on a metal structure and calling.

The ascent was relatively fast, but allowed us to appreciate the surrounding landscape and the entire extent of the wall. However, we could hardly turn around: we were packed like sardines in a can or a subway ride during rush hour!

As soon as we exited the cable car building we saw White-winged Snowfinches and Water Pipits moving around the rocky areas. By observing the Snowfinches' behaviour, we detected a nest in a hole in the wall, and managed to observe it very closely, even with a telescope, while the adults brought food to feed the chicks. We also saw a Mountain Green-veined White butterfly.

We then started the descent. At the first level, we met an English couple who were monitoring a Wallcreeper's nest, trying to observe the species. Later, we saw them again at lunchtime, in the car park, and they told us that they had had to wait until noon to see the male appear with food to feed the female.

We saw Alpine Choughs throughout the morning, and two Golden Eagles over the ridge at the highest point. We heard the alarm signal of Marmots in the valley several times. The Black Redstarts and Crag Martins accompanied us along the descent. At one point, we saw an interaction between two or three Alpine Accentors in a rocky area. For a few brief moments, some of us managed to observe a Marmot hiding a little further down. During the descent, we observed some alpine plants such as Alpine Butterwort, Bird's-eye Primrose and Livelong Saxifrage. We saw many Small Tortoiseshells and one or two Almond-eyed Ringlets. Further down, in an area dominated by willows, we saw small groups of Redpolls, which were passing by or approaching and perching on the small willows.

We had our lunch in the car park, using the back of the van as a table. While I prepared the picnic, some participants saw a Great Sooty Satyr. After lunch, we got into the van and went down the valley a little way, stopping in Pralong to sit for a while on the terrace of the local café. While savouring our drinks, we observed several pairs of Crag Martins with nests on the roofs of the local houses and the small chapel. We heard and saw Siskins pass by, while a Nutcracker flew over, calling.

Next, we went down the entire valley again and up the adjacent one, stopping in Evolène. The objective was to try to see a Red-backed Shrike. And there it was: a male, perched on a bush. Although it only stayed for a short time, we managed to observe it with the telescope.

As it was still early, before returning to the hotel we went for a short walk in the area, closer to the river. We went down to the riverside, where we parked the van and took a short walk along the left bank (upstream) and on the opposite side, among extensive flowery meadows. Many species of flowers were seen (Saint Bruno's Lily, Dark Columbine, Martagon Lily, Fragrant Orchid, Broad-leaved Harebell and Wolf's-bane, among others), and also butterflies, such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Geranium Argus, Chequered Skipper, Black-veined White, and Duke of Burgundy.

Halfway through the route, we heard a Black Woodpecker calling several times from deep within the forest, halfway up the slope. In the river, we saw Dippers at several points (one or maybe two individuals). In the riverside woods, we saw Spotted Flycatchers, and in the more isolated trees, some Serins.

We returned to the van and the hotel, in time to rest a bit, do the day's checklist, and have an early dinner. At the end of the meal, we were surprised by a prolonged downpour, which forced us to make the return journey to the hotel in the rain.

Day 4

Saturday 20th June

The day began with another early morning outing before breakfast, to explore the surroundings of the village on foot. This time, we went up the main street, crossed the bridge, and started a forest trail that gradually climbed up through the forest. We climbed until we reached a clearing. Along the route, we observed several species: a Song Thrush singing insistently, a Mistle Thrush perched on top of a pine tree, a Firecrest moving in the tops of the tall trees, plus Coal Tits and Nutcrackers. In the distance, at the top of the slope already illuminated by the sun, we saw two Golden Eagles and an Alpine Chough.

The plan for today was to go down the valley and head east, towards Leuk. Here we would visit a small nature reserve with lagoons. After breakfast and some shopping at the local supermarket, we started the journey of almost an hour. On the way down the mountain, we observed a Common Buzzard. Near Leuk, we stopped in the urban area to go to the toilet, then continued for another five minutes until we reached the reserve. As soon as we parked the van and got out, we heard a Nightingale singing and saw a Tree Sparrow calling from a nearby tree.

Right at the first lagoon, we were treated with an observation of two Little Bitterns, which flew and disappeared into the reedbed. We saw few species of dragonflies, of which we took some photographs. The largest observed were Lesser and Blue Emperors. But we also observed the much smaller Blue Featherleg damselfly. As for butterflies, nothing special was observed, just Common Marbled White, and Holly and Common Blues.

