



Field Guides Tour Report

France's Loire Valley: Birds, Chateaux & Wine 2018

Jun 1, 2018 to Jun 11, 2018
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For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



Even our cultural stops got us up close to some of the birds; here a White Wagtail sits on a wall outside Chenonceau. Photo by guide Megan Edwards Crewe.

Our inaugural Loire Valley: Birds, Chateaux and Wine tour tested the new concept of combining one of our birds and wine tours with yet another component -- a bit of culture -- and the resulting combination seemed largely to be a success. We spent our mornings searching for birds in forests, grasslands, wetlands and agricultural areas between the mighty Loire River and several of its larger tributaries (with trips further afield to the pond-pocked regions of the Sologne and La Brenne on several days) and turned our attention to a few of the region's many wineries and chateaux in the afternoons.

We started our adventures in the town of Chinon (once we'd made our way there from the Paris-CDG airport, that is). This lovely old town, dominated by its partially reconstructed castle, sprawls along the banks of the Vienne, not far east of that river's confluence with the Loire. From there, we ventured out into the surrounding countryside, finding golden fields of ripening wheat and barley studded with bright red poppies and alive with the songs of Cirl Buntings, Melodious Warblers and Common Chaffinches. Small copses of woods held busy family parties of Great and Eurasian Blue Tits, a Mistle Thrush shouted challenges from a dead tree top, and a plain-faced Garden Warbler flitted along a pond edge. After a morning spent getting familiar with some of the region's common birds, we headed to Fontevraud for lunch (accompanied by our first regional rosé) followed by a visit to the massive Fontevraud Abbey, run for centuries by a series of powerful abbesses until they were turned out the by French revolutionaries, who turned it into a prison. We finished up our visit just in time to avoid getting doused by a massive thunderstorm that moved quickly in to the area.

We spent the early part of our second morning in a tiny remnant grassland, where the prizes of the day were several Little Bustards -- one black-and-white-necked bird seen throwing his head back as he performed and two males in flight, their black and white wings flashing in the early morning light. Other highlights there included Corn Buntings, a cadre of tail-wagging White Wagtails, a single Eurasian Thick-knee, a couple of speedy Red-legged Partridges and a European Stonechat hunting from a thistle stalk. A walk in some mixed woods and fields later in the morning added a ground-feeding Great Spotted Woodpecker (maybe gobbling up some of those too-numerous-to-count baby toads), several bustling young families of Eurasian Coots and an unmoving Black-crowned Night-Heron up to its middle in a pond. After lunch at a Chinon cafe, we headed up to Pierre and Bertrand Couly's vineyard, where we were treated to a grand tour of the place -- and an explanation of the importance of terroir -- by Bertrand himself, followed by a tasting of six of their Chinon varietals.

Another morning, another forest! This time we visited the big evergreen plantations east of Chinon, which are mixed with native deciduous woodlands. Patience and persistence netted us (after considerable effort) such treats as Middle Spotted Woodpecker and Western Bonelli's Warbler, while a Tree Pipit made fluttering display flights from a dead snag, a Firecrest worked its way along branches only feet off the ground, a regal Short-toed Snake-Eagle balanced on a roadside post, and our only Eurasian Hoopoe flitted down the road ahead of us. Then it was off to a catered picnic lunch in the country

(complete with local wines) and a visit to the Villandry chateau, famous for its spectacular gardens -- some (like the extensive kitchen gardens, laid out in strictly regimented patterns) and others (like the wonderful "sun garden") a wildly exuberant profusion of growth.

Our transfer day proved a bit soggy, but we eked out a view of a wary Crested Tit, spotted our first flyby Common Cuckoo (after having heard what seemed like dozens) and enjoyed a pleasant (if damp) half hour along the Loire in the shelter of our raised van doors, watching Little and Common terns coursing over the river or sitting on their nests, plus Common Sandpipers, Eurasian Moorhens and a Little Ringed Plover. After a fabulous barbecue lunch at Teca's, and a visit to the troglodyte house in their back yard, we headed on to the winery of Chateau Gaudrelle, where Pedro took us on a short guided tour before offering us a taste of several of their white and sparkling wines paired with some fine local goat cheeses.

Our next hotel, in the town of Cours-Cheverny, allowed us to explore areas far to the east of Chinon. Our first morning there took us to the western edge of the vast area known as the Sologne -- a well-forested region pockmarked by thousands of manmade ponds. At the Etang de Beaumont, we watched our first Whiskered Terns quarter the marsh while Common Pochards and Tufted Ducks floated below them. A Purple Heron stalked the pond edge, a Eurasian Reed-Warbler chortled from his perch on a reed stem and a jewel-bright Common Kingfisher dazzled on a post by the blind. Our afternoon was spent exploring some the massive Chambord chateau, with its unique double-helix staircase (designed by Leonardo da Vinci) and period art and furniture -- fortunately or unfortunately, visitors don't have access to all 400 of its rooms!

