



## Top French chefs want banned bird on menu

**Top French chefs, including Alain Ducasse, want to be able to serve a long-banned delicacy**

Four top French chefs want to overturn a ban<sup>1</sup> on serving a tiny songbird called the ortolan, long seen in France as the pinnacle<sup>2</sup> of gastronomic delight that connoisseurs such as the late president François Mitterrand used to eat whole and, as tradition demanded, with a napkin<sup>3</sup> draped over their heads.

Celebrity cook Alain Ducasse is one of the four who want to be allowed, just one day a year, to serve the endangered species that was banned more than a decade ago from restaurant menus in most of Europe after being hunted<sup>4</sup> almost out of existence.

The traditional way to cook the birds is to fatten them on millet, douse<sup>5</sup> them in Armagnac before roasting them in the oven. Its feet and some other body parts are then removed before the diner places a napkin over his head and puts the whole bird in his mouth.

Explanations for the napkin vary. Some say it serves to avoid the eater the embarrassment of being seen spitting out<sup>6</sup> bones, others claim it helps the diner savour the aroma.

One of the four chefs, Michel Guérard, seen as the inventor of nouvelle cuisine, said that he and his colleagues were respectful of the environment and aware of the need to protect endangered species. "While respecting everyone's feelings, we also need to respect secular traditions, particularly from the Landes region... and to transmit to younger generations the savoir-faire of the preparation and cooking of these birds," he said.

The ortolan is particularly popular in the Landes region and other areas of southwestern France, where bird-protection campaigners accuse local authorities of turning a blind eye to the capture of thousands of the migratory birds.

Adapted from *thelocal.fr* - 17 Sep 2014

<sup>1</sup> (to) ban: bannir

<sup>2</sup> Pinnacle : le sommet

<sup>3</sup> Napkin : serviette de table

<sup>4</sup> Hunted (to hunt) : chasser

<sup>5</sup> (to) douse: tremper

<sup>6</sup> (to) spit out: cracher

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