

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

10th to 16th October 2026 (1 week)

LA BRENNE

autumn wildlife of the French lakes (by train)

"revealed a completely different part of France"

"a great success"

"exceeded expectations"

La Brenne 2024

A shorter break, 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.

As nature relaxes into autumn, in La Brenne the traditional *assec* will be taking place, the rotational management of the lakes (or *etangs*), with water drained every decade or so through a network of sluices and dykes. On the exposed muds, we may spot waders such as Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Ruff and Black-tailed Godwit.

The first of the region's Crane's, which pass through in their tens of thousands each year, should be reaching the area, and numbers of wintering ducks will also be building.

Whilst many of the area's summer visitors will have headed south, we can still expect to see Marsh Harriers quartering the reedbeds, with luck joined by White-tailed Eagle. Great White Egret, Night Heron and perhaps Black-necked Grebe can be spotted around the many lakes and ponds, and the last of the Migrant Hawkers, Winter Damsel fly and Southern Darter should still be on the wing.

Among La Brenne's scrubby grassland and traditionally managed farmland, we hope to find Middle-spotted and Black Woodpeckers, and the cheerful Cirl Bunting.

This holiday will appeal to anyone who wishes to enjoy pleasant walks filled with wildlife, with the bonus of travelling by train.



Price

£1,945

Single Room Supplement

£200

Full board

- Day 1** train to La Brenne
- Day 2** Chérine
- Day 3** La Brenne
- Day 4** Massé-Foucault
- Day 5** Loire's 'Grand' Châteaux
- Day 6** Maison du Parc
- Day 7** return to London

Leaders

Mike Russell with local guide Jason Mitchell

Group size

min 4, max 7

relaxed autumn wildlife,
French culture,
flight-free travel



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, 10th October Our train journey takes up by Eurostar to Paris, and then on to Saint-Pierre-des-Corps (Tours), from where we'll make our way to our accommodation at the edge of the Parc, close to the River Claise (c. 90 mins).

Day 2, 11th October One of the joys of La Brenne is its relatively small area, and our programme will to some extent be 'open-ended' to take advantage of local information and the interests of the group. Our pace will be leisurely, allowing us time to enjoy the odd coffee, or return to some of our favourite sites during the week, as we take in the area's wildlife.

We will explore Chérine National Nature Reserve today, to make a start on the area's one thousand lakes, for the beginning of our immersion in La Grande Brenne.

The reserve protects a set of natural habitats characteristic of the area: lakes, meadows, woodlands, heathlands and scrubby grassland. This diversity of habitat supports an astonishing number of plant and animal species, and at this time of year we will be checking the open water for newly arriving ducks, and looking for Great White Egrets and Spoonbill striding around the edges, along with more secretive species including Night Heron or perhaps Purple Heron.

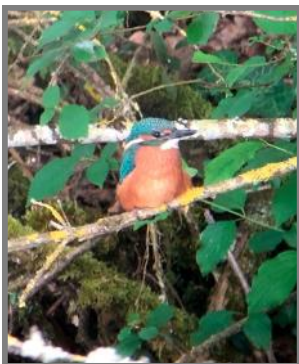
Day 3, 12th October Today we will spend some time on the open farmed 'plains' of La Brenne in search of Hen Harriers and Stone Curlews. *Bocage*, an open habitat made up of small fields and thick hedgerows is an important feature of La Brenne, and here we hope to find a range of birds including plentiful Corn Buntings, Stonechat and Serin, with Firecrest, Short-toed Creeper, Marsh Tit and Hawfinch all possible in the more wooded areas.

During the afternoon we will visit Domaine de Jourdain in Lye, north of La Brenne, with an option for a vineyard trail and wine tasting.

Day 4, 13th October We have a day to explore further the area's treasures including a visit to the Massé-Foucault to take a trail that winds through the different habitats of the reserve: ponds, woodland, meadows and reedbed.

Day 5, 14th October Today we include a little of La Brenne's culture (being sure to look out for wildlife along the way!), with a visit to one of the Loire's 'Grand' Châteaux or the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, home to the International Garden Festival.

If time allows we will also visit the extensive Forest of Loches for a walk amongst the oak and beech woodland, on the lookout for some of the area's woodpeckers: Middle Spotted and Black Woodpecker are both present, along with the more familiar UK species.



Day 6, 15th October For our final full day, we will explore the environs of the Maison du Parc, the area's visitor information centre. In addition to a wealth of wildlife, there will be frequent glimpses of the attractive Château du Bouchet, which dominates this corner of La Brenne.

The afternoon will be rounded off with a walk and visit to the hide at Étang Ricot or Étang Cistude, where we hope to find the lake's namesake European Pond Terrapins, alongside late-season dragonflies and damselflies.

Day 7 Today we head back to Saint-Pierre-des-Corps (Tours) and our train home, arriving back in London in the early evening.

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 guesthouse in Mézières-en-Brenne, the historical capital of Brenne. All rooms have en-suite facilities with bath and/or shower.

We will be having breakfast at our accommodation and evening meals at a nearby restaurant. Lunches will be picnic-style and often followed by a visit to a café for a coffee.

Transport will be in a comfortable eight-seater minivan. La Brenne is not vast, and can be explored without long periods driving.

The weather should be distinctly autumnal: we expect it to be cool and dry, with temperatures between 10 and 15 degrees, although considerable cooler, showery weather, or indeed warmer weather, is possible.



Leaders

Our leader for this holiday is **Mike Russell**, familiar to many of our travellers as an experienced Wildlife Travel leader who has lead almost 40 of our holidays, from Costa Rica to the Danube Delta. This will be Mike's second visit to the area.

Our local guide 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 an experienced nature guide, leading wildlife tours across France and beyond.

Group Travel

Train schedules for autumn 2026 are not yet released, but should be similar to spring 2026, as follows. France is one hour ahead of UK:

10th October: **depart London St Pancras 11.31**, arrive Paris Gare du Nord 14.59
depart Paris Montparnasse 16.39, arrive Saint-Pierre-des-Corps 17.49
16th October: depart Saint-Pierre-des-Corps 12.25, arrive Paris Montparnasse 13.36
depart Paris Gare du Nord 16.30, **arrive London St Pancras 18.00**

Passport and Entry Requirements

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.

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. From late 2026 (date yet to be confirmed) British passport holders will need to apply for the ETIAS European Travel Authorisation to visit Schengen countries, online prior to travel.

For up-to-date information, check www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/france

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 £350 PER PERSON, SECOND INSTALLMENT ON
CONFIRMATION OF HOLIDAY £400 (to cover committed costs)
BALANCE DUE 11/07/2026**

INCLUDED: Return train travel from London St Pancras, local transport and entry fees on excursions as specified in the itinerary. Six nights' accommodation, all meals from dinner day 1 to picnic lunch day 7. Services of leaders and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Gratuities. Travel insurance. ETIAS.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Photos: all taken during our previous visits to La Brenne (Mike Symes and Laurie Jackson)

Trip reports from our most recent La Brenne holidays can be found on our website, with galleries of photos on our Flickr pages.