BRETAGNE PLEIN SUD

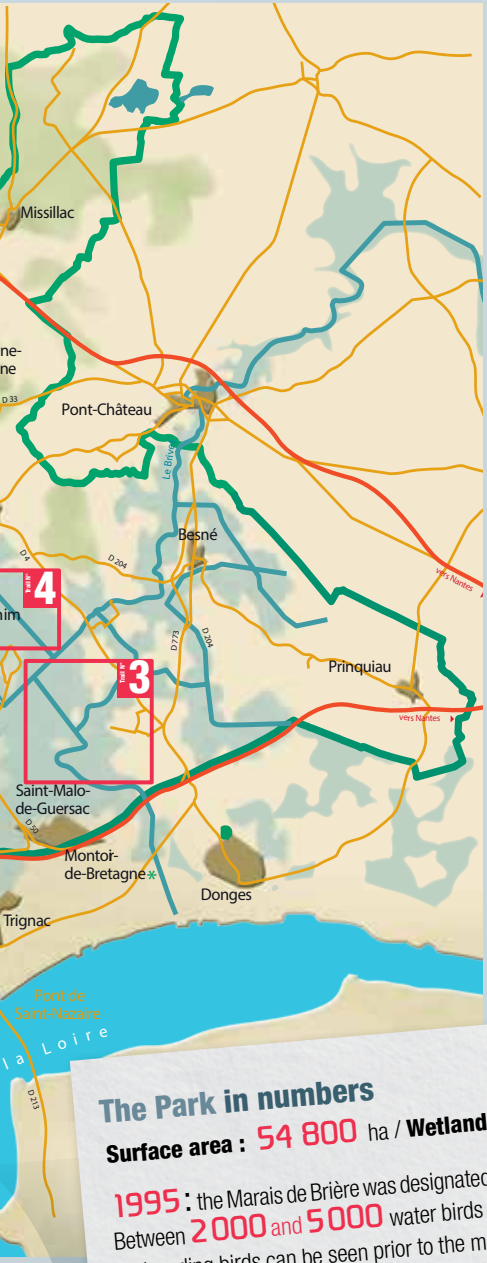
Where to watch Birds

Discover the Park

Parc naturel régional de Brière

Marais de Brière Regional Nature Reserve
Brière Regional Nature Park

Background for detailed maps (pp9 -23): BDMOS2012©CD Loire Atlantique, Open Street Map © OSM contributors, data published under licence Open Database License (ODbL 1.0).
Walking information : GR® and GR® de Pays are trademarks of the Fédération Française de Randonnée Pédestre,
Other information provided by CAP ATLANTIQUE, Carène and PnrB.
Cycle routes : Conseil Départemental de Loire Atlantique, Carène, Cap Atlantique and Brière Regional Nature Park



Helpful hints 4

Wetlands explained 5-6

Marais de Brière Regional Nature Reserve (RNR) in brief 7

Where to watch birds in the area

1 RNR Pierre Constant Site - SAINT-MALO-DE-GUERSAC 8-9

2 Pont de Paille - Bel Air - TRIGNAC 10-11

3 Caloyau - MONTOIR-DE-BRETAGNE 12-13

4 La Maison de la Grolle - SAINT-JOACHIM 14-15

5 Les Fossés Blancs - LA CHAPELLE-DES-MARAIS 16-17

6 Port de Bréca - SAINT-LYPHARD 18-19

7 La Chaussée Neuve - SAINT-ANDRÉ-DES-EAUX 20-21

Discovering shore birds

8 Between Brière and the Atlantic, a salty tang in the air 22-23

9 Gateway to the Atlantic 24-25

Birds most often seen in the area 26

Along the seashore 27

Injured animals 28

Guided tours, in the company of enthusiasts 29

Ecobalade and websites 30

Gîtes de France 31

The Park in numbers

Surface area : 54 800 ha / **Wetlands :** 20 200 ha / **RNR :** 836 ha

1995 : the Marais de Brière was designated a site of ornithological interest under the terms of the Ramsar Convention. Between 2000 and 5000 water birds overwinter in the Marais de Brière RNR. 15000 - 20000 ducks and wading birds can be seen prior to the mating season in the Marais de Brière and the Marais du Brivet. It is a site of n° 1 importance for the reproduction of iconic species such as the bluethroat, black tern, Savi's warbler, common spoonbill and great bittern.

Brière Regional Nature Park was created in 1970, mainly to protect and preserve the particularly fragile biological resources and ecosystems of its wetlands.

Helpful hints

© P. Bonnet

Starting out

Birds are timid creatures, so the best way to observe them is to be discreet, quiet, patient and not to get too close.

During migration, birds cover great distances using only their wings and fat reserves. If you try to approach them, you risk making them fly away. This needless consumption of energy is harmful to already tired birds, especially if it is repeated several times a day.

Help us to protect them **by keeping to the designated paths.**

Getting nearer

It is essential to move slowly and avoid making sudden gestures or talking out loud along the footpath and in the bird-watching hides at the Pierre Constant Site in Marais de Brière RNR. Be as quiet as you can during the whole walk, especially when in a group or family, and avoid wearing brightly-coloured clothes.

Along the way

The best times to see birds are early morning or late evening. If you see a bird sitting on a nest, do not go near it, not even to take a photo, as there is a strong risk that the parent birds will abandon their eggs or chicks if they are startled.

Don't forget to take...

Good walking shoes or boots, a pair of 8x or 10x binoculars or even a telescope to observe water birds, a bird-watching guide and a notebook.

By following this advice, you are helping to preserve species and their habitats.

For more detailed information

Brière Regional Nature Park has more detailed descriptions of birds on its website : **www.parc-naturel-briere.fr** (FAUNE/FLORE section – French only).

Key to symbols

Passerines

Long-legged wading birds

Waders

Birds of prey

Gulls

Waterfowl

Wetlands explained

© P. Bonnet

Wetlands are areas that are saturated, either permanently or seasonally with fresh, brackish, or salt water. The term can be used for many of the natural environments found in Brière Regional Nature Park : lakes, lagoons, mudflats, peat bogs, saltmarshes, ponds, marshes, streams, reed beds, water meadows…

The Marais du Brière and the Marais du Brivet on the Atlantic coast form an integral part of a vast group of wetlands bordered by the Gulf of Morbihan and Vilaine Estuary to the north and the Guérande Saltmarshes, the Bassin du Mès and the Loire Estuary to the south and west.

© Atelier photo UIA - JL.Via

© D. Pons

Each of these attractive areas functions in a different yet complementary way, making them popular stopovers for migratory birds and, more importantly, internationally important sites where water birds spend the winter and breed.

International recognition

The wetlands of Brière Regional Nature Park were granted « Ramsar Site » status for their role in water bird conservation. This international approval was created to preserve the biodiversity of the most remarkable wetland regions on earth.

In 2006, to ensure that the biological heritage and features of the area created by both nature and man were maintained, Brière was also designated a Special Protection Area for birds within the European Natura 2000 network. It thus became one of several thousand sites in Europe dedicated to preserving biodiversity, while taking into account the economic, sociological and cultural elements affecting the area.

© JP. Saliou

Birds come and go with the seasons

In Brière, as in all of the wetlands along the Atlantic Coast, the number and diversity of birds varies with the seasons and water levels.

In winter, lakes, lakeside areas and submerged water meadows welcome a great variety of water birds, mostly waterfowl (mallard, shoveller, teal), waders (common snipe, lapwing) and long-legged wading birds (grey heron, egret). The marsh harrier is one of the most regularly seen birds of prey.

In spring, the water meadows and lakeside areas teem with wading birds and gulls (black tern, whiskered tern, black-headed gull, redshank, black-tailed godwit, stilt…). In the vast reed beds, the songs of perching birds like Savi's warbler, reed bunting, sedge warbler and bluethroat trumpet their return from migration, heralding the onset of the mating season. The rare bearded tit, whose habitat is restricted to submerged reed beds, is very hard to spot.