The itinerary we were following took us to several observation points. At one of these, we managed to observe several waterbirds, such as Great Cormorant, Coot (an adult with chicks), Mallards and Little Grebe (the last being a new entry for the checklist). Bee-eaters made themselves heard, flying over the treetops and approaching the water. In the surrounding fields, we observed Skylark and Zitting Cisticola, the latter also being new to the checklist.

We arrived at the bird observatory area. In the adjacent fields, small remote-controlled planes were being flown, which generated some noise, although they were a little way away. We watched some Grey Herons by the water, looking for food. Bee-eaters perched on branches near the colony or on trees on the other side of the lagoon. Meanwhile, while part of the group stayed at the observatory, I continued a little further with the other part of the group, to go up to a higher observation point. Along the route, we heard the songs of both Great and Common Reed Warblers.

As lunchtime approached, we went back, stopping again at the first lagoon. Here we saw a Starling, in constant back-and-forth movement to a hole in a tree, where its chicks could be heard chirping. A Common Nightingale appeared next to us, perching on a wooden fence, and then jumping to the ground to pick up food. Meanwhile, in the reedbed, we started to hear sounds of a small animal moving. The vegetation could be seen moving at several points and near the water. We fell silent and tried to observe with binoculars and glimpse what it might be... but whatever it was, it never showed itself.

We left the reserve and went back a little to cross a bridge over the Rhône River, stopping immediately after to have our picnic in the shade. To the north, on the opposite side of the river, the limestone slope could be seen rising abruptly, torn by a narrow river defile, through which the river flowed. While we ate, some butterflies approached: Brimstone, False Heath Fritillary and Clouded Yellow. Also from this point, several birds of prey were seen flying over the ridge. We managed to identify Black and Red Kites, as well as a Kestrel. They were joined by a Raven.

After lunch, we packed everything up and continued upstream, staying on the north bank of the Rhône. We went up the slope in tight curves and stopped in the village of Bratsch, where we visited the local café. We sat on the terrace and, with some difficulty, tried to explain to the owner of the establishment, who only spoke local German, what we wanted to drink. While we enjoyed our coffee, a Short-toed Snake Eagle appeared, flying over the village slope, clearly hunting. It was flying high, hovering, and changing location frequently. A Common Buzzard also appeared, and for a time, a Honey Buzzard circled nearby, calling constantly. Crag Martins were also frequently seen patrolling the airspace of the village.

After coffee, we returned to the road, and stopped a little further on, roughly halfway through the gorge we had appreciated at lunchtime. Here we found a small chapel located next to an old cobblestone path and a single-arch bridge, spanning the narrow distance between the sides of the ravine. Crossing it was not advisable for those who suffer from vertigo! But the landscape impressed us immensely. We spent some time at this location, mainly scanning for birds. A little upstream, we detected a Golden Eagle, being molested by Black and Red Kites. Then a second Golden Eagle appeared, and the small raptors disappeared. In the same area, we also managed to see a small group of Alpine Swifts. Closer to us, we saw Raven, Alpine Chough (right upon our arrival), and a Kestrel.

The temperature remained high, at 35°C. We continued further west for a final stop in a forest area, and took a short walk along a forest path. Initially we were among pines, and then we reached a transition to deciduous forest. We heard Western Bonelli's Warbler and Coal Tit several times. We also discovered more orchids (Fragrant Orchid and Red Helleborine) and saw some new butterflies, namely Marbled Fritillary and Scarce Swallowtail. But the heat had already worn out the group's enthusiasm, and we decided to stop there and return to Les Haudères. The return journey took a little over an hour, and the day ended with a well-deserved dinner and rest.

Day 5

Sunday 21st June

Today's pre-breakfast outing was different. In order to explore another area in the surroundings of the hotel, we went out by car and parked at a curve in the road, next to the bridge over the Arolla stream. We started a forest trail in a mixed area of deciduous and coniferous trees, following the valley. The route was beautiful but demanding, with a constant ascent during the entire first part. Several bird species were observed and heard, such as Nuthatch, Crested, Coal and Willow Tits, Song Thrush and Chiffchaff. We found some new plants on this route too, such as Wood Pink and Mountain Lettuce.