We spent the next full day in La Brenne, a regional nature reserve located some 60 miles south of our hotel. As in the Sologne, thousands of small manmade lakes are again a feature of the region, and some of those bodies of water sheltered screaming colonies of Black-headed Gulls, flotillas of Red-crested Pochards, and scattered Great Cormorants, while a gang of Northern Lapwings snoozed along one shore, Red-backed Shrikes hunted from fence posts and bush tops, Greater Whitethroats chortled from hedges, and our first Cetti's Warbler slipped into view. We had multiple encounters with Eurasian Marsh Harriers, and a surprise Black Stork made an appearance low over the trees.

On the following morning, we headed to Etang de l'Arche in a successful attempt to find some grebes; we eventually located all three species (Great Crested, Eared and Little), plus a quick-moving family of Hawfinches, a cooperative Common Nightingale and our first perched Black Kite. A walk in a nearby farming area gave us our first Yellowhammer (a male perched right in the open) before the heat of the day finally chased us back to town for lunch. We headed south and west to the Caves Monmousseau after lunch, taking a self-guided tour through some of the vineyard's vast cave complex -- though far less than the whole 9km length! Then it was on to the fabulous Chenonceau chateau, which stretches all the way across the pretty Cher River, for the remainder of the day.

We headed back to the western edges of the Sologne on our final morning and were rewarded with eleventh-hour sightings of several noisy Wood Warblers, a couple of inquisitive Goldcrests and an all-too-brief adult Hawfinch. Then it was back to town for a final lunch at the local bistro, and the long drive back up to Paris to the airport hotel for our final dinner together.

Thanks so much for joining us on the tour; it was fun birding and wining and dining and exploring chateaux together with you all! We hope to see you again soon on another adventure somewhere. Meanwhile, happy birding!

-- Megan and Marcelo

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) -- We heard a good-sized group honking as they flew past while we birded along a track near Marcilly-en-Gault, but nobody was enthused enough to scurry to the end of the track to actually see them. [I*]

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) -- A family group -- an adult followed by three fluffy white youngsters and two fluffy gray ones -- floated serenely across the Etang de Beaumont. Our biggest numbers, however, came at the Etang de la Gabrielle, where scores paddled and upended at the far end of the lake in search of tasty tidbits from the bottom. The picturesque pair in the reflection pond at Chateau Villandry were presumably part of the "garden furniture".

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) -- A female floated on the Etang de Essart, right at the end of our day at La Brenne. Her distinctive bill (orange stripes down the edge of her black beak) and black-and-white speculum were distinctive.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) -- Very common throughout the tour, seen on all but the first day.

RED-CRESTED POCHARD (*Netta rufina*) -- A sprinkling of males on Etang de la Gabrielle, with a few others on Etang de la Sous. There is a small breeding population in La Brenne, but most of this species breeds considerably further to the east.

COMMON POCHARD (*Aythya ferina*) -- A few -- including several handsome males and a furtive female with a pack of very small ducklings -- paddled across the Etang de Beaumont or slipped through the dense reeds right in front of the blind. We saw others at the main etang at the Cherine Nature Reserve.

TUFTED DUCK (*Aythya fuligula*) -- Another breeding species found in small numbers (typically pairs swimming close together) on the Etang de Beaumont and at the Cherine Nature Reserve. Their bright golden eyes were distinctive -- and eye-catching!

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE (*Alectoris rufa*) -- One bird trotted down the track ahead of us as we drove through the Meron Nature Reserve, and a second crept more slowly away from us after we got out to scope the European Stonechat. Eventually, the second partridge climbed up on a fence post to sing, giving us some fine views.

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) -- A few scattered males seen in agricultural fields in the Sologne. Most were wandering across recently plowed fields, but one was standing tall on a big straw bale near Teca's house. [I]

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – Surprisingly, we found only a single bird -- one in non-breeding plumage diving repeatedly near the edge of the Etang de l'Arche.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*) – Easily the most common grebe of the trip, seen in good numbers on the various etangs in La Brenne, with others at the Etang de Beaumont and the Etang de l'Arche. We saw at least one pair engaged in their courtship "mirror dance", a few splashing confrontations between neighboring pairs and plenty of stripey-faced youngsters being fed by their busy parents.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – Quite common on Etang de l'Arche our last morning, with nice scope views of several adults feeding youngsters at the near end of the pond. This species is known as the Black-necked Grebe in Europe.

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (*Ciconia nigra*) – This one was certainly a surprise; they breed in large swampy forests along the Loire Valley, but are quite shy and hard to see during the breeding season. Marcelo spotted one in flight just above the trees around the Etang de la Sous.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Scattered birds along the Loire and its larger tributaries, with a couple of others over the Etang de Beaumont and the Cherine Nature Reserve. Most of the birds we saw were in flight, but we did see a few drying out on sandbars and dead snags along the water's edge.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*) – Daily, both in flight (sometimes a surprisingly long way from the nearest water) and along the shores of lakes and rivers throughout. This species strongly resembles North America's Great Blue Heron, but is smaller, shorter-legged and completely lacking in any rufous or cinnamon tones to the thighs, coverts or carpal regions.

