

# WILDLIFE TRAVEL

13th to 20th May 2024 (1 week)

## LA BRENNE

wildlife of the French lakes (by train)

NEW ITINERARY  
FOR 2024

A 'wild' week, exploring one of France's best-kept secrets as we are transported back to a landscape of yesteryear.

Often called the Land of a Thousand Lakes, La Brenne Parc Naturel Régional is located just south of the Loire Valley. A mosaic of fish ponds, lakes, reedbeds, meadows, heaths and broad-leaved forest set in a traditional farmland landscape, makes for a uniquely diverse flora and fauna.

At this time of year Corn Bunting, Turtle Dove and Nightingale will be proclaiming their territories, with dozens of warblers including Savi's, Melodious, Western Bonelli's and Great Reed Warbler among the standout species.

Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Hoopoe and Golden Oriole are widespread and common, and nine species of herons can be found here including Purple Heron and Night Heron, and with luck the secretive Little Bittern. La Brenne is home to over 10% of the French breeding population of Black-necked Grebes, and several hundred pairs of elegant Whiskered Terns nest on waterlilies. Perhaps one of the region's most spectacular birds is the Bee-eater and no trip is complete without a visit to a river-bank colony.

Although best known for its birds, La Brenne has plenty of other wildlife on offer. With large areas of traditionally managed farmland and forest, and their associated flower-rich meadows, wetlands and heath, butterflies and dragonflies abound. An impressive 97 species of butterflies and almost 70 species of dragonfly have been recorded across La Brenne. For the botanist there's also much on offer, with an impressive 36 different species of orchid found across the Parc. This holiday will appeal to anyone who wishes to enjoy pleasant walks filled with wildlife, with the bonus of travelling by train.



### Price

£1950

### Single Room Supplement

£175

### Full board

- Day 1** train to La Brenne
- Day 2** La Brenne
- Day 3** La Brenne
- Day 4** River Creuse
- Day 5** Forêt du Lancosme
- Day 6** Vallée du Suin
- Day 7** La Brenne
- Day 8** return to London

### Leaders

Laurie Jackson with local guide Jason Mitchell

### Group size

min 5, max 14

birds, mixed natural history, flight-free holiday



## ITINERARY

**Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.**

**Day 1, Monday 13th May.** After travelling to Saint-Pierre-des-Corps (Tours) by train, we'll make our way to our accommodation at the edge of the Parc, close to the River Claise (c. 90 mins).

**Day 2, Tuesday 14th May.** Today we will visit some of La Brenne's many small lakes or *étangs*, where we hope to find Black-necked Grebe and Whiskered Tern, the latter can be seen hawking for insects over the still waters. Warblers will be noticeable, with Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler and Zitting Cisticola all in fine voice. We'll spend time in a hide in the hope of seeing the diminutive Little Bittern along with the showier Purple Heron tiptoeing along the water's edge. Waterfowl here, include the flashy Red-crested Pochard and more delicately marked and secretive Garganey. All the while, we will be watching out for early-flying dragonflies including Hairy Hawker, Downy Emerald and Scarlet Darter.

**Day 3, Wednesday 15th May.** *Bocage* is an important feature of La Brenne; a habitat made up of small fields and thick hedgerows, it is rich in birdlife and other animals. The hedgerows are great for a number of interesting passerines; both Red-backed Shrike and Melodious Warbler are common. Out on the open *plaine*, we'll search for the elegant Montagu's Harrier. Stone Curlew are common here but never easy to spot and Quail is sometimes heard giving its characteristic song from deep in cover, while, finding Corn Bunting is a far easier prospect.

**Day 4, Thursday 16th May.** The River Creuse cuts its way through limestone and over millennia has formed impressive chalk cliffs along its shores. This has made for a unique microclimate rich in wild flowers. Most eye-catching are the orchids and several species are to be found in spring, including Burnt, Fly and Lady. It is here we find La Brenne's most exotic breeding species, the Bee-eater, and we will spend time enjoying these exciting birds, as they pursue insects near to their riverside colony.

**Day 5, Friday 17th May.** Today we head for the eastern boundary of the Parc, where we visit the large Forêt du Lancosme, an area of woodland, heathland and wetland, rich in butterflies and birds. Woodpeckers here include Black, Middle Spotted and Lesser Spotted, and Golden Orioles are never far away. The flora is notable, with several species of orchid growing along the forest rides including Man, Bird's-nest and Monkey Orchids. Small streams and flushes are home to many dragonflies, including 'jewel-winged' demoiselles and perhaps a patrolling clubtail dragonfly.