After breakfast, we noticed that the village had been transformed: it was preparing to host a mountain bike event. Vehicles, bicycles and many people were everywhere. But the event did not significantly interfere with our ascent to Ferpèche. This climb was winding: we went through villages on narrow roads with somewhat degraded surfaces. Finally, we parked near the Ferpèche dam.

Initial observations near the dam included a new butterfly species, Large Ringlet, and Mountain Green-veined White. We also saw Asian Fritillary. We started a gradual ascent. The temperature was mild. Paniculate Saxifrage, Hedge-leaved Adenostyles and Bird's-eye Primrose were visible. Nutcrackers were heard several times.

We made a short detour at a spring line, which soaked a small meadow and formed a pond. Tadpoles were visible in the water. Taking advantage of the damp soil was the small carnivorous plant Southern Butterwort, and Broad-leaved Marsh Orchids grew here. We also observed Dingy Skipper and Alpine Heath butterflies.

Continuing up the Ferpèche valley, at a higher level, we found a large pond full of tadpoles. Along with these were about three Alpine Newts, and two very small juvenile frogs, probably of the *Rana* genus. We witnessed the predatory behaviour of the newts, trying to capture tadpoles.

At this level, the landscape becomes more open and flattened, with fewer trees. In the grasslands, we found a peculiar fern, Moonwort, and also some specimens of Common Wintergreen and Musk Milfoil. Around the yellow flowers of Alpine Bird's-foot-trefoil we saw Turquoise Blue butterflies.

We reached 1,950m, below the intersection of two glacial tongues, Ferpècle and Mont Miné. The melting waters joined to form a stream with a strong flow and milky water (rich in glacial sediments). A lagoon had formed here due to a narrowing and damming of the stream. After a short rest, during which we could appreciate this imposing landscape, we returned by the same path.

We had our picnic at the place where we had left the van, taking advantage of the cool shade provided by the trees. Once the meal was finished and everything was packed in the van, we headed to the bar, which was located a little further down. On its terrace, where we stayed for a good while, we saw Edelweiss (cultivated) flowering in a flowerbed.

We returned earlier to the accommodation. Due to the heat and accumulated fatigue, we decided to have more time in the afternoon to rest at the hotel. However, we went out earlier for dinner, at 6.30pm, which today was in Evolène, the next village. The objective was to get to know this locality a little, so we walked along its main street until we reached the restaurant. Dinner was very pleasant, out on the terrace, from where we could appreciate the mountain landscape and see several birds also enjoying the end of the day.

Day 6

Monday 22nd June

Today, a long journey to the highest point of the tour was scheduled. We would ascend to Gornergrat by train, from Zermatt. But before that, we would have to catch a train in Täsch.

The day started early, with breakfast at 7.00am and departure for Täsch at 8.00am. The journey lasted about ninety minutes, via a new tunnel (which was under construction last year), saving us some time and avoiding a winding road through the valley. Upon arrival in Täsch, we parked in the train station car park. From here, the train would be the only possible transport. We took the train to Zermatt, a journey of about ten to fifteen minutes. We got out in the centre of this tourist locality, which was full of visitors. From Zermatt, we took the mountain train to Gornergrat. The journey was very interesting. We advanced slowly, gradually overcoming the incline and gaining altitude. We admired the flowers decorating the slopes, and even managed to observe an Apollo butterfly while having excellent views of the mythical Matterhorn. Along the ascent, we also observed one or two Marmots. We crossed the forest barrier, entering alpine meadows, and shortly reached the end of the line in Gornergrat, at 3100m.

Before the train had even stopped, one of the clients drew my attention to a bird of prey. From inside the train, without a good viewing angle, we could not work out what it was, but as soon as we got out onto a platform full of tourists, we tried to find a favourable observation point. We managed to see a silhouette that slowly glided by, gradually moving away. With binoculars, we confirmed our first observation of a Bearded Vulture!

We organized ourselves and went up to the highest point, from where we would have 360° perspectives to the Zermatt valley and the Weisshorn (4,505m) to the north, to the Dent Blanche (4,358m) to the north-west, to the Matterhorn (4,478m) to the west, and to the Breithorns (4,139m/4,164m), to the south-west. Around us were several Alpine Choughs, taking advantage of the tourists' crumbs. Snowfinches hopped on the ground among the crowd, also looking for leftovers. We discovered that there were at least two pairs: they doubtless had their nests in the buildings.