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea*) – Our first was a hunting bird along the fringes of the Etang de Beaumont -- good spotting, Alice! We saw plenty of others in flight over the etangs of La Brenne. This species is considerably darker than the previous.

GREAT EGRET (EURASIAN) (*Ardea alba alba*) – We saw only a single bird -- flying along the back edge of the Etang de Panama. This species is a relatively rare breeder in western Europe; it has spread westward from eastern Europe (and further east) and is far more common there.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*) – A few hunted with a group of Gray Herons in a swampy area near the Vienne River in Chinon (seen on a foggy pre-breakfast walk) but this species proved to be more common in La Brenne. It strongly resembles North America's Snowy Egret, but has only two long head plumes (rather than a showy spray of fine feathers) in breeding plumage, and shows blue-gray (rather than yellow) lores.

CATTLE EGRET (WESTERN) (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*) – Regular through much of the tour, with the biggest numbers seen at the Cherine Nature Reserve -- scores snoozed or preened on stick nests on several islets in the large etang near the visitor's center.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (EURASIAN) (*Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax*) – Seen on most days, including an adult up to its middle in a scummy pond near Savigny-en-Veron and a preening adult with its panting, nearly-grown youngster on a nest at the Cherine Nature Reserve.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

SHORT-TOED SNAKE-EAGLE (*Circaetus gallicus*) – Our first was a magnificent bird perched on a fence post right beside the road in the Foret de Chinon -- wow! We got great looks before it eventually flew off across the field. We saw another in flight over the Etang de la Sous; its large size and mostly pale underparts (with only narrow brown barring on the underwings and a brown hood) help to quickly identify it.

EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*) – Several in La Brenne, including a female circling over the fields near the Cherine visitor's center and another female coursing over the fields near the Etang des Essarts. This species is considerably larger and broader-winged than the Northern Harrier, and lacks the latter's white rump patch.

HEN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – A male coasted across the highway in front of our vans during our drive back to Paris, showing his white rump and uniformly-colored upperwings nicely as he went.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*) – An all-too-brief view of one diving for cover in some riverside bushes near the rainy overlook we stopped at along the Loire on our way to Teca's. It certainly got the terns all riled up!

BLACK KITE (*Milvus migrans*) – Scattered birds on several days, including one wheeling over us as we climbed out of the vans near the restrooms at the little park south of Savigny-en-Veron, another flapping over the Meron grasslands, and more in flight at La Brenne. Our best views, though, came at Etang de l'Arche, when we found one perched beside a big stick nest.

COMMON BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*) – Common throughout, seen every day but our first afternoon; this (along with the European Kestrel) is one of the most common raptors in most of Europe. This species comes in a bewildering variety of color morphs, though most show at least some hint of a dark belly band.

Otididae (Bustards)

LITTLE BUSTARD (*Tetrax tetrax*) – Yahoo! Here's a great example of persistence paying off. It meant an earlier-than-normal start and a bit of standing around and triangulating while we tried to figure out where the birds were singing from, but we eventually got one of the head-throwing males in the scopes and watched while he performed. We had even better views a little further on, when we flushed a bird from a roadside wheat field as we drove along. It flew in a giant circle around us as we clambered out of the van, with a rival soon springing up to join him. Wow! This species is in sharp decline across most of Europe as the open plains it requires are chopped into smaller and smaller pieces.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*) – A couple of birds clambered around on the grassy banks of the Vienne River where it flows through Chinon on our first pre-breakfast walk, and another chugged across an oxbow lake in a park near the town center a few days later. We saw others along the shore of an islet in the Loire (not far from where the terns were nesting) and still more in many of the etangs in Sologne and La Brenne. This species was recently split from America's Common Gallinule.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*) – Very common in wetlands throughout, including a couple of busy parents feeding some so-ugly-they're-cute chicks in a roadside pond near Montour, and dozens across the water from our lunch spot at Etang de la Gabriere. [N]

Burhinidae (Thick-knees)

EURASIAN THICK-KNEE (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) – One flew strongly past while we birded on the Meron grasslands, following along the high-tension electricity wires for a long way before dropping down into a field across the highway. This big "shorebird" (which is typically found stony, dry open areas) is known as "Stone Curlew" in Europe.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

NORTHERN LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*) – One flew past over the road as we drove from back from the Meron grasslands before breakfast one morning. But our best views came on the track out to the Etang des Essarts in La Brenne, when we scoped a flock of many dozen snoozing in the grass along the shore of one of the ponds en route. That pointy crest -- and the hunter green mantle color -- is distinctive.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius dubius*) – One stood sentinel among the Little and Common terns on a sand bar in the Loire River, seen from our perch on a nearby overlook.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Two teetered along the edge of the Loire River on a drizzly morning, poking and prodding at the sandy shore -- at least until the Eurasian Sparrowhawk happened by, that is!