Other more discreet or invisible birds make their presence known; the booming call of the bittern is answered by the 'sharm' of the water rail or the powerful whistling of the spotted crake.

In summer, long-legged wading birds occupy the lakes as they dry up : spoonbill, great egret and little egret are the most common. The emerging mudflats are alive with migrating sandpipers and lesser yellowlegs (green sandpiper, greenshank, common sandpiper).

With the coming of autumn, the movement of migratory birds intensifies with the passing of swallows, wheatears and other finches. Later, depending on the rainfall and speed with which the ponds and mudflats of the lower marshes become submerged, the number of snipe, teal and shoveller can be quite substantial.

Some years, a cold winter results in an arrival of birds from the north when wild geese, widgeon, curlew and plovers enliven the stretches of marshland.

A list (not exhaustive) of the species which are most frequently observed in the area can be found at the back of this booklet.

© P. Bonnet

« Marais de Brière » Regional Nature Reserve (RNR) :
A way of protecting and discovering birds

The RNR in brief

The « Marais de Brière » is a conservation area of 836ha divided into 3 geographical zones which are home to numerous species of birds. It is jointly-managed by Brière Regional Nature Park and the Commission Syndicale de Grande Brière Mottière.

One of the zones, the Pierre Constant RNR at Rozé, Saint-Malo-de-Guersac, is open to the public and has a visitor centre and observation hides.

Réserves Naturelles DE FRANCE

Get close to birdlife in the « Marais de Brière » RNR

The bird-watching observatory at the Pierre Constant Site, Saint-Malo-de-Guersac is open 7 days a week (except in winter).

Amazing panoramic and close-up views of the Marais de Grande Brière await you at the end of your walk through the Reserve. Fee-paying guided visits only before the summer (to avoid disturbing wildlife), then free access during July and August.

To book a guided visit, please ring the Maison du Parc (visitor centre) :
02 40 66 85 01

© T.Thudor

Birdwatching in Brière

Off you go !

8 well-marked trails within the Regional Nature Park.

Plus other sites on the coast to continue your discovery.

All the birdwatching sites listed here are open to everyone and located in sensitive natural areas.

Please respect them.

© JP. Saliou

A showcase for marshland birds

Regional Nature Reserve
"Marais de Brière" - Pierre Constant Site

SAINT-MALO-DE-GUERSAC

© T.Thudor

At first the path beside the canal crosses private marshland, prone to flooding : natural meadows which are grazed or mown, stretch southward to the nearby estuary and docks. Towards the north and the islands of Brière (Pendille, Fédrun, Aignac), lie vast reedbeds.

The Pierre Constant Site RNR is on the edge of the Grande Brière Mottière marshes, giving the visitor the impression of being "at the end of the world". Discover the enchanting views from the viewing platform of the observatory, revel in the silence and the beauty of the countryside dotted here and there with church steeples.

Depending on the time of year and weather conditions, many species of dabbling ducks (shoveller, gadwall and mallard), long-legged wading birds (heron, African sacred ibis and spoonbill) and passerines (wagtail, bluethroat ,sedge warbler and reed bunting) may be observed on lakes and in neighbouring reed beds throughout the Reserve. The atmosphere varies from subdued tranquillity to all manner of cacophony, which can take you by surprise !

The RNR is open to the public all year round. Guided tours are available, if required.
Sorry, no dogs !

// Bluethroat

© D.Pons

When it comes back from its winter quarters in March, the male bluethroat shows off its brightly-coloured breeding plumage. Most of the nesting pairs in France are concentrated in coastal and estuary marshlands and Brière. In April, the male is easy to spot with its bright blue bib and white throat spot, perching on top of a reed or a bush ! Its powerful and varied song is typical of a territorial bird seeking a mate. Once couples form and nest, the birds become much harder to spot; so be patient and you may be lucky enough to come across a bluethroat running across the mudflats in search of food.

// Spoonbill

© Atelier photo UIA - JL.Via

This long-legged, mostly migratory wading bird takes its name from its distinctive, spatulate bill and regularly overwinters in the marshes of the Guérande peninsula. In spring, one hundred breeding pairs settle in colonies in the damp woodlands of Brière alongside heron and egret. But it is after the breeding season that the number of spoonbill in the Marais de Brière reaches its peak, during optimum conditions for migratory birds to stopover (tranquillity and plenty of food). The spoonbills from the north, and in particular the Netherlands, mix with the local population. Young and adult birds stay near shallow ponds and lakes or walk through the water in small groups with their bills open in search of food.

Trail N° 1

Directions

Take D50 to Saint-Malo-de-Guersac.
At roundabout in Rozé, leave your car in the car park.
Walk across the little stone bridge leading to the marshes and follow the path beside the canal for 800m.
Coming from Loncé along the GR® de Pays Tour de Brière (hiking path), carry on walking beside the Canal de Rozé as far as the Reserve entrance.

Length of trail

Guided visit: 3km in total, from the locks at Rozé.
Unaccompanied : 2km circular walk from the port of Rozé to the observatory at the Reserve entrance.

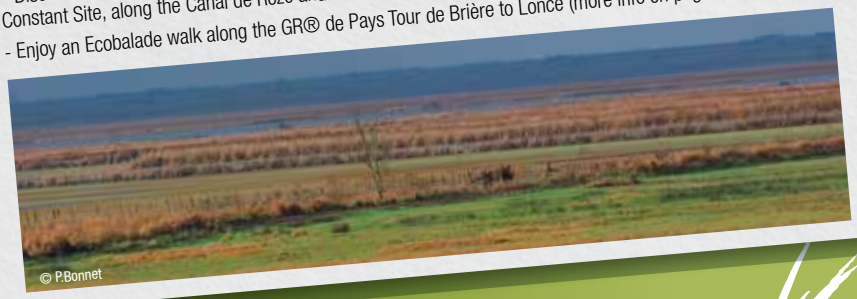
Accessibility

All-year-round (depending on water levels). Keep to the GR® de Pays Tour de Brière hiking path in springtime, to avoid disturbing the birdlife.

GR® de Pays Tour de Brière (hiking path)
PR® (local footpath)
Cycle route

Around and about

- Discover the marshes and its birdlife by 'chaland' (a type of punt, typical of the area) close to the Pierre Constant Site, along the Canal de Rozé and towards Fédrun.
- Enjoy an Ecobalade walk along the GR® de Pays Tour de Brière to Loncé (more info on page 30)


© P.Bonnet

A host of birdlife , close to the estuary !

Pont de Paille / Bel Air

TRIGNAC

© T.Thudor

At Pont de Paille locks, first surprise !

An amazing view of water, barges and lift nets greets the walker !

Further on, after Bel-Air and the overhead power cables, the water meadows and reed beds of La Grande Brière Mottière stretch far away into the distance...

Here, the best opportunities for observing birds are in late winter and early spring (March-April) during periods of flooding and migration : flocks of teal, shoveller and shelduck can been seen flitting around on either side of the Canal de Trignac.

These numerous groups of ducks are joined by all kinds of coots and wading birds including redshank, black-tailed godwit, heron and spoonbill ! If you are really lucky, you may catch sight of the first black terns back from their winter quarters and sporting their breeding plumage…

If the water level permits, follow the path as far as Loncé accompanied by an incessant ballet of lapwing and the beautiful song of skylarks. Plentiful food resources, prenuptial migration and bird pairing herald the arrival of spring on the marshes.

// Black-tailed godwit

© JP.Saliou

This elegant wading bird is a frequent visitor to the water meadows of the Marais de Brière and the Marais de Brivet.

In springtime, during the prenuptial migration, these slightly submerged environments and summer pastures are popular stopovers and at dusk, the tranquil air is suddenly filled with flocks of trumpeting godwits flying over the marshes, often followed by the arrival of several nesting pairs in the meadows.

In April and May the adult birds, sporting their breeding plumage of a brown and bright orange breast, seek out the peace and tranquillity of the open meadows to make their nests, away from any possible disturbance.

