

Birding at Parc des Beaumonts, Montreuil

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For a birder living in Paris or thereabouts it's difficult to imagine a better local patch than this - a small green island thrust up above an urban landscape. The most appealing feature of the park from a birder's point of view is its elevation, with big welcoming skies all around :- to the west, a panoramic view over Paris with distant views of the Tour Montparnasse and the Eiffel Tower and, nestled down around the edges, the very tops of the surrounding blocks of flats - the urban 'banlieu' of Seine St-Denis.

Unlike your standard Parisien park, which would be dreadfully regimented with special opening times, park guards, trimmed flower beds, finely cut lawns and 'keep off the grass' signs, the Parc des Beaumonts is wonderfully wild, rough and rugged, with rambling bramble bushes, weed-filled ditches, bits of scrub, banks of high leafy trees, 2 reed-filled ponds with muddy edges and a rubbish dump.

It's particularly exciting here at migration time because the birds, suddenly hitting this high green ground, will drop in briefly for a breather before continuing on, and this visible migration fuels a feeling that pretty much anything can turn up anytime. This bore testament only this spring when, on a hot, bright and sunny April afternoon, against a backdrop of buildings, balconies, washing-lines, barking dogs and children playing, a lone curlew flapped steadily north towards a distant coastline.

The site is covered principally by three birders:

1- the author, fresh into town and learning the ropes - has a rather pathetic park list of 81 (but has seen a curlew !). Gets there most weekends, sunrise (yeah , right) to about 2pm when the boredom of sky-gazing sets in. Great claim to fame is still needing a nuthatch.

2- Pierre Rousset, definitely the main man with the huge list, been going almost every day for yonks. Stands atop the Overlook, scanning the horizon - a pillar of the community and a familiar figure to all the joggers and dog walkers. Seen pretty much everything (apart from curlew)...all the main rarities like ortolan bunting, red-footed falcon, tawny pipit, penduline tit, waxwing, nuthatch etc.....they're all there, comfortably on his list.

3- Beaten easily into 3rd place, based on 'number of park visits' is **Laurent Spanneut** - one of France's top birders who lives right next door to the park, and *so really should get out there a bit more often Laurent*....Laurent's great claim to fame is gripping off 'everyone' with the biggest blocker of all blockers...a dotterel flying over calling on one clear autumn evening back in 2004.

Other birders can and do turn up from time to time, depending on weather conditions : Pierre Delbove, Philippe Rance, Olivier Laporte, Isabelle Merle, Philip Redman, Maxime Zucca and others...

This website intends to provide a general picture of the reserve and recent reports of what's about. Please do come and visit us sometime - it's a great place to have a picnic! And, if you actually see something, please, let us know!

Thanks and good birding !