On a stony slope facing south towards the Gorner glacial valley, Wheatears were seen several times, and we heard a Linnet passing by. We moved away a little from the viewpoint, to escape the crowd and enter more natural terrain. Here, on the soil moistened by the melting snow, some butterflies were libating, such as Peak White, Glandon Blue and Southern Grizzled Skipper. In the rocky areas, we found some alpine plants, such as Furrowed and Purple Saxifrages, Short-leaved Gentian and Alpine Moon-daisy.

Around lunchtime, we went down to the train station to eat something at the local bar. And immediately after, we took the train to descend to the Riffelberg station. This area is characterized by a quite open landscape, comprising high-altitude meadows, with good views of the Matterhorn. We explored some trails, managing to get more Marmot observations. We also saw new butterflies, such as Dewy Ringlet, a skipper species we could not identify, and Mountain Clouded Yellow. In the meadows, several plant species bloomed, such as the blue-and-yellow Long-spurred Violet, and Spring and Short-leaved Gentians. We heard and (with some difficulty!) observed Water Pipit and Skylark.

Around 3.00pm, we took the train back to Zermatt, then continued to Täsch, and returned to the van and the road. We arrived in Les Haudères with time for a shower, a change clothes, and to fill in the day's checklist, before going to dinner, again in Evolène, as the usual restaurant in Les Haudères was closed. To conclude the day's observations, on the return from dinner, we surprised a Common Buzzard perched on a post by the roadside.

Day 7

Tuesday 23rd June

The day dawned clear, but with a forecast of cloud and rain, which was confirmed later. As usual, we went out early for a short ornithological walk to whet the appetite for breakfast. Again, we used the van to go to a stretch of the La Borgne stream, between Les Haudères and Evolène. We parked next to the river and explored the trail on the left bank. We initially walked downstream, through a coniferous forest. As we were at the bottom of the valley, the temperature was cool. We had good observations of Dippers, both adult and juvenile. We heard Great Spotted Woodpecker, several tits (Coal, Willow, and Blue), Wren and Firecrest (it was difficult to see them!). A Jay was also seen.

Shortly after, we went back to explore the upstream sector, crossing an area of meadows and clearings. Here we saw Mistle Thrush and Fieldfare, and we continued to see Dippers along the stream.

After breakfast, we started our journey north, descending to the Rhône valley, and headed to Chamoson, a vineyard area, to visit an old quarry. When we arrived, around 10.00am, the temperature had already reached 25°C. Almost immediately, we started to hear the song of the Blue Rock Thrush. With some difficulty, due to the size of the rock wall, we finally managed to locate the birds, moving between several points on the wall and bushes at the base of the escarpment. We also saw some Serins and Linnets, and first heard a Cirl Bunting and then detected a female on top of a bush. At the top of the escarpment, small groups of Alpine Swifts and one or two Alpine Choughs were seen passing by. Meanwhile, closer to us, a Melodious Warbler appeared, singing from a bush.

After a while, we decided to continue our journey. We stopped at a pastry shop in Vétroz for a coffee, before starting to climb the mountain. We left Vétroz towards the Derborence Valley, gradually climbing and gaining excellent views over the Rhône valley. Immediately after Aven, we made a quick stop next to a small chapel,

overlooking the entrance to the enclosed valley of the Lizerne stream. On a wall (appropriately) we saw two Common Wall Lizards.

A Common Apollo flew very close, but moved away immediately. While we appreciated the views of the imposing landscape, a Honey Buzzard also passed by. We continued the journey, now along a narrow, winding road, through several tunnels excavated in the mountain slopes. Fortunately, these narrow passages are controlled by traffic lights! When we entered a more open but forested area, we stopped to explore the woods.

We found several orchid species here, mainly Red Helleborines and Heath Spotted Orchids. At one point we started to hear a Western Bonelli's Warbler, at the top of the pines. We spent some time trying to observe it, but in the end, we only managed to see brief movements, and then the bird moving away.