Any unauthorised approach to their territory is met with an avalanche of unexpected noisy protests. You have been warned, do not venture into the meadows !

Trail N° 2

Directions

From RN171, take exit for Trignac, go to the village of Bel-Air and park by the lock at Pont de Paille.
Two different trails, one each side of the Canal de Trignac :
- V1 : before the lock, walk past houses beside the canal for 400m ; observe the meadows from the little bridge.
- V2 : 800m at the end of the road, follow the path through the meadows to Curée des Fougères for a great view of the marshes and the isles of Brière. In summer, it is possible to continue along the signposted path to Loncé.

Length of trails

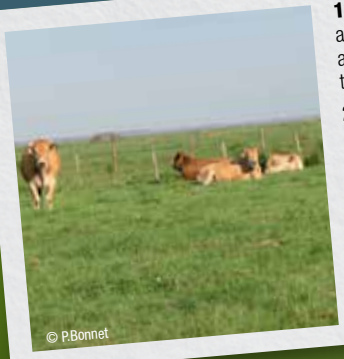
V1 - 800m
V2 – 3.5km as far as 2nd observation point, Circuit via Loncé 4.5km

Accessibility

Visit during fine weather. N.B. The GR® de Pays « Tour de Brière » hiking path is only accessible from May onwards !

GR® de Pays Tour de Brière
Cycle route

Around and about


© P.Bonnet

1 ▫ The port, typical of south Brière, and the main Brière Canal, known as « Le Vieux Canal » with its eel fisheries. When not flooded, walk along the GRP « Tour de Brière » from the Canal de Trignac across the marshes to Loncé or go by road to Loncé (Montoir-de-Bretagne).

2 ▫ From Bel-Air, go to Trignac then take the RN171 towards the Pont de Saint-Nazaire. Before the bridge, turn right to Méan-Penhouët-Centre-ville Saint-Nazaire ; go along the Boulevard des Apprentis and go to the car park on the right bank of the Brivet (Méan port and locks). Walk 500m for panoramic views of the Méan mudflats, the St Nazaire Bridge and shipyards ! At low tide, shelduck, teal, curlew and avocet can be observed on the mudflats.

A little trail, through the meadows...

Caloyau **MONTOIR-DE-BRETAGNE**

© T.Thudor

After the last houses, an amazing landscape of meadows stretches before you : wooded islets, tamaris hedges, a dense network of small canals, fences and paths leading to the pasture. Once the fine weather arrives, cattle leave the farms and head for the most luscious hay ! Despite the proximity of the estuary docks and the main RN171 road between Nantes and Saint-Nazaire, the area has an atmosphere of space and tranquillity…

Apart from the flocks of ducks which come here from the estuary during winter (teal, pintail and gadwall) spring is also a good time to explore this area !

From March to June, by the farm at Caloyau, a wide range of bird species can be seen from the road. Depending on the year and flood conditions, lively groups of black tern explore the submerged areas and sometimes nest there as do great egrets, recognisable by their graceful, white silhouette. On the higher ground and small hillocks where cattle graze, pairs of lapwing can be seen as well as a multitude of cattle egret who patiently accompany the cows until nightfall, much to the delight of walkers...

// Lapwing

© JP.Saliou

This wading bird is easily recognisable by its rounded wings, the crest on its head, black bib and white abdomen. Considered as a common species on the Brière marshes, it can be seen all year round. Nevertheless, the nesting population in the area has not escaped the drastic decline in numbers observed throughout France.

In Brière, from March onwards, the first breeding pairs isolate themselves on the cropped water meadows and tussocks which have emerged from the water : the arrival of the species is also determined by the extensive farming practices (grazing and mowing) which keep the area open.

Their acrobatic performances, nuptial parades and plaintive calls do not go unnoticed !

Once the breeding period is over, the lapwings form small roaming groups which are joined in summer by birds from Central Europe. In winter, large groups can be seen on the marshes as some birds leave their daytime quarters (salt marshes, estuaries, nature reserves) to feed at night in the water meadows and cultivated fields.

Trail N° 3

Directions

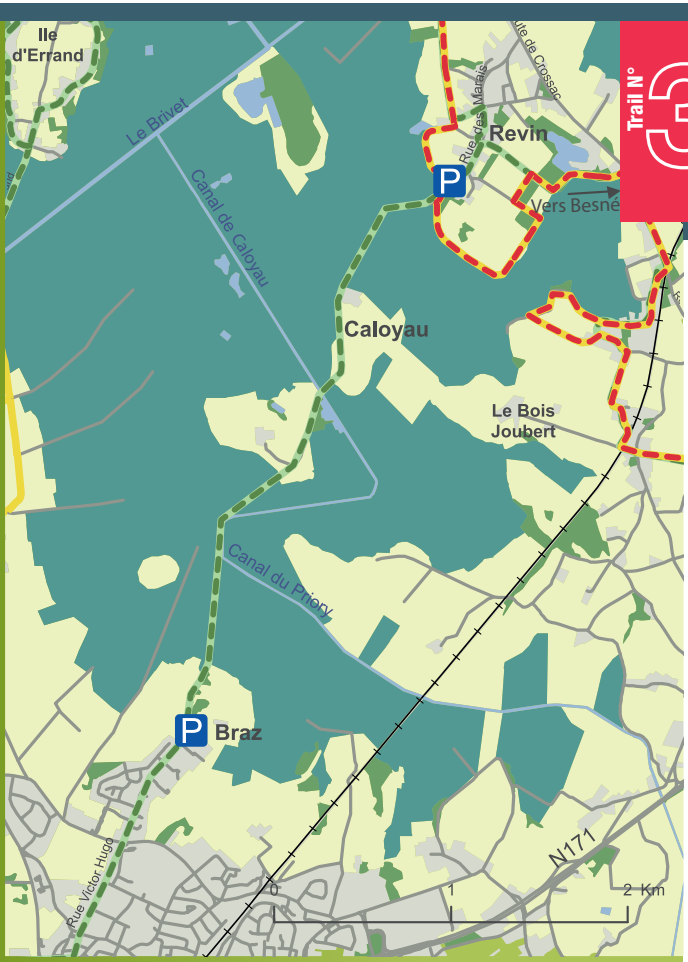
In the centre of Montoir-de-Bretagne, go along Rue Victor Hugo towards Revin and park in the hamlet of Braz.

Length of trails

Approx. 4km to Revin; also, signposted circular cycle trail.

Accessibility

Lane is accessible and open most of the year, except during exceptional flooding.

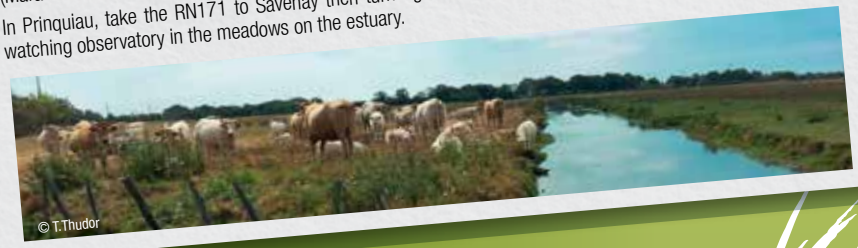


GR® de Pays Tour de Brière
PR®
Cycle route

Around and about

From Revin, continue on to Besné and its marshes along the old railway track, or head further east to Prinquiau (Marais du Pingliau, Marais de Sem).

In Prinquiau, take the RN171 to Savenay then turn right to Lavau-sur-Loire, (7km). Discovery trail and bird-watching observatory in the meadows on the estuary.


© T.Thudor

A little house on the prairie !

La Maison de la Grolle

SAINT-JOACHIM

© T.Thudor

With the autumn and winter rain, the privately-owned marshes become quickly submerged, taking on a very different appearance to the reed beds of Grande Brière.