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – We watched (from our view beside the ruined mill at the overlook above Candes) as a few distant birds flew past along the Vienne River, and saw others bathing and flying at the Etang de Beaumont. But our best views came at the noisy colony at the Cherine Nature Reserve, where scores squabbled and foraged and attended their large, fluffy youngsters -- and showed that their distinctive heads are actually BROWN, not black!

MEDITERRANEAN GULL (*Ichthyæetus melanocephalus*) – A few flew past along the Vienne River, seen from the overlook where we were enjoying the view of the Vienne/Loire confluence, but our best views came towards the end of our visit to the Fontevraud Abbey, when small groups of them winged low over the grounds, heading towards roosts to the west as the big storm approached. The all-white upperwings of the adults -- and the midnight-black heads and scarlet bills of their breeding plumage -- are distinctive.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL (*Larus michahellis*) – Plenty of these big gulls throughout the tour along the rivers -- though very uncommon on the smaller etangs of the Sologne and Brenne. A pair nesting among the Black-headed Gulls at the Cherine Nature Reserve gave us a good chance to compare sizes. This species was long considered to be a subspecies of the Herring Gull.

LITTLE TERN (*Sternula albifrons*) – Best seen along the Loire River, where we found a little group nesting on a sandbar with some larger Common Terns; we found a few others on some of the etangs of La Brenne. With its white foreheads and yellow bill, this species strongly resembles North America's Least Tern. [N]

WHISKERED TERN (*Chlidonias hybrida*) – After a surprisingly long tern-less stretch, a trio of these handsome birds made an appearance at the far end of the Etang de Beaumont, gradually working their way closer and closer until they were finally quartering back and forth over the water right in front of the blind. We saw others over the etangs of La Brenne. This species is the quintessential "marsh tern", seldom appearing along the coast except during migration.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – As its name suggests, this was the common tern of the trip, seen on many days of the tour -- both along the various big rivers and over the region's many etangs. The bright red-orange beak of this species was certainly eye-catching. [N]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – All of the "feral pigeon" variety, especially common around towns and cities.

STOCK DOVE (*Columba oenas*) – A couple along the Vienne River on our first pre-breakfast outing in Chinon, including one that spent long minutes foraging on the grassy bank near our first Eurasian Green Woodpecker. Unlike the more common (and superficially similar) Rock Dove, this one has a dark eye, lacks a white rump and dark wingbars, and has black primary feathers.

COMMON WOOD-PIGEON (*Columba palumbus*) – Almost ridiculously throughout, with dozens and dozens seen every day. The big white wing stripe on this species is diagnostic -- as is its enormous size!

EUROPEAN TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia turtur*) – A scattering of these handsome doves on several days. This species is in steep decline across Europe, no thanks to modern agricultural practices and a boneheaded spring hunt on Malta.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Small numbers on most days, typically around towns. It was certainly far less common than the wood-pigeon!

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

COMMON CUCKOO (*Cuculus canorus*) – As usual, heard far more frequently than seen; the cuckoo clocks were "ringing" all throughout the Loire Valley! Some of the group had good views of a rusty female (or two) along a track at the southern edge of the Forêt de Chinon, while others didn't catch up with a visual until we had a singing bird fly over near the pine forest on the morning we drove to Teca's house. We saw others in flight at the Cherine Nature Reserve.

Apodidae (Swifts)

COMMON SWIFT (*Apus apus*) – Daily, always in flight -- including some swirling over Chinon with a mass of House Martins, which allowed nice comparisons of their very different wing actions.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

EURASIAN HOOPOE (*Upupa epops*) – Somewhat surprisingly, we found only a single bird -- a wary individual along a leafy track at the southern edge of the Forêt de Chinon. Unfortunately, it flew up off the road as we approached, and then slipped off into the forest before everybody got a look.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*) – Only one of these as well (another surprise), but this one cooperated nicely, sitting stock-still on a post just outside the blind at the Etang de Beaumont and giving us all multiple chances to study it in the scope. What a gorgeous little creature it is!

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

MIDDLE SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dendrocopos medius*) – It took some patience -- and lots of shuffling up and down a roadway and a couple of forest "rides" -- but we eventually all got nice views of one or both of an adult and fledged youngster in the Forêt de Chinon, particularly when the adult hitched its way up the main trunk of a fairly open oak tree right up to (almost) the top.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dendrocopos major*) – The most common woodpecker of the trip, seen on most days. We had especially nice views of one feeding a youngster along a track west of Chinon; it returned again and again to the ground -- where it was probably hunting the zillions of tiny toadlets that were EVERYWHERE there. As its name suggests, this species is larger than the previous one. It has a darker red vent, heavier markings on the face and unstreaked underparts.