**Day 6, Saturday 18th May.** The Vallée du Suin is a must for anyone interested in plants. In addition to an abundance of orchids, we'll find many other chalk-loving species today.



Butterflies are abundant as well, with the Black Hairstreak at its peak and the cheery orange 'spring form' of the Map on the wing. The forest here is home to the enigmatic Honey Buzzard and in fine weather, they sometime break cover, soaring high over their breeding grounds.

**Day 7, Sunday 19th May.** For our final full day in La Brenne, we leave things a little more open-ended and our visits will likely see us return to some of our favourite sites from earlier in the week, perhaps in an effort to catch up with a species or two that escaped us the first time around.

Our pace is always leisurely but today especially so and this should leave time to enjoy an extra coffee or an ice-cream!

**Day 8, Monday 20th May.** Today we head back to Saint-Pierre-des-Corps (Tours) and our train home.

## Health and Fitness

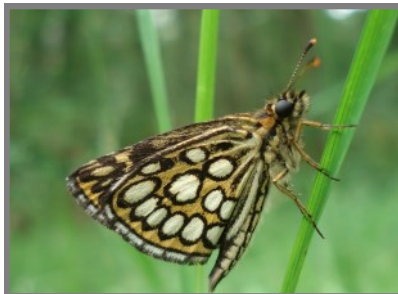
On most days, we are out and about for much of the day, albeit walking a relatively slow pace and making several stops each day. It is necessary to walk on some rougher ground but none of the walking is strenuous. Walking boots (e.g. lightweight) are essential. The pace will be relaxed, with plenty of time to enjoy the surroundings and take photos as well as stopping to enjoy the wildlife along the way. You must be able to carry your own luggage between, on and off of the trains. The rooms at the hotel are upstairs, with no lift. If you are a slow walker, please contact us to discuss whether any of the walks will be a problem for you.

## Accommodation, meals, transport and weather

We will stay in a cosy hotel in the village of Martizay on the edge of the Parc Naturel Régional. The hotel is well-situated for our explorations, and all rooms have en-suite facilities with bath and/or shower. We will be having breakfast and evening meals at our accommodation and where possible meals will have an emphasis on local cuisine. Lunches will be picnic-style and usually followed by a visit to a café. La Brenne is not vast, and can be explored without long periods driving.

Transport will be by minibus or smaller vehicles if necessary.

The weather should be dry, with temperatures in the low-twenties, although considerably cooler, showery weather is possible.



## Leaders

**Laurie Jackson** is an excellent all round naturalist and experienced Wildlife Travel leader who will be familiar to many of our travellers. In recent years, she has led many of our trips, including visits to the Vercors.

Our local guide for this holiday is Jason Mitchell. He has worked for the RSPB and Kent Wildlife Trust, where he shared his passion for 'things with wings' - birds, butterflies and dragonflies. Since then Jason and his family have moved to La Brenne, and he is well-established as a nature guide, leading wildlife tours across France.

## Group Travel

Train schedules for summer 2024 are not yet released, but should be similar to 2023, as follows. France is one hour ahead of UK:

13th May: depart London St Pancras 12.31, arrive Paris Gare du Nord 15.48  
depart Paris Montparnasse 17.31, arrive Tours 18.48  
20th May: depart Tours 12.13, arrive Paris Montparnasse 13.30  
depart Paris Gare du Nord 16.12, arrive London St Pancras 17.30

## Passport and Entry Requirements

These rules are correct as of 5th November 2023. **Please note that travel rules may be changed by either the UK or French government at any time.** For up to date information, check [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/france](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/france)

If you hold a British passport, you are able to travel to the Schengen area (including France) for up to 90 days in total in any 180-day period without a visa.

Your passport must be issued less than 10 years before the date you enter the country and valid for at least 3 months after the day you plan to leave.

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## TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

### DEPOSIT £500 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE 12/02/2024

**INCLUDED:** Return train travel from London St Pancras, local transport and entry fees on excursions as specified in the itinerary. Seven nights' accommodation, all meals from dinner day 1 to picnic lunch day 8. Services of leaders and guides.

**NOT INCLUDED:** Refreshments. Gratuities. Travel insurance. Covid tests and associated costs.

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## WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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**Photos: front** (clockwise from top): Purple Emperor, La Brenne, *Orchis laxiflora*, European Tree Frog.  
**Page 2** (from left): Wryneck, Stag Beetle, Woodland Brown. **Page 3** (from top): *Epipactus palustris*, Large Chequered Skipper, Orange-spotted Emerald, Violet Fritillary.

All photos: Jason Mitchell.