

France - La Brenne

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Eurostar & TGV from London St. Pancras to Tours and drive La Brenne.
Day 2/7	La Brenne
Day 8	Drive Tours for TGV & Eurostar train for London St. Pancras

Departs

May

Focus

Birds, wild flowers (especially orchids), and butterflies

Grading

A. Day walks only

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code FRA09) or brochure.

Highlights

- Enjoy a feast of fauna & flora in this quiet, picturesque corner of France
- Impressive heronries are a highlight
- 16 species of warbler possible, including Bonelli's, Great Reed & Melodious
- Up to 36 orchid species possible and many butterflies, many of which not found in the UK.



Firecrest



Whiskered Tern



Botanising in an orchid meadow



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Train to Tours

We will leave London St. Pancras during the morning on the Eurostar service, either to Lille or Paris (depending on schedules – please check with the Naturetrek office), changing stations and then board our TGV service down to Tours (Saint-Pierre-des-Corps), from where we have an hour and a half's drive to La Brenne.

Day 2 – 7

Mézières-en-Brenne

La Brenne lies in an area of central France south of the Loire, about fifty miles south-east of Tours and fifty miles east of Poitiers.

We will spend our six days exploring all corners of the region but will not have any set programme; much will depend on the interests of the group and the weather conditions experienced each day. La Brenne is not an extensive area and most habitats are within short drives of our hotel, thus we are able to maximise our time spent in the field and limit our driving to around 30 miles per day.

A typical day in La Brenne will start with a continental breakfast. After breakfast we will sally forth to our first destination. We will have a wide choice of sites from which to choose, one of which is a private estate where, normally, only Naturetrek groups have access. The abandoned farm buildings by which we will park often hold Woodlark, and in the surrounding scrub and trees the beautiful song of the Nightingale is occasionally heard. Green Lizards may also be seen in this area. We will then walk on through the damp grass, looking for Tongue Orchids (*Serapias lingua*) as we go. La Brenne is the furthest north this species is commonly



Naturetrek group in La Brenne



Stag Beetle

found and we have a good chance of locating this, as well as other species of orchid as we explore. No fewer than 36 species of orchid occur in the area, although they are obviously not all in flower at the same time. Species we have seen on previous visits at this time of year include Early Spider (*Ophrys sphegodes*), Fly (*O. insectifera*), Monkey (*Orchis simia*) Burnt Tip (*O. ustulata*), Lizard (*Himantoglossum hircinum*) and Violet Birdsnest (*Limodorum abortivum*). Marsh Harriers are also frequently seen hunting in this area, and towards

the end of our walk we will be able to observe a nesting colony of Purple Herons and Little Egrets. Returning to the vehicle around midday or early afternoon we will spread out our lunch. Lunch will be varied, but may include a bowl of pâté or a couple of cold roast chickens as the main part, with lots of crusty French bread, together with some saucisson, several sorts of cheese, fruit, and sometimes tartelettes, all washed down with a glass of vin de table.

After lunch, we may choose to explore one of La Brenne's many small lakes. These hold a rich diversity of



bird and animal life. Black-necked Grebes and Garganey breed whilst overhead both Black and Whiskered Terns dip to the water's surface for insects. In the surrounding reedbeds and scrub, birds such as Great Reed Warbler, Fan-tailed Warbler, Cetti's Warbler and Savi's Warbler will be in full song and competing with the ever present chorus of noisy, amorous Pond Frogs. The booming call of the Bittern is still frequently heard here and on one occasion we were even lucky enough to find a Spotted Crake!

On another afternoon, we will head into the open fields where Stone Curlew and Cirl Bunting breed, two species that are uncommon and local in Britain but are common in La Brenne. Another species here is Montagu's Harrier which quarter the fields in search of small rodents and birds and we may hear the distinctive liquid call of the Quail, a bird frequently heard but rarely seen.

During our stay, we should see a number of butterflies that are rare in England including Large Tortoiseshell, Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, White Admiral and Purple Emperor. Plants of interest that we will be hoping to see include Milkweed (*Vincetoxicum hirundinaria*), White Asphodel (*Asphodelus albus*), Greater Broomrape (*Orobanchae rapumgenistae*), Hairy Spurge (*Euphorbia villosa*) Blue Bugle (*Ajuga genevensis*) and Viper's Grass (*Scorzonera humilis*).

We will aim to return to our hotel around 6.00 pm where we can relax over an apéritif before dinner or take a quick stroll into its surroundings where both Hoopoe and Golden Oriole can be seen. On one evening, towards dark, we go looking and listening for Nightjar and owls and may be lucky enough to find a 'roding' Woodcock as well.



Day 8

Train to London

Today we will have to pack and return to Tours to take the TGV/Eurostar service back to London St. Pancras, either via Paris or Lille, arriving late afternoon / early evening.

Grading

This tour is graded A and will consist of day walks only and as such is suitable for any age and level of fitness. It is based at one hotel from where we will be taking day trips by minibus visiting the various sites looking for birds, flowers and insects and taking a picnic lunch with us. There will be some gentle walking involved at most of the sites.

Weather

Late May is generally warm and sunny, but as with Britain, the weather can still be changeable. It is therefore wise to be prepared for all conditions from shorts and 'T' shirts to pullover and waterproofs.

Daily schedule

We will typically take breakfast at about 8 a.m. and aim to leave our hotel no later than 9 a.m. for a full day in the field. We'll break the day to relax and enjoy a picnic lunch, which will be varied, but may include paté, terrine and cold meats as the main part, with lots of crusty French bread, together with olives, coleslaw, pickles and several sorts of cheese. To follow, fresh fruit, yogurts, and chocolate, all washed down with a glass of vin de table if required. We'll aim to return to our hotel at about 5.30 pm, depending on the weather and our success in the field. This should allow a little time at the end of each day to relax, shower and enjoy a drink before dinner. After dinner, for those with energy remaining, your leader will be keen to run through the wildlife seen during the day, and discuss findings with you before retiring to bed. There will also be opportunities for short walks early and late in the day for those who wish.

Accommodation & meals

Accommodation for all seven nights will be in rooms with private facilities. All meals from evening meal on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8 are included, i.e. meals en-route are not included.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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