EURASIAN GREEN WOODPECKER (*Picus viridis*) – Super views of one hunting along the river on our first pre-breakfast walk in Chinon -- it spent a long time clinging to a concrete wall right next to the sidewalk, which gave us a great opportunity to study it in the scopes. Like the flickers

of the Americas, this species is an ant-eating specialist that spends a lot of its time on the ground (like our bird did).

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Common throughout, often hovering over roadside fields. Eurasian Kestrels are larger than their American cousins.

Laniidae (Shrikes).

RED-BACKED SHRIKE (*Lanius collurio*) – A pair in a tree along the edge of a field across the road from the Cherine Nature Reserve headquarters finally broke our shrike jinx; we saw another bird hunting from a fence along the track to the Etang des Essarts.

Oriolidae (Old World Orioles).

EURASIAN GOLDEN ORIOLE (*Oriolus oriolus*) – Somehow, despite hearing multitudes of this handsome species, we never really got the quintessential look. Some of the group spotted one (or more) bright males in flight from moving vehicles (including one bounding over a farm field) and we saw an active pair flashing over the canopy of the Foret de Chinon -- but only through the many intervening branches!

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).

EURASIAN JAY (*Garrulus glandarius*) – Small numbers seen on most days, often crossing the road in front of the vans. We had particularly good views of a pair nest-building along the Vienne River on our first pre-breakfast walk in Chinon. [N]

EURASIAN MAGPIE (*Pica pica*) – Another common species, seen every day -- though in smaller numbers than most of the other corvid species. Our first was trundling around in the parking lot of the rest area we visited on our way from the airport to Chinon, thanks to Donna.

EURASIAN JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*) – Very common around Chinon, where a busy rookery full of just-fledged youngsters provided wake-up calls each morning. Birds sitting on the roofs of nearby houses gave us our best scope views, letting us study those distinctively pale eyes and the frosty napes of the adults. We saw fewer around Cours-Cheverny.

ROOK (*Corvus frugilegus*) – Regular around Chinon, where they mingled with the smaller jackdaws in the big rookery across the road from our hotel. We had nice looks at the distinctively white bill bases of the adults in the scopes.

CARRION CROW (*Corvus corone*) – Another very common species, seen daily -- including one gourmand dining on frog legs (and the rest of the unfortunate frog) beside a muddy puddle at the dried-out Etang de la Sous.

Alaudidae (Larks).

WOOD LARK (*Lullula arborea*) – One flew high above the Etang de Beaumont, singing loudly as we approached the blind. Unfortunately, it proved singularly difficult for most folks to find the tiny dot in the sky (and it wasn't much of a look, even for those who managed to spot it).

EURASIAN SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*) – Another high flyer, with displaying birds hanging above the Meron grasslands and others over the track out to Etang des Essarts. Unlike the previous species, some also showed nicely on the ground -- including a few waddling along the edges of the road at the Meron grasslands, a couple in a field near Teca's house and two in a plowed field not far from Etang de l'Arche on our last morning.

Hirundinidae (Swallows).

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Regular, though less common than the next species. The subspecies found in Europe (*rustica*) is far paler underneath than North America's "erythrogaster" is.

COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (*Delichon urbicum*) – Daily, except for our first afternoon together. The birds nesting on the houses near the bridge in Chinon gave us particularly nice views -- and allowed us to study their nest construction as well. [N]

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice).

CRESTED TIT (*Lophophanes cristatus*) – Our first was a rather furtive bird flicking through some tall pines at the edge of the Foret de Chinon. We had much better looks at another, low down along a leafy track near the Etang de Panama on our last morning's birding outing.

MARSH TIT (*Poecile palustris*) – Frustratingly elusive along a track near Marcilly-en-Gault. Two (probably a parent and a fledgling) flitted through the trees over our heads, showing reasonably well for some and not at all for others. The very tiny bib of this species -- more like a little moustache than a bib -- is distinctive.

EURASIAN BLUE TIT (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) – Another common and widespread species, with particularly nice looks at a little family party working along a roadside south of Montour. At some points, they were only a few feet above the ground, which meant we could get nice looks without killing our neck muscles!

GREAT TIT (*Parus major*) – The most common of the tour's tits, recorded every day but the first afternoon; the little family group swarming along the hedge around the ruined house near Montour allowed us to study them at our leisure. Quite a few of the groups we saw contained multiple newly-fledged youngsters, which have pale yellow (rather than white) cheek patches and lack the black central breast stripe of the adults.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits).

LONG-TAILED TIT (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – A pre-breakfast walk on a foggy morning in Chinon netted us close views of a little family group -- including quite a few relatively short-tailed youngsters -- flitting through some street trees. A few sat still long enough for us to get scope views, which is practically unheard of for these active little birds. We saw others with a mixed flock near the parking lot at the Etang de Ricot in La Brenne.

Sittidae (Nuthatches).