We returned to the van and, as it was almost lunchtime, we continued to the Godey dam, where we parked. In this area, we dedicated some time before lunch to exploring the stream bank. In a small flowery clearing, we saw some good butterflies, namely, Bright-eyed Ringlet (new to the checklist), Large Wall Brown, and False Heath and Heath Fritillaries. Two Mallards flew over.

Back at the van, while I prepared the picnic, one of the clients detected a group of Alpine Ibex, very far away, taking advantage of the shade of a natural rock shelter. But with the telescope, it was possible to observe the group and its movements.

After lunch, we went to the local bar, to have coffee and relax a little. We exchanged a few words with the locals, who indicated a probable nesting location for Bearded Vultures. While we were on the terrace, we saw White Wagtail, Alpine Chough and a Golden Eagle on a high slope.

After coffee, we took the van and continued up the road towards the Derborence Lake. Halfway, we positioned ourselves in front of the escarpment the people had told us was good for Bearded Vulture. A client saw a bird approach and land, but out of sight. Initially, by size and colour, we thought it was the Bearded Vulture, but, with the telescope, we confirmed to be 'just' a Golden Eagle. We continued up to the lake and parked in the car park.

Immediately after we started walking towards the lake shore, it started to drizzle. Quickly, the precipitation intensified, accompanied by wind and thunder. We ran to the van, sheltering just in time to avoid the downpour. The rain lasted approximately thirty minutes, then stopped, so we decided to return to the lake trail. Along the way, we saw the Lesser Butterfly Orchid and One-flowered Wintergreen, and a Song Thrush singing from the top of a pine tree. At the lake, we observed some Tufted Ducks and Mallards on the opposite bank. One of the clients spotted a female Red Deer feeding at the top of a more distant slope, another addition to the checklist.

We returned to the van and started the descent. Along the way, I heard the call of a Rock Bunting. We stopped and explored the area, following in the direction of the sound. Finally, we discovered it, perched on a pine tree, and made good observations with the telescope. A little lower, we stopped at a point where we might have a different perspective of the supposed nesting area of the Bearded Vulture. We had no luck, but instead saw another Golden Eagle, two Sparrowhawks and some more Alpine Choughs.

When we reached the Rhône valley and joined the motorway, under a clear sky, the temperature reached 37°C. But, immediately after passing the last tunnel before Sion and before exiting the motorway, we were again in torrential rain, with wind and a sudden drop in temperature, to 26°C. As we approached Les Haudères, the rain eased, and then ceased.

Day 8

Wednesday 24th June

And so we had reached the last day of the tour. We decided to make one last outing before breakfast to see birds, undertaking the same itinerary as the first morning. It was a productive morning, with more than twenty species observed, including Italian Sparrow, Dipper, Green Woodpecker (only heard), Grey Wagtail and Serin.

After breakfast, we filled the van with our luggage and started the return journey to Geneva. But we still had a stop to make and an area to explore before lunchtime. After almost two hours of travel, we stopped on the shore of Lake Léman, in the Lausanne area, to visit the Bird Island of Préverenges (Île aux Oiseaux de Préverenges). This had been a recommendation from a native of Les Haudères, when he realized that our group was birdwatching.

This is a tourist area, with parks, bars and a beach area, where there were many bathers. The Bird Island was a small piece of isolated land a few metres from the shore. In parallel, two or three artificial platforms had been built over the water, to serve as a nesting place and refuge for birds. The scenario we found was indescribable: a deafening din of hundreds of birds. Common Terns and Black-headed Gulls stood out, both in terms of numbers and in decibels, occupying the platforms to nest. But dozens of Cormorants, some Tufted Ducks, Coots, Red-crested Pochards, and Little and Great Crested Grebes were also present. Some Mute Swans swam about further away, a Cattle Egret appeared, joining the island group, and we also saw a male Ruff in spring plumage. In the reedbeds, Common Reed Warblers were heard and seen. Twice, a Black Kite appeared, flying over the Common Tern colony, trying to catch some more unprotected chick. It succeeded in one of its attempts, leading to an immediate reaction from the colony, with furious cries and mass pursuit until it moved away from the area.

This island is a protected space and has benefited from some interventions that favour birds and facilitate their observation by locals and tourists. There were interpretation panels installed at various points, an interpretation centre, and two fixed Swarovski ST Vista 30x95 telescopes!