The mysterious ruins of « La Grolle », cut off for a time, should not be approached for several reasons. Firstly the building is unstable and may collapse at any time and secondly a pair of storks nest there every year on the gable end ! These vast stretches of farmed grassland provide exceptional foraging for overwintering water birds : at the end of the shooting season in February, large numbers of waterfowl (shoveller, pintail, gadwall, teal) and seagulls are seen to stay for longer periods.

In March and April other species arrive from the south to prepare for breeding : wading birds in prenuptial plumage are particularly well-represented (black-tailed godwit, ruff).

As the water recedes and the herds are put out to graze, the meadows become a hive of activity and lapwing engaging in their courtship ritual, melodious skylark concerts and yellow wagtail chasing one another provide lucky walkers with an amazing show !

Couples of white stork, cattle egret and great egret patrol the pastureland, a sign that spring has definitely arrived !

// White stork

© C.Fontaine

With its white plumage, black-tipped wings, bright red beak and legs, this mythical bird does not go unnoticed in the Brière landscape. Perhaps better-known for nesting in Alsace villages, this long-legged wading bird also settles in Brière on its return from overwintering Africa or Spain, nesting on the cross-arms of electricity pylons from where it has a perfect view of the water meadows, its preferred environment !

To a lesser extent, white storks also nest in old trees, ruined buildings and remote man-made platforms in or near the marshes. Stable pairs return to the same nest year after year, adding more material each time so that nests can be up to 1.50m thick. At the end of the summer, before the winter migration, it is common to see families of storks following tractors mowing the meadows in order to glean plentiful, easily-accessible prey such as crickets, grasshoppers, small mammals and amphibians.

Although today the population of white stork is increasing nationally thanks to species and habitat protection, it is worth remembering that it almost disappeared entirely from the French countryside during the 1970s.

Nowadays, almost one hundred nests are recorded annually in Loire Atlantique, mainly in and around major wetland areas, a third of which are located within Brière Regional Nature Park.

GR® de Pays Tour de Brière hiking path
GR® 3
PR® local footpath
Cycle route

Directions

1/ From Crossac, take the D2 towards Donges to the hamlet of Le Souchet (approx. 2.5km), then turn right down the hill to the car park ; splendid views of the marshes and meadows (flooded in winter!).
2/ Leave Saint-Joachim on the D50 ; turn left at Ile de Pendille Ile de Brécun, then go on to Bais; in Bais, turn left along the lane and go about 1.5km to the start of the GR® de Pays Tour de Brière hiking path.

Length of trail

3km in total, depending on directions followed.

Accessibility

Signposted trail, open in springtime from May onwards, or once floodwater has receded, which can vary from year to year. Rubber boots are essential !

Around and about

Continue along the footpath to Crossac and Ferme du Blanchot.

More intrepid walkers can carry on along the GRP Tour de Brière (Ramsar trail) to Sainte-Reine-de-Bretagne.

© C.Fontaine

Hidden Brière !

Les Fossés Blancs

LA CHAPELLE-DES-MARAIS

© P.Bonnet

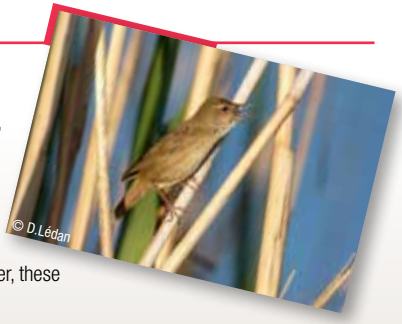
The far north of Grande Brière Mottière marshes can appear hostile to passing visitors, but those who look a little more closely will quickly find their curiosity rewarded. The landscape comprises reed beds (willow plantations) bordered by oak and silver birch plantations reminiscent of the early Bronze Age developments and the creation of peat bogs.

Here silence reigns, broken only by the grunts and squeals of the water rail or the distinctive repetitive whiplash-like hwuit, hwuit call of the spotted crake. Along the trail, wetland shrubs (small willows, bayberry) mingle with reeds. During spring, the fenland is brought to life by thousands of passerines, dependent on this environment : sedge warbler, Cetti's warbler, reed warbler, as well as the much sought-after bluethroat, take up residence for a couple of weeks to breed until the time comes to set off on their long voyage…

A walk through this area is always a surprising experience...

At the end of the trail, the amazing vista of the Canal du Nord stretches far into the distance and from time to time the haunting call of a bittern rises from the vast reed beds…

// Savi's warbler


© D.Lédan

A large part of the French population of this trans-Saharan migratory passerine bird, considered to be in decline throughout France, moves into the reed beds of the Marais de Brière each spring. Its reddish-brown, mottled plumage makes it difficult to spot individual birds. Territorial males can be most easily observed during the mating season in April-May.

Perched on a reed, the bird trills its characteristic, monotonous, insect-like reel sometimes for 30 seconds or more usually at dawn or dusk. To an uninformed observer, these strange noises add an air of mystery to the marshes. Excitement guaranteed !

Trail N° 5

Directions

From La Chapelle des Marais, head towards Herbignac and turn left at roundabout along RD51 towards Saint-Lyphard; go approx. 2km to Les Fossés Blancs : the car park is by the road at the entrance to the little port. From the car park, admire the collection of punts (known locally as 'chalands') tied up along the bank;
rejoin the GRP trail along the wooded edge of the marshes. The path quickly leaves the road and runs beside the small circular canal which surrounds this part of the marsh, before weaving its way through the reed beds.

Length of trails

V1- 2.5km in total to Hoscas and back ; a pretty walk to the Canal du Nord.
V2- 6km in total to the Ile de Camer and the Ile de Camérun and back.

Accessibility

Accessible from late spring until the first autumn rain (don't forget your rubber boots!).

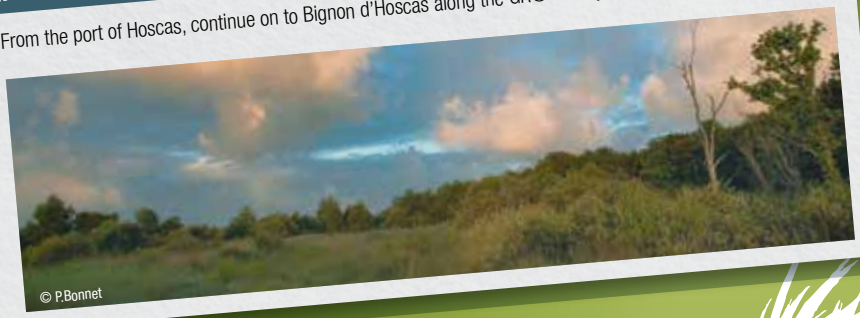
GR® de Pays Tour de Brière hiking path

PR®

Cycle route

Around and about

From the port of Hoscas, continue on to Bignon d'Hoscas along the GR® de Pays Tour de Brière hiking path.



© P.Bonnet

Woodland meets the marshes!

Port de Bréca

SAINT-LYPHARD

© T.Thudor

The village of Bréca has a cluster of traditional thatched cottages and some truly remarkable views. From the port, panoramic views in all directions enable the visitor to grasp the immensity of the marshes. Here, the landscape changes and woodland replaces open grassland. Whatever the time of year, dawn and late afternoon are the best times to appreciate the charm of the area and its diverse birdlife. The birds, although not always immediately visible, are everywhere going about their business : passerines and waterfowl mill around the punt moorings, heron, egret and great cormorant gather on the banks of the canal, black kite hover above lakes and ponds to the sound of a kingfisher on the lookout for fish.

300m further along the GRP path, a boardwalk leads to the marshes. Flooded during March and April, the edges of the path can hold surprises ! Colourful groups of shovellers waddle backwards and forwards, attracted by the plentiful supply of food !

Discretion is the order of the day, so stay hidden beneath the willow trees and don't move ! Large numbers of noisy coots come out of the reed beds to feed among the foraging ducks and you may even be lucky enough to see a great egret, once a very rare sight ! Later in the season, as the floodwater recedes and animals are turned out to pasture, swallows, martins and yellow wagtails enliven the leafy surroundings.

