

Skiing (and a little birding) in the French Alps **– New Year 2008** **by Nick Bruce-White**

I spent 6 days skiing in Les Trois Vallees, Courchevel in the French Alps over the New Year. Although birding was the last thing on my mind (I do like my skiing!), Howard pleaded with me to write a little report on my sightings for the website. So here goes,

As I was travelling with a group of friends, driving was the most efficient way down there. It sounds fun, but the French countryside visible between Calais and Lyon is somewhat dull (except for when the big crane flocks are around- I would recommend a March trip to Lac du Der in Champagne for anyone). The lack of hedgerows and obvious wildlife habitat makes British farms look like nature reserves by comparison. Unfortunately, both my ferry crossings were in the dark, so I couldn't even do any sea watching :-)

The one thing that does strike you as you drive through France, however, is the enormous number of common buzzards and kestrels along the autoroutes. At one point along the A6 in Central France, buzzards were perched every few hundred metres for several hours of the journey. No kites to be seen, though.



Ski resorts tend to be relatively sterile places for wildlife, as was driven home to me so acutely when hiking through the Pyrenees last summer. That said, there were an abundance of interesting corvids, particularly **Raven** and **Alpine Chough**. The only other notables were **Nutcracker** and **Crested Tit**. Plenty of mammals tracks were seen from various chairlifts, which I assume were all fox as marmots would be hibernating.



That's about it, I'm afraid. Skiing and wildlife watching aren't exactly natural bed partners. That said, skiing is a lot of fun :-)

Nick