

Operation Pyrenean Desman

After reading the trip notes from Ben (aka geomalia) posted on Jon's website on August 2017 about Desman observations in the Lac d'Ayous area in France, I said to myself that my wife and I must go there to try our chance to observe this incredible critter that is the Pyrenean Desman.

Knowing how difficult it is to see such a small mammal and leaving in the South of France not so far away from the Pyreneans mountains and the Lac d'Ayous area where Ben and others mentioned Desman could reliably be seen during daytime, we could not miss the opportunity to go there during a long week-end end in May. Even if we wouldn't see the Desman a quick look at the Refuge Ayous website where Ben spent 2 nights showed that we would at least enjoy great hiking and views of the lakes and mountains in the area.

We went there end of May on the first days the Refuge was opening. Even so, the Refuge was fully booked and I'm glad I booked it well in advance. The amount of snow above 2000m of altitude was still quite important but the good news is that part of the lakes, and most importantly the small water ponds between the lakes where Ben saw the Desman, were clear of ice.

I must emphasize on how detailed and precise the information given by Ben were. Thanks to them, we could find the spot very easily to focus on the Desman observation. A big thank to Ben for his precious information about the location and the Desman habits.

On 3 days spent in the area, we could see the Desman in good conditions twice: on the first day only after waiting for 20 minutes but the light conditions were poor. On the second day, the light conditions were much better but we had to wait 5 hours before seeing it! Each time we saw the Desman was only for a couple of minutes and not 10 min like Ben 😊 We did not see it on the third day...

Beyond the **Pyrenean Desman** that we saw quite well but was a nightmare to take pictures of since he moves so fast and always remains in the water, we could also see lots of **Alpine marmots**, 1 **Isard/Pyrenean Chamois** and some nice birds like 1 Lammergeyer and 1 vulture.

A few pictures below:



Desman - Day 2



Alpine marmot