// Shoveller

© JP.Saliou

The shoveller is a dabbling duck. It is easily distinguishable from other ducks (mallard, gadwall, widgeon, teal, etc) by its stocky body, and huge, spatulate beak which allows it to feed easily in shallow waters, by filtering surface plankton and aquatic invertebrates through its half-open beak. The breeding plumage of the adult male is instantly recognisable by its dark green head, white breast and typically bright yellow eye. The female is a mottled brown like other dabblers.

In Brière, prenuptial migration takes place in February-March and at the end of the shooting season, the water meadows teem with thousands of shovellers ! This amazing spectacle heralds the approach of spring when breeding pairs become more discreet and seek out open grassy areas bordered by reeds to make their nests.

Trail N° 6

Directions

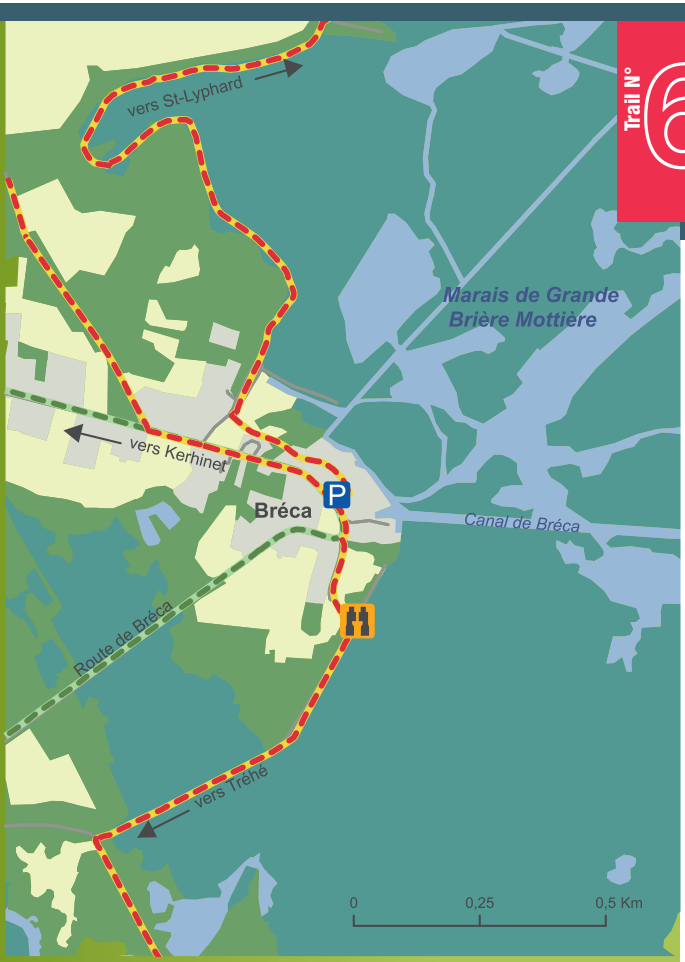
Localisation : Take the RD51 from Saint-Lyphard and turn left at Le Brunet to Bréca (in the opposite direction to the village of Kerhinet). The car park is 1.5km on the left, by the entrance to the port (opposite Calèches Briéronnes).
The trail : from the car park, walk past the port and punts to the landing stage ; there are information boards along the trail which leads to a viewpoint over the Canal de Bréca (orientation tables, covered picnic area, toilets).

Length of trail

500m from the port to the meadows.

Accessibility

The site is accessible all year round, but spring and summer are the best times to observe birdlife.



GR® de Pays Tour de Brière hiking path

Cycle route

Around and about

From Port de Bréca, continue along the GR® de Pays Tour de Brière to Fontenay and Tréhé then back to Bréca : a 4km loop.

It takes 2½ hours to discover the diverse landscapes and birdlife of the area.

2km by road from Bréca, lies the restored village of Kerhinet with the Maison du Parc (discovery centre), an inn, summer market (Thursday), woodland discovery trail, exhibitions ; the view from the top of the local church tower at Saint-Lyphard is well worth a visit with magnificent views of the marshes and woodland.

Take a guided tour of the marshes in a punt or stop off at a local restaurant for a meal or a snack.

Birds, birds, birds as far as the eye can see !

La Chaussée Neuve **SAINT-ANDRÉ-DES-EAUX**

© JY.Bernard

The western edges of the Grande Brière marshes, characteristically bordered by trees (oak, ash, silver birch) can also occasionally feature swampy land (known as 'saulaies' – willow plantations).

This scenic diversity, between woodland and marshes provides a wide variety of bird-watching environments : the wooded wetlands close to the marshes are the kingdom of nesting passerines, where the songs of nightingale, Cetti's warbler and garden warbler can be heard in clusters of blackthorn and small oak.

In springtime, the water meadows are home to breeding colonies of whiskered tern. During this time of year which is so important for birds, please stay on the boardwalk so as not to disturb them.

Further away towards the marshes, the song of skylarks resounds above the grazing cattle and horses while wagtail, egret and cattle egret methodically comb the grassy pasture. Beyond the meadowland, stretch vast reed beds.

// Whiskered tern

© JP.Saliou

This freshwater tern can be recognised by its graceful, dainty flight. Once spring has arrived, it arrives from faraway places to nest in colonies on the flooded water meadows. At this time of year, Brière can become home for up to a thousand nesting pairs, making it one of the major breeding sites in France for the species!

The meadows where the birds have chosen to nest bustle with the incessant coming and going of the birds, searching for material to build their nests and, later, food for their young. It is forbidden to approach the colonies at this sensitive time ! Outside the nesting zone, it is not unusual to spot a whiskered tern or the emblematic black tern above the canals and ponds searching for food. Watching the acrobatic antics of these indefatigable birds spending hours catching small fish, insects and crayfish is a real gift from Mother Nature…!

Trail N° 7

Directions

From the centre of Saint-André-des-Eaux, follow signs to La Chaussée Neuve (1km). The car park is by the port.

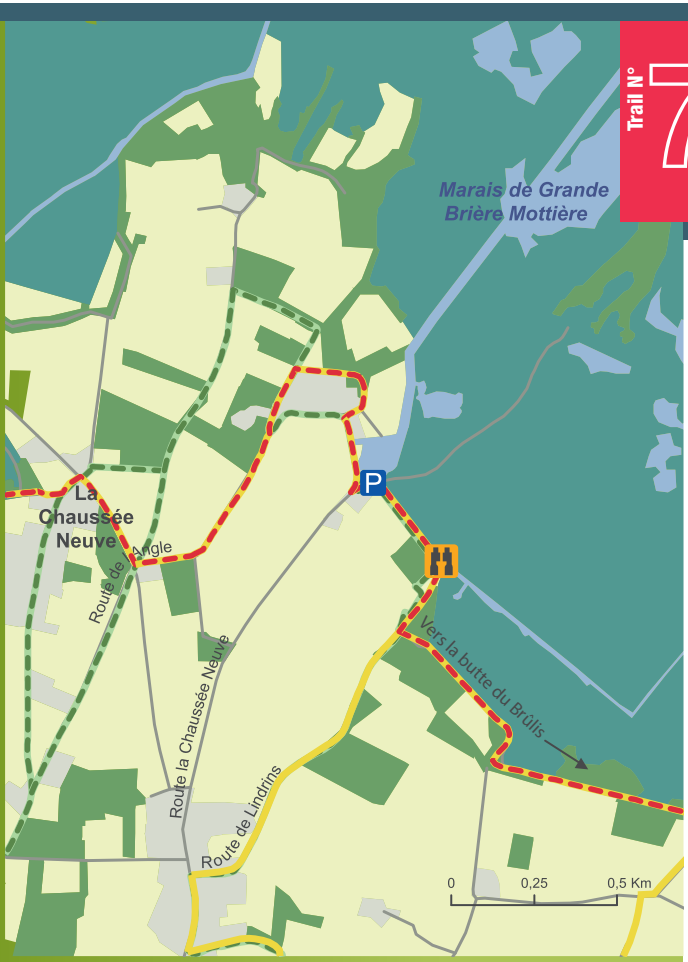
The trail : Go to the right of the landing stage for 300m to a viewing point from where there are panoramic views across the Grande Brière Mottière.

