

## **Nature at La Cabane du Pommier**

### **An introduction and calendar of the yearly cycle**

La Cabane du Pommier lies within a terrain of 10 acres comprising abandoned hornbeam coppice, secondary oak / hornbeam woodland and limestone grassland with scrub in roughly equal measure. There is also a small orchard and natural springs nearby. The area is riddled with dry stone walls and terraces dating from the time when land was cleared for cultivation - particularly vineyards - now long gone. We are on the edge of the Foulissard Forest which is a local area of wildlife importance and includes a mixture of central and southern European woodland types. Similar habitat nearby adjacent to the River Dordogne is a proposed European Special Area of Conservation (pSAC), as is the river itself.

The woodland is generally fairly young secondary growth with a good variety of orchids in spring and summer including Lady, Violet Limodore, Mueller's and Red Helleborines. Of the wildflowers Stinking Hellebore flowers here first - around New Year. Cowslips and Primroses and Narrow-leaved Lungwort adorn the woodland floor in the spring. In sunny warmer spots locally one can find Holm Oak and Sweet Bay. Nesting bird species include Honey Buzzard, Golden Oriole, Short-toed Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Turtle Dove, woodpeckers and tits (including Marsh and Crested).

The limestone grassland and scrub is very rich in flowers and invertebrates. Orchids include Sombre Bee, Early Spider and Lizard. There is a particularly fascinating rocky garrigue nearby on the south-facing hilltop of Cabant with a flora including Blue Lettuce, *Helichrysum stoechas* and other xerophilic species. Over 80 species of butterfly have been recorded including Large Blue and Twin-spot Fritillary. Wood Lark and Cirl Bunting are typical local nesting birds.

### **A year around La Cabane du Pommier**

The year starts fairly quietly with Buzzards and Sparrowhawks up on thermals on sunny days. White Wagtails buzz around the terrace and Marsh Tits come to the bird table. Hawfinches become easier to see with the leaves down. Tawny and Barn Owls call at night. As the days get longer Nuthatches seem to call incessantly and Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers are very active. Short-toed Treecreepers and Firecrests soon join in the chorus.

The first warm sunny days in March or even late February, bring Large Tortoiseshell butterflies out of hibernation. On a mild evening there may be several species of bats flying around the houses. Occasionally a Black Kite may flap lazily over as the birds return from Africa and many nest locally along the river. Wood Lark sing more frequently around the hill. Amphibians become active and Midwife Toad and Common Toad can be found on wet mild evenings. Local ponds hold good populations of Marbled and Palmate Newt. Wall Lizards come out of hibernation and bask on stones. Black Redstarts return to the hamlet to take up their territory and Cirl Buntings sing locally. The first colour comes to the forest floor with yellow Primroses, Oxlips and Cowslips and blue Common Lungwort.

In April and May orchids are at their peak including Early Spider, Sombre Bee, Violet Limodore and Lady. As early summer arrives Green Frogs call from the valley ponds below and Meadow Crickets sing in the grasslands. Migrant birds arrive with Bonelli's Warbler, Melodious Warbler; Golden Oriole and Hoopoe setting up territories locally. Turtle Doves join them a little later. The meadow in front of the house livens up as the butterfly population takes off. Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail and Black-veined White are perhaps most spectacular but there are many blues and skippers. With luck there may be Duke of Burgundy or Map butterflies.

In June the meadow often seems full of Marbled White butterflies but perhaps more interesting is the colony of Reverdin's Blue, a species closely related to the Silver-studded Blue. Nightjars are very active along the hilltop. In July one of the stars of the butterfly fauna emerges - the Large Blue, plus the lesser known Dryad. A few orchids are still flowering such as Mueller's, Red and Broad-leaved Helleborine.

In the late summer and early autumn butterflies continue to be of interest with Great-banded and Woodland Graylings and various Clouded Yellow species. If you are lucky you may see migrating raptors including Osprey, Short-toed Eagle, Honey Buzzard and Hobby. Tiny young Wall Lizards may scuttle away from under your feet. The strange buzzing call in the evening is the large cricket *Ephippiger*. You could catch sight of a Wild Boar, perhaps with piglets, crossing a track. Wild Cyclamen flower by the house.

Roe and Red Deer come to feed in the meadow in the evening often with young - we've even seen them by our front door! As the nights get colder in October we listen out for the first flocks of migrating Common Cranes bugling across the sky. If we are lucky a flock may circle for a while overhead. On milder wet nights Common Salamander are often active on the forest floor.

In November, Redwings and Siskins appear from the north with occasional Bramblings. On sunny days the last butterflies show themselves, perhaps a Peacock, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood or even a late Brown Hairstreak. If the evenings are mild there may be a bat or two on the wing. Red Squirrels are more noticeable in the bare treetops. In late December the Stinking Hellebore starts to flower and we look forward to longer days once more.