We had our last picnic, then went to the local bar to have a coffee. Immediately afterwards, we set off for Geneva airport. As we approached Geneva, traffic inevitably intensified, but we managed to reach the airport by 3.00pm. We had time for a quick goodbye: some caught the first flight, others waited for flights later on, and others headed off for one more night in Switzerland.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>								✓
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>								✓
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓						✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				✓			✓	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				✓				✓
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓							✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓			✓	✓		✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>							✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓						✓	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>								✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓			✓				✓
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>								✓
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>								✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>								✓
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓							✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓			✓				✓
Little Bittern	<i>Botaurus minutus</i>				✓				
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>								✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓			✓			✓	
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>				✓			✓	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		✓		✓				
Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>						✓		
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>				✓			✓	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>				✓				
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>							✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>				✓				
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓			✓				✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓						
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>				✓				
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			✓					✓
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>			✓					
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓					✓	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>			✓					
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓		✓			✓	
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓		✓			✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				✓	✓		✓	
Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>			✓					
Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>		✓			✓		✓	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				✓		✓		
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>				✓				
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>							✓	
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓			✓				✓
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>				✓				
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	✓			✓	✓		✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			✓	✓				
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Currucula curruca</i>		✓			✓		✓	
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>				✓			✓	✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓					
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>					✓			
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				✓				
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>				✓				
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		✓	✓				✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>			✓		✓		✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			✓					
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>				✓			✓	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			✓		✓	✓		
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>							✓	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓	✓				✓	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>						✓		
Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>			✓					
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓						
White-winged Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>			✓			✓		
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>				✓				
Italian Sparrow	<i>Passer italiae</i>		✓						✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓			✓			✓
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓						
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>			✓			✓		
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓					✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>			✓					
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	✓				✓
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			✓					
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>							✓	
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>							✓	

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		✓						
Alpine Marmot	<i>Marmota marmota</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>							✓	
Alpine Ibex	<i>Capra ibex</i>							✓	
Alpine Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>		✓						

Amphibians & reptiles

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Alpine Newt	<i>Ichthyosaura alpestris</i>					✓			
Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>					✓			
Marsh Frog	<i>Pelophylax ridibundus</i>				✓				
Common Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis muralis</i>							✓	

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Apollo	<i>Parnassius apollo</i>						✓	✓	
Chequered Skipper	<i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>			✓					
Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>			✓					
Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>				✓				
Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>		✓			✓			
Southern Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvoides</i>						✓		
Common Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>		✓						
Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Common Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>				✓			✓	
Mountain Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias phicomone</i>						✓		
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>				✓				
Moorland Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias palaeno</i>		✓						
Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>			✓		✓			
Peak White	<i>Pontia callidice</i>						✓		
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>				✓				
Mountain Green-veined White	<i>Pieris bryoniae</i>			✓		✓	✓		
Mountain Dappled White	<i>Euchloe simplonia</i>		✓						

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Common Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>			✓					
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>				✓				
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>		✓						
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>				✓				
Green-underside Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>		✓						
Little Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Idas Blue	<i>Plebejus idas</i>		✓						
Glandon Blue	<i>Agriades glandon</i>						✓		
Geranium Argus	<i>Eumedonia eumedon</i>		✓	✓					
Turquoise Blue	<i>Polyommatus dorylas</i>					✓			
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>				✓				
Marbled Fritillary	<i>Brenthis daphne</i>				✓				
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>			✓					
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓		
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓						
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>		✓	✓					
Asian Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas intermedia</i>		✓			✓			
False Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea diamina</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea athalia</i>							✓	
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>				✓				
Alpine Heath	<i>Coenonympha gardetta</i>					✓			
Large Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>							✓	
Northern Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata petropolitana</i>		✓			✓			
Common Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Alpine Grayling	<i>Oeneis glacialis</i>		✓						
Great Sooty Satyr	<i>Satyrus ferula</i>			✓					
Bright-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia oeme</i>							✓	
Dewy Ringlet	<i>Erebia pandrose</i>						✓		
Large Ringlet	<i>Erebia euryale</i>					✓			
Almond-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia albergana</i>		✓	✓		✓			

Damselflies & dragonflies

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026							
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Blue Featherleg	<i>Platycnemis pennipes</i>				✓				
Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>				✓				
Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>				✓				
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>				✓				