Length of trail

500m in total, depending on what there is to see and the time you want to spend exploring the site.

Accessibility

March and especially April – May are the best times to observe migrating ducks (shoveller), spoonbill, colonies of gulls and terns (black-headed gull, whiskered tern).

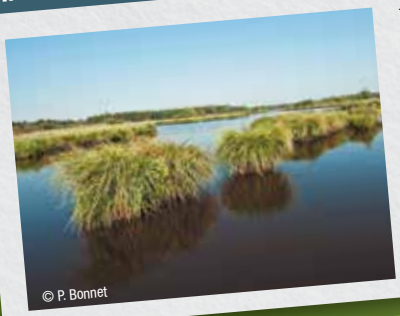


GR® de Pays Tour de Brière hiking path

PR®local footpath

Cycle route

Around and about


© P. Bonnet

The graceful silhouettes of western marsh harrier rise above the vast reed beds.

Depending on the time of year and water level, continue south along the GR footpath to La Butte du Brûlis (15-minute walk), or north to other Brière ports (Tréhé, Fontenay et Bréca).

At the port of La Chaussée Neuve take a trip in a punt accompanied by a nature guide from Brière Regional Nature Park.

Between Brière and the Atlantic, a salty tang in the air !

L'estuaire du Mès : Vasières de Pen-Bé
Traict du Rostu

ASSÉRAC
MESQUER

© P.Bonnet

© D.Lédan

As you leave the car park, the scenery is typically coastal : a small coastal river, the Mès, flows from the granite of the Guérande peninsula to the Atlantic along the inlets (known as traicts) of Pen Bé and Rostu. This ria covers 263 hectares of intertidal mudflats, partly used for shellfish farming; it opens onto the Bay of Pont-Mahé to the west between the rocky headlands of Merquel (Mesquer) and Pen Bé (Assérac).

- Pen-Bé : At the end of summer, the osprey is a regular September visitor, although it only makes a brief stopover on its way to distant climes ! Lucky visitors may see this magnificent bird of prey hovering above the mussel beds. From October onwards, the mudflats which up to then have been the domain of people digging for shellfish, are suddenly enlivened by wild visitors from the north – Brent geese ! These small geese make an incredible racket to announce their arrival on the coast. At low tide near the Pointe de Pen-Bé, patient observers can watch these birds, who are by no means timid, busy feeding on sea lettuce and other saltmarsh plants (eelgrass, salt grass).

Further along the footpath, the cliffs of Pen-Bé plunge towards the sea, offering unrivalled panoramic views of the oyster and mussel beds. Here on the edge of the shore, the kingdom of sea birds (terns and gulls) begins !

- Marais and traict du Rostu : A salt shed (a traditional building used for storing salt), restored by the Conservatoire du Littoral (coastal protection agency) and Mesquer council, marks the start of this pretty walk. In summer an exhibition space gives information about working on the saltmarshes and the biological wealth of the area. A walk of a few hundred metres brings you to the sea and mudflats. During spring tides, an amazing number of birds can be seen here, attracted by the abundance of food : as the tide goes out, avocet, curlew, godwit, plover and sandpiper flock to the shoreline and at low tide, scarlet-beaked shelducks along with a few agitated egrets meander around the mudflats.

© Commune d'Assérac

For a few hours, they are all very busy hunting out worms and shellfish…finding food is essential for survival ! Lucky walkers can only stand and marvel at their strange, astonishing acrobatics !

Directions

2 different walks to explore the mudflats :

1/ From Assérac, take the D82 towards Pen-Bé and Pont-Mahé. After 3.5km, turn left to Pointe de Pen-Bé ; in Mesquery, go down the hill to the Bas-Village, as far as the Traict de Pen-Bé (car park). A signposted coastal footpath runs for 2km along the creek as far as the cliffs at Pen-Bé. It is possible to continue for another 2km along the GR® 34 to the beach and dunes at Pont-Mahé.

2/ From the centre of Mesquer, go 2km to Rostu. Go through the village to the roadside car park, just before the first salt ponds and salt shed. Walk about 500m to the mudflats. A circular walk of 1.5km takes you along the Traict du Rostu and the salt ponds restored by Cap Atlantique District Council.

Length of trail

7.5km in total for the northern loop to Mesquery - 7km in total for the southern loop from Rostu to the Pointe de Merquel.

Accessibility

All year round to look at the scenery, salt production, oyster and fish farming ; for bird-watching, the best times are during autumn and winter spring tides and also in spring.

Around and about

From the car park (rue de Rostu), walk along the GR® 34 to the saltmarsh village of Kervarin (1.5km) : Black-winged stilts and avocets can be seen in the oyster beds and restored salterns (observatory); please be very quiet during the breeding season from April to July!

Carry on through Kercabellec to the dunes, the Pointe de Merquel and the Traict de Rostu (a Sensitive Natural Area belonging to the Département of Loire-Atlantique).

Continue along the GR® 34 for 2km to Pont-Mahé, across conservation land owned by the Conservatoire du Littoral (information boards, protected footpath, grazing animals); magnificent views of the Bay of Pont-Mahé and the Pointe du Bile. Return to the car park and take the path as far as Kergéraud (Frostidié saltmarshes); take the road to Pen-Bé, go to Pont d'Armes (guided tour of the Mès saltmarshes).

Gateway to the Atlantic !

Other places and sites to visit and explore to your heart's content…

To the west of the territory, a stone's throw from Brière, other magical places lead to the sea. The geographical position, history and wildlife of the Guérande peninsula make it a charming, extremely interesting area to visit. Its scenery alternating rocky headlands, sheltered coves, sand dunes, beaches, mudflats and saltmarshes is quite unique !

The presence of these different landscapes, surrounding the neighbouring Brière marshes, is essential to maintain the ecological environment necessary for the wild bird population.

5 places to visit and discover birdlife (see map on pages 2-3.) :

9a The Côte Sauvage ('Wild Coast'), between the Pointe de Penchâteau (Le Pouliguen) and the Pointe du Croisic. Take the D92 southward via Guérande and the saltmarshes to the granite peninsula of Le Croisic , facing the Atlantic. The 10km coast road and GR34 hiking path along the cliffs to Le Croisic offer a range of different viewpoints with facilities (well-maintained footpath, orientation tables, information about the sea birds at the Pointe du Croisic).

Species of birds which can be observed at different times of year include great cormorant, gulls, gannet, sandwich tern, common tern, great skua, red-breasted merganser, loon, rock pipit and wheatear.

© Commune du Croisic

9b The harbour and inlets ('traicts') at Le Croisic : watching the fishing boats coming in to land is an amazing sight; park in one of the large car parks beside the traicts ; lovely views over the traicts, Pen Bron dune (La Turballe) and the Guérande area to the north. To watch birdlife on the Traict, take the D92 road across the saltmarshes as far as the Dune de Pen-Bron (car park and well-maintained footpaths).

Different species of bird can be seen depending on the time of year. These include gulls, Brent geese, shelduck, little egret, bar-tailed godwit, oystercatcher, sandpipers and plovers, ringed plover, great crested grebe and black-necked grebe.

© Commune du Croisic

9c The Pointe du Castelli (Piriac/Mer) and the Pointe du Merquel (Mesquer) : these magnificent headlands reaching out into the Atlantic offer 2 different types of foreshore. The first, at low tide, allows access to the rocks and stretches of brown seaweed, both of which provide food for the birds ; the facilities at the second (blockhouse, orientation tables) allow visitors uninterrupted views of the Bay of Pen-Bé and the Bay of Pont-Mahé (mussel beds at low tide).

Different species of bird can be seen depending on the time of year : great cormorant, gulls, Brent geese, sandwich tern, common tern, grebe and diving ducks, mallard, little egret, oystercatcher, curlew, ruddy turnstone, dunlin, purple sandpiper, rock pipit and wheatear.

© Commune de Penestin

9d The Bay of Pont-Mahé (Assérac) and Le Bile (Pénestin) : follow the road from Saint-Molf to Assérac, then the D82 for some beautiful coastal scenery. From the Pointe du Bile, the view from the coastal footpath takes in the whole of the Bay of Pont-Mahé. In fine weather, it is best to visit this site during the afternoon when the sun lights up the cliffs until twilight… an amazing spectacle ! At low tide, numerous water birds come and go on the mudflats. Take a good pair of binoculars, or even better, a telescope, to observe the bird life under optimal conditions.

Different species of bird can be seen depending on the time of year : Brent geese, shelduck, mallard and pintail, diving ducks, curlew, bar-tailed godwit, sandpipers, plovers and rock pipit.

© Commune d'Assérac

9e The Pointe du Halguen and the Vilaine Estuary (Pénestin) : After the cliffs of Le Bile and La Mine d'Or, the Halguen cliffs are the last observation point and can be reached by car or on foot along the GR34. This area of land on the edge of Morbihan overlooks the muddy waters of the Vilaine Estuary. Besides being the site of many mussel farms, these impressive mudflats are exceptionally popular with migratory birds and winter visitors. Here men and birds share the natural resources ! It is possible to walk along the GR34 or drive along the left bank of the estuary as far as Tréhiguier.

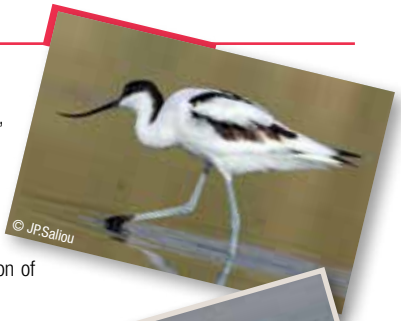
Different species of bird can be seen depending on the time of year: diving ducks (tufted duck and scoter), Brent geese, shelduck, pintail, mallard, bar-tailed godwit, grey plover and rock pipit.

© Commune de Penestin

// Pied avocet

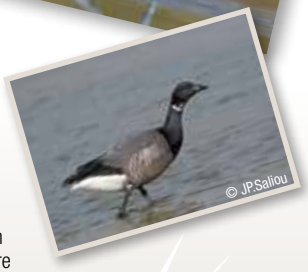
With its striking black and white plumage, turned-up beak and long blueish legs, this small wading bird definitely lives up to its name ! Watching avocets looking for food is always a fascinating sight : they sweep the surface of the water with their beaks, picking up tiny creatures with disconcerting agility, proof of the extraordinary abundance of life in the mud !

During the breeding season from April to June, please take care not to disturb the colonies which can become very noisy if approached and thus attract the attention of seagulls and crows, always on the look-out for food…


© JP.Saliou

// Brent goose

It is easiest to discover this little goose with dark plumage at low tide, when the mudflats are exposed. This gregarious voyager from the Arctic covers between 5,000 and 6,000 kilometres every year to come and overwinter on the coast of Brittany. Exhausted by the journey, the Brent geese find the food resources they need to survive in these bays. Watching the beautiful, noisy flocks arriving is a wonderful sight ! The far from timid birds walk around in the mud for hours on end or bob up and down on the incoming tide, feeding on seaweed and eelgrass… But, take care not to disturb them as this could make the whole flock fly away, which is a great waste of energy ! Once plentiful in number, this species has seen its numbers decline since the end of the 20th century…


© JP.Saliou

The **most** frequently **observed birds** in our **région**

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
GULLS and TERNS				
Herring gull				
Great black-backed gull				
Whiskered tern				
Black tern				
Black-headed gull				
ANATIDES				
Mallard				
Shoveller				
Pintail				
Gadwall				
Garganey				
Common teal				
WADERS				
Black-tailed godwit				
Common snipe				
Common greenshank				
Green sandpiper				
Redshank				
Ruff				
Black-winged stilt				
Little ringed plover				
Lapwing				
LONG-LEGGED WADERS				
Little egret				
White stork				
Great egret				
Night heron				
Grey heron				
Cattle egret				
Spoonbill				
PASSERINES				
Yellow wagtail				
Cetti's warbler				
Reed bunting				
Streaked fantail warbler				
Bluethroat				
Sand martin				
Savi's warbler				
Sedge warbler				
Reed warbler				
Wheatear				
BIRDS OF PREY				
Western marsh harrier				
Sparrow hawk				
Hobby				
Black kite				
RAILS				
Coot				
Water rail				

Reed beds — Lakes and ponds — Meadows

This list is not exhaustive ! We advise serious bird-watchers to use a bird-watching guide book too.

© D. Pons

© D. Pons

Along the seashore

Gulls and terns

- Seagulls (all year round)
- Sandwich tern (spring, summer)
- Common tern (spring, summer)

Wading birds

- Pied avocet (spring, summer)
- Whimbrel (spring)
- Oystercatcher (summer, autumn, winter)
- Bar-tailed godwit (spring, autumn)
- Ruddy turnstone (summer, autumn, winter)
- Ringed plover (summer, autumn, winter)
- Sandpipers (summer, autumn, winter))
- Plovers (autumn, winter)

Geese and Ducks

- Brent goose (autumn, winter)
- Shelduck (all year round)

Bird of Prey

- Osprey (autumn)

Other groups

- Grebes (autumn, winter)
- Diving ducks (autumn, winter)
- Loons (autumn, winter)
- Mergansers (autumn, winter)

If you find an **injured animal**

© Fotolia

© JL.Via

© Fotolia

First of all, please note that legally you are not allowed to transport or keep any wild animal in captivity. Nevertheless, you can transport an animal if you inform the Centre de Sauvegarde de la Faune Sauvage (Wildlife Protection Centre) or a local vet and you take the animal there immediately. This will avoid you being suspected of bird trafficking if you are stopped en route! However, before rushing to the aid of an injured bird, make sure it really is in distress. Young birds may leave the nest prematurely, but rest assured that their parents are keeping a careful eye on them !

If you find a bird which needs assistance, here are a few pieces of advice :

- Most birds calm down in the dark so put it in a cardboard box with an old towel or cloth in the bottom, close the lid and make a few air holes. Keep it in a warm, quiet place. Stress can be fatal.

- Watch out for the talons of bird of prey and wading birds' beaks, which can give you a nasty injury.

- Don't forget to wash your hands after handling a wild animal.

- Never give an animal food or drink without seeking advice from a treatment centre first.

Finding a bird on the ground, does not necessarily mean it is injured…

Fledglings leave the nest before they can fly. During the days when they are learning to fly, their parents continue to care for them and watch over them (even if they may not be visible !)

- If the baby bird is fully-fledged and lively, leave it where it is ! If it is in a dangerous situation, lift it gently onto the branch of a tree or put it in a small open cardboard box near where you have found it.

- Even if you have touched the bird, the parents will still take care of it. However, do not stay close by as they will become frightened.

- In all cases, make sure no cats or dogs go near the place where the young bird is.

- If it appears too young, weak or injured or if you are in any doubt about its condition, contact the nearest animal treatment centre.

- Giving an animal the wrong food can cause many problems (spontaneous fractures, malformations or even death).

- If it survives, it won't be able to return to its natural environment.

- Every animal has an important role in nature and by removing it from its habitat, you are contributing to the destabilisation of the environment.

Contact ONIRIS

Centre Vétérinaire de la Faune Sauvage et des Ecosystèmes des Pays de la Loire

Site de la Chanterie
Nantes
Tél : 02 40 68 77 76
Email :
faunesauvage@oniris-nantes.fr

Guided tours... in the **compagny** of **enthusiasts**

As well as carrying out scientific studies and running educational activities, Brière Regional Nature Park aims to make sure that spending time at the heart of the marshes is an unforgettable experience !
So why not take a trip in a punt with an approved nature guide.