EURASIAN NUTHATCH (*Sitta europaea*) – Small numbers on several days of the tour, including a noisy one bouncing through the Foret de Chinon (repeatedly distracting us from our search for the Middle-spotted Woodpecker). Our best views, though, came in the parking lot of the Etang de Ricot, where one rummaged along a number of craggy trunks and mossy branches, checking for tidbits.

Certhiidae (Trecreepers).

SHORT-TOED TRECREEPER (*Certhia brachyactyla*) – Abundant throughout, recorded every day of the tour -- though far more regularly heard than seen. Our first bird was in the parking lot of the rest area we visited on our drive from the airport to Chinon, and it was the only one the whole group saw. It's similar enough to the Brown Creeper that it would probably be overlooked if it were to show up in the US.

Troglodytidae (Wrens).

EURASIAN WREN (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – Another common and widespread species heard regularly throughout the trip. The male singing his heart out from the top of several chimneys and television aerials along the Vienne River in Chinon was entertaining.

Regulidae (Kinglets).

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*) – A couple of calling birds twitched through some giant evergreens along one of the backroads east of Cours-Cheverny on our final morning -- a consolation prize for having outlasted the downpour!

FIRECREST (*Regulus ignicapilla*) – Those who ventured out for our last pre-breakfast walk in Chinon spotted our first -- a fired-up male along the entrance drive down to a little riverside park in town. But our best views came in the Forêt de Chinon, where one descended to mere feet off the ground along one of the "rides", showing his bright red-orange crown stripe to perfection.

Scotocercidae (Bush Warblers and Allies)

CETTI'S WARBLER (*Cettia cetti*) – After hearing the loud, abrupt song of this species around Marcilly-en-Gault, we connected with a fairly showy one (well, showy for a Cetti's Warbler anyway) right near the parking lot for the Etang de la Sous.

Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers)

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – Common throughout, with their distinctive (and onomatopoeic) song a regular part of the tour soundtrack. We had especially nice views of one Marcelo called in right over his head at the little park just south of Savigny-en-Veron. Its habit of regularly dipping its tail is distinctive.

WESTERN BONELLI'S WARBLER (*Phylloscopus bonelli*) – It took a bit of time and patience, but we eventually all connected with one working through the trees along the edge of the road in the Forêt de Chinon.

WOOD WARBLER (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*) – This one was an eleventh-hour save! On our last morning, we found our first along the track beside the Etang de Panama, then found an even more cooperative bird along another track as we headed back towards our hotel.

Acrocephalidae (Reed Warblers and Allies)

MELODIOUS WARBLER (*Hippolais polyglotta*) – One of the more common warblers of the trip, particularly in more open areas with scattered scrubby stands of trees. One singing from the hedge at our very first stop west of Chinon gave us some great scope views.

SEDGE WARBLER (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) – A flighty bird along the edge of the Etang de Panama never sat in the open for very long, though we did get quick looks at its bold eyebrow.

EURASIAN REED WARBLER (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) – One singing from the reeds just outside the blind at the Etang de Beaumont proved very cooperative, sitting for a long time in the same place and allowing us nice scope views. We heard others singing from the reeds around several etangs in La Brenne, and a final one along the edge of the Etang de l'Arche on the morning of the day we drove back to Paris.

GREAT REED WARBLER (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*) – One loudly sang and sang and sang from the reeds just outside the blind at the Etang de Ricot in La Brenne, but it stubbornly refused to come out where we could see it -- though we could hear that it crept as far as the near end of the reed bed several times! We heard another singing in the reeds around the dried-up Etang de la Sous. [*]

Locustellidae (Grassbirds and Allies)

COMMON GRASSHOPPER-WARBLER (*Locustella naevia*) – Arg! We heard the distinctive insect-like song of this species from a vast grassy field just over the fence from the path out to the dry Etang de la Sous. Unfortunately (though the sound moved several times) we never laid eyes on the singer. This species creeps along through dense vegetation like a mouse. [*]

Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)

EURASIAN BLACKCAP (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – One of the tour's most common warblers, recorded on most days (though sometimes as a "heard only"). The one singing from the tree hanging over the street near the entrance of the little park near Savigny-en-Veron was especially cooperative.

GARDEN WARBLER (*Sylvia borin*) – Our spotting of this plain warbler working along the back edge of the oxbow lake in the park outside Savigny-en-Gault made Ron and Jeff H. very happy! This species is distinguished by its almost complete lack of field marks.

GREATER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia communis*) – Some of the group spotted one (or two -- there were a pair) sitting up briefly in tall weeds in a scruffy field near Savigny-en-Veron, but most had to wait until we found another along the road near the Cherine Nature Reserve visitor's center to see one.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa striata*) – Scattered individuals throughout, including a couple of birds interacting near where we parked our vans while birding (and using the restrooms) in the little park south of Savigny-en-Veron, and others hunting from dead snags near our parking spot in the Forêt de Chinon. Given the fact that its markings look more like streaks than spots, this species is misnamed; youngsters, however, are strongly spotted above.

