

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

10th to 17th May 2027 (1 week)

LA BRENNE

wildlife of the French lakes (by train)

"revealed a completely different part of France"

"a great success"

"exceeded expectations"

La Brenne 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.

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

£2,295

Single Room Supplement

£290

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

Mike Symes with local guide Jason Mitchell

Group size

min 4, max 7

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 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 Today we will visit some of La Brenne's many small lakes or *étangs*, where we hope to find nesting 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 *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, and the gentle purring of Turtle Dove will be a familiar soundtrack to our days. 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 The River Creuse cuts its way through limestone gorges, forming 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-tip Orchid, Fly Orchid and Lady Orchid. 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 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 Western Clubtail dragonfly.

Day 6 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. In the roadside verges we can hope to get our fill or orchids, with Man Orchid, Violet Limadore and Lizard Orchid among the many species to be found.

Day 7 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 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 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 usually followed by a visit to a café.

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

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



Leaders

Our leader for this holiday is **Mike Symes**. Mike is an excellent all round naturalist and an experienced Wildlife Travel leader, who has led holidays from the Danube Delta to Costa Rica, this will be his second visit to La Brenne for us.

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 summer 2027 are not yet released, but should be similar to 2026, as follows. France is one hour ahead of UK:

10th May: **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
17th May: 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 Estonia) for up to 90 days in total in any 180-day period without a visa. British passport holders will need to apply for the ETIAS European Travel Authorisation to visit Schengen countries. This must be applied for online prior to travel. Once granted, your ETIAS will be valid for 3 years.

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 09/02/2027**

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.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Photos: front (clockwise from top): Southern White Admiral, Abbaye Saint Cyran en Brenne, Tongue Orchid, Turtle Dove. **Page 2** (from left): Bee-eater, Broad Scarlet, Sooty Copper. **Page 3** (from top): Monkey Orchid, Great White Egret, Migrant Spreadwing, Whiskered Tern.

A trip report and gallery of photos from our recent holidays to La Brenne can be found on our website.