> More details at : **www.parc-naturel-briere.fr**

The Département of Loire-Atlantique is responsible for about 7,500ha of green spaces and is extremely aware of the importance of nature conservation for future generations. It has thus developed a policy to promote natural habitats and educate the public about the environment. Working closely with local organisations, it regularly organises nature walks and visits. Everyone is welcome !

> More details at : **www.loire-atlantique.fr**

The 1,300 members of the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux de Loire-Atlantique (Bird Protection League) are very active in three domains of wildlife : species protection, land conservation and raising public awareness, including education about the environment. To this end, it conducts nature surveys and organises nature outings and wildlife lectures for everyone (schoolchildren, individuals).

> More details at : **www.loire-atlantique.lpo.fr et sur Facebook**

The CPIE Loire Océane is an environmental organisation involved in nature conservation and raising public awareness of sustainable development. It works closely with local organisations throughout our region which stretches from the River Loire to the River Vilaine and from the Atlantic to the Sillon de Bretagne.

> More details at : **www.cpie-loireoceane.com/ et sur Facebook**

ACROLA is an association which is involved in numerous aspects of ornithology within the region, including studies of the stork population and migratory passerines. Its activities are mainly carried out by volunteers with funding from many sources. The aim of the association is to learn more about the biology of the different bird populations and the biodiversity associated with them and to relay this information to a broad public. In addition, it organises an annual programme of outings.

> More details at : **www.acrola.fr**

For more than 60 years, the association Bretagne Vivante has played an essential role in understanding, protecting and discovering nature both at local and regional level. It makes sure that nature is considered as a rich part of everyday life and not as a constraint. Its wide ranging actions include the protection and management of green spaces, wildlife surveys, discovery trips and educational programmes for schools.

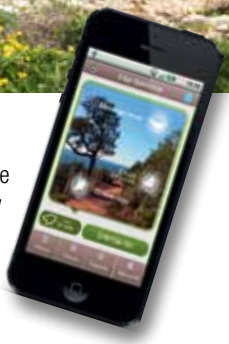
> More details at : **http//www.bretagne-vivante.org/**

In Brière Regional Nature Park and more widely throughout the region Destination Bretagne Plein Sud, local authorities and organisations collaborate daily to preserve the environment and inform the public. These include the Conservatoire du Littoral (coastal protection agency), district councils (Cap Atlantique, Carene, Pont-Chateau Saint-Gildas-des Bois, Estuaire and Sillon) and local councils.

Learn as you walk !

Ecobalade

Ecobalade is a free app for discovering wildlife while walking or hiking. It is a great way for locals and holiday makers to learn about their surroundings in a fun way.



The Ecobalade app is managed by the website www.ecobalade.fr.

You can find it on Apple store and Google Play.

It features the walk between Port de Loncé, Montoir-de-Bretagne and the Pierre Constant Site at Rozé, Saint-Malo-de-Guersac in the Marais de Brière.

Download the walk here :

www.parc-naturel-briere.fr

Additional information about the wildlife in the Brière Regional Nature Park can also be found on its website :

www.parc-naturel-briere.fr
section faune/flore. (in French only)

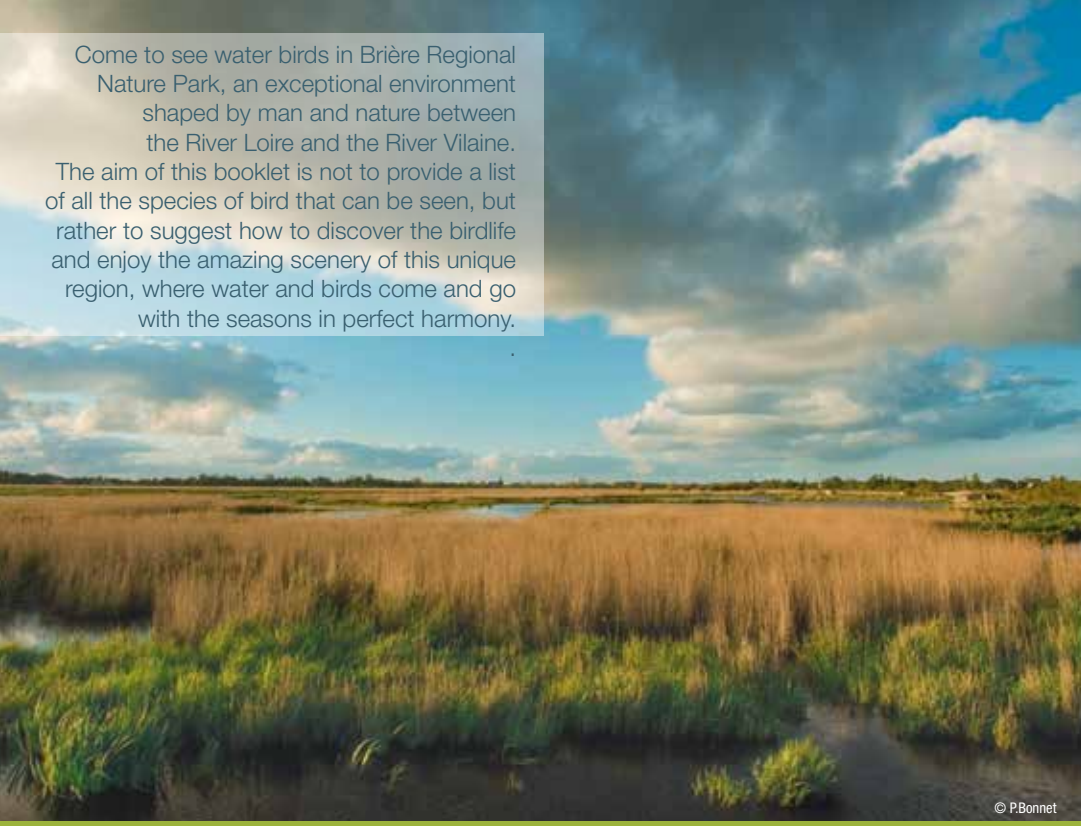
It contains short descriptions of some of the species presented in this guide.

Of course, the list of species is not exhaustive, but it is regularly updated, so it is worth visiting the section from time to time.

AUTHENTIC HOLIDAYS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Reservation service : 0033-2.51.72.95.65 / www.gites-bretagne-sud.fr

Come to see water birds in Brière Regional Nature Park, an exceptional environment shaped by man and nature between the River Loire and the River Vilaine. The aim of this booklet is not to provide a list of all the species of bird that can be seen, but rather to suggest how to discover the birdlife and enjoy the amazing scenery of this unique region, where water and birds come and go with the seasons in perfect harmony.



© P.Bonnet

To find out where to watch birds in other Regional Parks : www.parcs-naturels-regionaux.fr

Where to watch Birds

Translated by SOS Services Traductions Tourisme – 06.86.13.96.77

This booklet is distributed free of charge by Brière Regional Nature Park

Published by PNR Brière

ISBN : 978-2-9550489-5-5

Parc naturel régional de Brière
Village de Kerhinet
44410 Saint-Lyphard
Tél. 02 40 65 85 01
email : tourisme@parc-naturel-briere.fr

www.parc-naturel-briere.fr

Parc naturel régional de Brière

Une autre vie s'invente ici

Follow us on

Conception réalisation : LATITUDE Nantes - www.agence-latitude.fr - 0942/15-11/16 - Impression : Goubault Imprimeur - Crédit photo - 1ère de couverture: UIA Photo JL. Via

UNION EUROPÉENNE
CE PROJET EST COFINANCÉ PAR LE FONDS EUROPÉEN DE DÉVELOPPEMENT RÉGIONAL
Région PAYS de la LOIRE
MARAIS DE BRIÈRE Réserve naturelle régionale PAYS DE LA LOIRE
PEFC 10-31-1253