EUROPEAN ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*) – Regular in small numbers in wooded area and around some of the towns, with particularly nice views of one with a mixed flock at the Etang de Ricot in La Brenne. It's hard to believe that our big American Robin reminded homesick colonials of this little cutie!

COMMON NIGHTINGALE (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) – Heard far more frequently than seen, but we finally caught up with a heavily-marked youngster along the road near the visitor's center at the Cherine Nature Reserve. A day later, we found an adult singing and flitting through the trees near the edge of Etang de l'Arche.

BLACK REDSTART (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) – Common and reasonably widespread, with a few along the river front in Chinon (often perching on the concrete wall along the sidewalk) and others flitting around the Fontevraud Abbey and the huge Chambord chateau. Most of the birds we saw were females or youngsters (i.e. a plain soft gray with rusty tails), but a few were more colorful adult males.

EUROPEAN STONECHAT (*Saxicola rubicola rubicola*) – Small numbers on many days, including a male perched on a thistle head at the edge of the Meron grasslands and a little group hunting in the field near the parking lot of the Etang de Beaumont.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*) – Very common throughout, found in many habitats -- including the courtyard of our Chinon hotel, where a pair had a nest and at least one fledged youngster food-begging before we left -- though the outside kitty there was undoubtedly going to make short work of that one. [N]

SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelos*) – We heard the loud, mockingbird-like song of this species on several days, but just couldn't get ourselves in a position to see the singer -- despite repeated attempts! [*]

MISTLE THRUSH (*Turdus viscivorus*) – Our best views came in the little park south of Savigny-en-Veron, where we spotted one singing from the top of a big dead tree. We saw another in a treetop near the Meron grasslands, and a flying bird or two in La Brenne. Its large size, big round breast spots and vertical "whisker stripes" (sort of like those found on a kestrel) help to separate this one from the previous species.

Sturnidae (Starlings).

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – How did this one get left off the checklist?! It was a common species, seen in good numbers every day - including plenty of screechy, brown youngsters just out of their nests.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits).

GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*) – Ron spotted one in the stream under the Chateau Chenonceau -- and managed to get an identifiable picture or three with his mobile phone!

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*) – Easily the most common of the tour's wagtails, seen nearly every day. A gang of wagging youngsters on the manure piles at the start of the Meron grasslands entertained us for a while, and we saw some handsome adults on walls and walkways around each of the chateaux we visited.

TREE PIPIT (*Anthus trivialis*) – One singing and making short display flights back and forth from a couple of dead snags in the Forêt de Chinon gave us nice scope views.

Emberizidae (Old World Buntings).

YELLOWHAMMER (*Emberiza citrinella*) – A male sang from a leafy branch on a toasty late morning near La Gaudrie, and a second male flew past there. The writer Beatrix Potter transcribed this one's song as "Just a little bit of butter with CHEESE".

CIRL BUNTING (*Emberiza cirrus*) – A confiding male bounced between a barley field and a massive "laid hedge" around a ruined building west of Chinon, giving us nice looks in the process. We saw others around the edge of the Meron grasslands, and in the park near Savigny-en-Veron.

CORN BUNTING (*Emberiza calandra*) – A couple of birds singing from wires near the start of the track through the Meron grasslands showed well.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

COMMON CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*) – Another regular species, recorded every day. The first afternoon (at the highway rest stop where we found our Short-toed Treecreeper) we only heard one, but after that we had plenty of repeated good looks -- including some bouncing around on the grounds of the Fontevraud Abbey and the tippity-top of a female on a nest near the Etang de l'Arche. [N]

HAWFINCH (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – A few just-fledged, piping youngsters flapped vigorously from one tree to the next near the edge of the Etang de l'Arche, but an adult carrying food along a back road east of Cours-Cheverny (where we found the Goldcrests) gave us slightly better views.

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH (*Chloris chloris*) – Regular throughout, including some wheezing from evergreens around Fontevraud Abbey, one perched near a farmhouse at the edge of the Meron grasslands, and some feeding in the grass at Chambord.

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis*) – Another widespread species on this tour, with especially nice views of a little group foraging on the rocky wall behind the gift shop at Villandry. The bold yellow wing stripe of this species is distinctive in flight -- as is their tinkling call.

EUROPEAN SERIN (*Serinus serinus*) – A singing male in a tree along the road we walked between the parking lot and Fontevraud Abbey showed nicely -- and even more so when he moved to a nearby television aerial. We found another antenna-sitter on a foggy pre-breakfast walk in Chinon a couple of days later.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Very common throughout, particularly in cities and towns -- which was nice to see, since their numbers are crashing across much of Europe.

MAMMALS

EUROPEAN BROWN HARE (*Lepus europaeus*) – One lurked along the edge of an agricultural field in the Meron grasslands, its long ears folded discretely along its back.

EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – One along the edge of the track edging the Etang de l'Arche dithered a bit as our vehicles approached before finally scuttling off into the undergrowth. This species is far smaller than North America's Gray Squirrel.

NUTRIA (*Myocastor coypus*) – We saw a few individuals swimming across various etangs. This species was introduced from South America for the fur trade; when that collapsed, many were released "into the wild". [I]

RED DEER (*Cervus elaphus*) – One of these large deer (formerly considered conspecific with our Elk) galloped off across a roadside field, its buffy rump flashing as we drove by.

ROE DEER (*Capreolus capreolus*) – A couple of these smaller deer waded through the tall vegetation at the Meron grasslands, seen shortly before we finally located the bustards; eventually (after watching us for a bit), they bounded away across the field with a flash of white tails. Another two wandered across a pasture behind a couple of curious horses that were checking us out as we birded near the end of a track outside Marcilly-en-Gault.

Herps

EUROPEAN POND TURTLE (*Emys orbicularis*) – Very common in La Brenne, with nice scope views of one resting on a log near the path to the blind at the Cherine Nature Reserve's visitor's center (we later learned that it was radio-tagged) and a whole string of them balanced on a partially submerged branch outside the blind at the Etang de Ricot. La Brenne is an important area of conservation for the species; some 70,000 are thought to dwell in the park's 4000 ponds.

SPINY TOAD (*Bufo spinosus*) – The zillion little toadlets we found hopping along the track south of Montour (where they were probably being gobbled up by the Great Spotted Woodpeckers) were probably this species, though they might also have been Natterjack Toads. Identifying small toads turns out to be harder than I'd anticipated! The Spiny Toad has recently been split from what is now called the Common Toad; it is found south and west of the latter.

EDIBLE FROG (*Pelophylax esculentus*) – At least some of the many frogs we saw appeared to be this species, which is intermediate in size between the Pool Frog and Marsh Frog, but with a sharper, more elongated snout. As with the toads, the frog situation in central France is far more complicated than I had realized!

WESTERN GREEN LIZARD (*Lacerta bilineata*) – We found a very confiding male right beside the path out to one of the etangs in La Brenne. His blue chin helps to identify him.

SAND LIZARD (*Lacerta agilis*) – Alice spotted one of these small lizards while hanging back at the van while we walked in La Brenne.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Marcelo has provided the following list of the wines we tasted on the tour.

Winery, Wine name, Appellation, Wine type, Vintage

- Vignoble Roux, Domaine des Haut Sentiers, Saumur, Rose, 2016
- Le Logis de la Bouchardiere, Les Clos, Chinon, Red, 2016
- Earl Vacher, Saumur D'origine, Sparkling, no vintage
- Pierre & Bertrand Couly, N/A, Chinon, Rose, 2017
- Pierre & Bertrand Couly, Les Blancs Closeaux, Chinon, White, 2017
- Pierre & Bertrand Couly, N/A, Chinon, Red, 2017
- Pierre & Bertrand Couly, St Louans Le Parc, Chinon, Red, 2013
- Pierre & Bertrand Couly, Le Haute Olive, Chinon, Red, 2014
- Pierre & Bertrand Couly, V, Chinon, Red, 2012
- Domaine des Forges, Manoir de Louis XI, Chinon, Red, 2015
- Domaine du Raifault, N/A, Chinon, White, 2017
- Vignoble Dubreuil, Perle de Rose, Cremant de Loire, Sparkling, no vintage
- Domaine du Raifault, Cuvee Les Allets, Chinon, Red, 2014
- Domaine Des Hautes Brosses, Ancestra, Anjou, 2014
- Chateau Gaudrelle, Les Ges d'Amand, Vouvray, White, 2016
- Chateau Gaudrelle, Clos le Vigneau, Vouvray, White, 2016
- Chateau Gaudrelle, Brut Mellesime, Vouvray, Sparkling, 2015
- Chateau Gaudrelle, Reserve Speciale Moelleux, Vouvray, White, 2016
- Vendanges Manuelles, Vigneau Selection, Vouvray, White, 2012
- Domaine Octavie, Veilles Vignes, Touraine, Red, 2012
- Benoit Daridan, N/A, Cheverny, Red, 2015
- Chateau de la Presle, Pineau d'Auins, Touraine, Rose, 2016
- Andre Dezat Et Fils, Domaine Thibault, Pouilly Fume, White, 2016
- Domaine de la Desoucherie, Quartet de la Desoucherie, Cheverny, Red, 2014
- Chateau du Breuil, N/A, Coteaux du Layon, Red, 2013
- Pierre & Bertrand Couly, V, Chinon, Red, 2013
- Vigneau-Chevreau, Vigneau Selection, Vouvray, Sparkling, no vintage
- Pascale Jolivet, Montagu, Pouilly-Fume, White, 2017

Totals for the tour: 106 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa