



Field Guides Tour Report

France's Loire Valley: Birds, Chateaux & Wine 2019

May 31, 2019 to Jun 10, 2019
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For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



When a Firecrest is in full flow, it's easy to see how they got their name! Photo by participant David Presotto.

France's Loire Valley brings together a number of elements that drew us to offer a tour here: a pleasant early-summer climate, a nice selection of lowland European birds (with a few real standouts), some spectacular architectural gems (with plenty of history to accompany them) and lots of tasty regional wines to sample. We concentrate on the middle section of the river's long course, dividing our time between the pine and deciduous forests around the medieval city of Chinon, and the pond-pocked region around Cour-Cheverny. And though we joked at times that we might need to rebrand ourselves as "Food Guides", we also enjoyed close encounters with the valley's feathered inhabitants -- many of them repeatedly.

Good numbers of lowland Europe's common species gave us multiple opportunities to study them, with roving bands of tits showing nicely most days, Common Chaffinches singing from virtually every chimney pot, European Blackbirds scurrying across lawns and sidewalks, Common Greenfinches wheezing from treetops and Common House-Martins nesting on buildings (or swooping low overhead) near our hotels. A rookery near our Chinon hotel brought Rooks and Eurasian Jackdaws into close focus, and the myriad ponds and rivers of the region meant herons, gulls and terns -- including plenty of breeding-plumaged Whiskered Terns -- were regular companions. A Sedge Warbler worked the edge of a reed bed with a couple of European Reed-Warblers nearby. A Purple Heron stepped slowly through a shallow marsh, peering intently. A Wood Warbler flitted closer and closer through a verdant wood. Single Black Storks drifted overhead, long legs trailing. A male Common Redstart hunted conveniently close to a male Black Redstart near the parking lot of our Cour-Cheverny hotel.

A Firecrest, showing clearly how the species got its name, flicked through branches along a vineyard's driveway with his flaming crest flared as he sang, brightening a soggy early morning. Common Swifts rocketed overhead in screaming groups. Gaudy Eurasian Hoopoes perched on wires and television aerials, or bounced across green lawns. Great Crested Grebe pairs performed their mirror courtship dance among a host of noisy Black-headed Gulls. A drake Red-crested Pochard floated side-by-side with a drake Common Pochard. A frenetic family group of Long-tailed Tits boiled through trees just over our heads. Chiffchaffs sang their onomatopoeic songs from treetops and telephone wires. A singing male Little Bustard shared a rutted track with a hunting Eurasian Thick-knee, while a Corn Bunting sang his jangly song from a nearby electricity pylon. A Red-legged Partridge huddled sleepily on a vineyard pole. A pair of Crested Tits moved furtively through some pond-side trees. And Common Nightingales sang their famous songs (which proved to be less musical than many expected) from dense bushes, defying views -- until one finally ventured out to sit on a post for some of the group.

Of course, on this tour, it's not just the birds that are the star attractants. The huge complex of Fontevraud Abbey, which once ranked among the largest and most influential of Europe's abbeys, was the site of a fascinating guided tour -- all about girl power in the Middle Ages. The complex patterns of

Villandry's kitchen and formal gardens dazzled from the chateau's parapets, despite the sprinkles, and the informal gardens appealed to many of our green thumbs. Chambord staggered the imagination with its vast size (440 rooms that could sleep 2000!), Michelangelo's intriguing double-helix staircase and a roofline that resembles a fever-dream chess set. Graceful Chenonceau rounded out the set, stretched elegantly across the Vienne with most of its original furnishings still in place.

Then, of course there were the wines -- 32 different labels during the course of the tour, plus a couple of jugs of local "mixed table wines" (Marcelo has provided the list below) and food enough for twice our number. Bertrand Couly himself led us around the family's Chinon vineyards and into the tasting room, and we toured the chilly aging caves of Chateau Gaudrelle's Vouvray production too. Altogether, it's not a bad way to spend 9 days at the beginning of summer!

Thanks so much for joining Marcelo and me for the adventures. It was fun sharing this corner of France with all of you. We hope to see in the field again soon. 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)

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) – Small numbers on various etangs and waterways, including some with fluffy gray cygnets in tow. [N]

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*) – A wary pair (the male already transitioning into his eclipse plumage) seen from one of the viewpoints along the edge of the Etang de Malzone, with another male at Etang de l'Arche on our last morning.

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) – Small numbers on several days, with especially nice views of a few pairs at the Cherine Nature Reserve in La Brenne. The white speculum of this species is distinctive.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Ubiquitous, paddling across nearly every lake, pond and waterway we passed. We saw plenty of females trailing lines of fluffy ducklings behind them. [N]

RED-CRESTED POCHARD (*Netta rufina*) – A few on Etang Cistudes (Turtle Lake) at the Cherine Nature Reserve, including a male floating right beside a male Common Pochard for convenient comparison. This is a southern species that ranges up as far as La Brenne.

COMMON POCHARD (*Aythya ferina*) – A common duck on the etangs of the Sologne and Brenne regions, where we saw many floating or diving for food.

TUFTED DUCK (*Aythya fuligula*) – Another regular species on the second half of the trip. The "ponytail" of the male was particularly easy to see on some of those windy days!

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

COMMON QUAIL (*Coturnix coturnix*) – We heard one calling from a field along a back road near Chinon on one drizzly morning. [*]

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE (*Alectoris rufa*) – A last-morning spot by Marcelo of a bird perched up on a pole in a vineyard near the Etang de l'Arche was a highlight for Doris, for whom this was a much-desired species. Lannois and Sharon also ranked it among their favorites. We found another, even closer, bird snoozing on another pole just after turning around to head back to the hotel. [*]

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) – From our first bedraggled bird huddled in a front yard near Teca's house to our last, scratching along the edge of a dirt road with a couple of partridges and then scuttling off through some grape vines, we saw these game birds regularly across our tour route. As in the US, they were introduced for hunting. [I]

GRAY PARTRIDGE (*Perdix perdix*) – Two "gritting" along the side of a dirt track near the Etang de l'Arche were a bit of a surprise; this species can be tough to find. They scurried off into the vineyard, but slowed down and allowed good looks once they were between the rows of vines. This is a resident species across much of France.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – A handful on scattered etangs on the second (eastern) half of the trip, including a courting pair floating close to the blind at the Etang de Malzone. As its name suggests, this is Europe's smallest grebe.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*) – Abundant on the second half of the tour, including a pair demonstrating their stunning courtship dance on the Etang Cistudes -- to the gunfire accompaniment of the camera shutters from the photography group at the other end of the blind! At the Etang de Malzone, we watched one doing its best to swallow a fish that appeared to be quite a bit bigger than its throat!

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – Our first were a rather distant pair on Etang Cistudes, but we had closer views of others at Etang de Malzone and Etang de l'Arche. This species is known as the "Black-necked Grebe" in the Old World.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Somehow, we managed to miss this abundant city dweller one day! We obviously weren't concentrating hard enough... [I]

STOCK DOVE (*Columba oenas*) – At least two trundled around near the boat ramp in Chinon, seen on our first morning's ramble near our hotel. This species is quite similar in appearance to the previous one, but has far less black markings on wing and lacks the white rump of the pigeon. It also has a dark (rather than red) eye and a more distinct iridescent green patch on the neck -- as we saw well in the scopes.

COMMON WOOD-PIGEON (*Columba palumbus*) – Abundant throughout, often in flight display (with a noisy wing clap and a showy "dive") as a rival passed by. This large species is similar in size and structure to North America's Band-tailed Pigeon.

EUROPEAN TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia turtur*) – This declining species is still gratifyingly common in the Loire Valley, with birds heard purring from the woods on several days and seen nicely in multiple locations -- including one dwarfed by the previous species when perched below it near Etang de l'Arche on our last morning. Unfortunately, despite being rated as "Vulnerable" by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, it is being decimated during its migration when it passes over Malta, which is defying EU regulations by continuing their "traditional" spring hunt.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Unlike the previous species, this one is common and widespread across our tour route, with dozens seen cooing from television aerials and roadside wires throughout. Amazingly, this species only arrived in Europe during the last century, invading from the east.

Otididae (Bustards)

LITTLE BUSTARD (*Tetrax tetrax*) – A few males seen along a track near Meron, with another (or possibly one of the males from the road) calling from a weedy field nearby -- throwing his head back with each little farting call. This species is in decline all across Europe, being squeezed into smaller and smaller areas of suitable habitat.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

COMMON CUCKOO (*Cuculus canorus*) – Very common across our tour route, but typically heard rather than seen. Our best views came of a flying bird along the Beauregard trail in La Brenne, when it passed quite near us. We saw another flying past several times in the Forêt Domaniale de Chinon. They're amazingly falcon-like in flight!

Apodidae (Swifts)

COMMON SWIFT (*Apus apus*) – Daily, with especially nice views of the screaming mobs raking the skies over Chinon. This is a long-distance migrant, extending as far as eastern China and Siberia during the breeding season and retreating to sub-Saharan Africa for the winter.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*) – Small numbers on many days of the tour, typically chugging along the shallow edges of various rivers and etangs. One nibbling the grasses near the bottom of the boat ramp in Chinon gave us good views on our first pre-breakfast walk. This species was recently split from the Common Gallinule of the Americas.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*) – Very common on the etangs of the Sologne and Brenne, including scores floating on Etang de l'Arche, with a few feeding adorably ugly chicks on Etang Ricot.

Burhinidae (Thick-knees)

EURASIAN THICK-KNEE (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) – One foraged along the dirt track in the Meron grasslands (often in the same scope view as our first Little Bustard) and the same -- or another -- bird flew off across the fields in a flurry of black-and-white wings later in the morning.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

NORTHERN LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*) – An overshoot on our drive to the "Goldcrest spot" brought us nice roadside views of our first birds (for those who'd missed the pair flying over the highway on our journey from Paris, anyway) and we had others in the fields around Etang de l'Arche on our last morning. This handsome species is resident across much of France.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius dubius*) – A couple trotted along the gravelly edge of the Cher River near Villandry, occasionally stopping for vigorous bouts of preening. Through the scopes, we could clearly see the bold yellow eye rings that help to identify them.

Scolopaciidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – A late migrant poked along the edge of the Vienne River, seen from our perch on the bridge near Candes St. Martin on the first full day of the tour.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Regular across much of the tour, with especially nice studies of the nesting birds at Etang Cistudes in La Brenne. This is the common smaller gull in the Loire Valley.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL (*Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*) – Unfortunately, heavy rains put the kibosh on our visit to the nesting areas along the Loire that might have held some of these uncommon breeders, so the only one we saw was an adult flying over the bridge near Blois as we headed to Cour-Cheverny on our transfer day. And unfortunately, not everybody happened to be looking in the right direction!

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL (*Larus michahellis*) – Very common throughout much of the tour along the rivers and foraging in newly-plowed farm fields. It was long thought to be a subspecies of the Herring Gull, but DNA studies have convinced taxonomists to recognize it as a distinct species -- more closely related to the Great Black-backed Gull than the Herring Gull!

LITTLE TERN (*Sternula albifrons*) – A few folks saw (and Dave P photographed!) a pair along the Cher River near our picnic lunch spot on the day we visited Villandry, and some in Marcelo's bus spotted another from the big bridge near Blois on the day we returned to Paris. Like its close relative the Least Tern, this species nests on large rivers and lakes as well as along the coast.

WHISKERED TERN (*Chlidonias hybrida*) – Common over lakes and ponds on the second half of the trip, including dozens nesting on some protected islands in Etang Cistudes. For those who'd never seen the bird in its breeding plumage, the dark gray bellies were a revelation!

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – Regular on the first half of the trip, along the larger rivers -- including a few courting up and down the Vienne on our first pre-breakfast walk and others resting on the gravel bars near our picnic spot along the Cher.

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (*Ciconia nigra*) – Single birds seen soaring over a couple of places in La Brenne, with their long, outstretched necks and legs helping to identify them -- even at a distance. The second bird was close enough that we could see its white belly. This species is vulnerable to disturbance while nesting, and is thus declining all over Europe.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Caryl and Susan tag-team spotted our first, a single bird at the Etang de Beaumont. It was followed by dozens at the Etang de Malzone the following day, where we had good scope views of several birds in full breeding plumage.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*) – Daily, either in ponderous flight or standing stock-still along a river or lake edge.

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea*) – One stalking prey along the edge of a reed bed visible from the visitor's center at the Cherine Nature Reserve allowed nice scope studies.

GREAT EGRET (EURASIAN) (*Ardea alba alba*) – A small number scattered around various wet spots in La Brenne. This species is a fairly recent arrival from further east, slowly expanding its range across Europe.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*) – Seen at several locations throughout the trip, including a few standing around the stanchions of a bridge in Chinon and others fishing the river near Candes St. Martin. The birds in the Cher near our Villandry picnic spot gave us particularly good scope views, and

we saw others in La Brenne.

CATTLE EGRET (WESTERN) (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*) – Reasonably common throughout, including a loose group hunting in a grassy roadside field on our last morning (up to their eyeballs in grass!) and a picturesque flock flapping past in a tight bunch against the black clouds over the Meron grasslands.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (EURASIAN) (*Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax*) – Best seen at the Cherine Nature Reserve, where a few were scattered among abundant Cattle Egrets on one of the nesting islands. We had others at the Etang de Beaumont and the Etang de Malzone.

Pandionidae (Osprey).

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – A rather distant bird flapped past over La Brenne, and a closer one flew along the edge of the Etang de l'Arche, circling around for a second look.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites).

SHORT-TOED SNAKE-EAGLE (*Circaetus gallicus*) – Marcelo spotted one soaring over the boardwalk trail at the Cherine Nature Reserve, being relentlessly pursued by a very agitated gull. This big raptor is primarily a reptile eater, specializing (as its name suggests) in snakes.

EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*) – A female quartered low over an etang along the Beauregard trail in La Brenne, her golden head glowing against her browner plumage.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*) – One spiraled in the skies above a wheat field at the edge of the Foret Domaniale de Chinon, occasionally breaking into the flap-flap-glide that's more typical for an Accipiter.

BLACK KITE (*Milvus migrans*) – Best seen in La Brenne, where we spotted several pairs hanging in the air over various etangs. Some of the group saw another along the highway on our drive back to Paris the last afternoon of the tour.

COMMON BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*) – Easily the most common raptor of the tour, seen every day but one -- that very rainy day we transferred between Chinon and Cour-Cheverny, and they were probably all hiding on a perch somewhere, trying to stay dry!

Upupidae (Hoopoes).

EURASIAN HOOPOE (*Upupa epops*) – We saw our first in the Meron grasslands, and another flew past us and landed briefly on a utility wire near the start of the track at Le Gateau. But our best views came on our rainy drive to the Etang de l'Arche on our last morning, when a trio interacting in a front garden along the way bounced across the grassy lawn or perched on the television aerial.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers).

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*) – Several brief encounters with these little gems: one flashed across the Vienne River on our first morning, disappearing into the trees hanging over the far bank, another one (or two) flew past the blind at Etang Cistudes several times (with tiny fish clamped firmly in bill), and we saw a final one in flight at the Etang de Malzone.

Picidae (Woodpeckers).

MIDDLE SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dendrocoptes medius*) – One flew in over our heads along a weedy track in the Foret Domaniale de Chinon, calling loudly but always staying JUST out of sight behind leaves and branches. A little later, it made a return trip and landed on a trunk not far away -- to the delight of those who managed to find the right trunk before it flew away again.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dendrocoptes major*) – Easily the most common woodpecker of the tour, seen on all but two days. We had especially nice looks at several (including an adult feeding a fledgling) along a back road near Montour one morning. [N]

EURASIAN GREEN WOODPECKER (*Picus viridis*) – One clinging to the top of a pole in a vineyard along our route to our first birding spot west of Chinon was a nice find; this species is far more regularly heard than seen. We spotted another in flight near Montour on the morning we transferred to Cour-Cheverny, its yellowish rump clearly visible as it went.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Very common, seen on all but one day, typically hovering over roadside fields or resting on roadside wires. We got a few in the scopes for closer views. This is a bigger bird than the American Kestrel -- it's even larger than a Merlin!

EURASIAN HOBBY (*Falco subbuteo*) – Two hunting over the start of the Beauregard trail were our last new birds in La Brenne. Their dark, long-winged shape makes them easy to distinguish from the ubiquitous kestrels.

Oriolidae (Old World Orioles).

EURASIAN GOLDEN ORIOLE (*Oriolus oriolus*) – Arg! We heard the clear, liquid whistles of this handsome species on about half the days of the tour, but never really got THE look at one. We did see plenty of shapes moving through treetops, and others in flight. And a lucky few got a look in the scope at one or more in a treetop along a grassy trail near Montour -- though the darn things didn't wait for everyone to get a look before they flew away.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).

EURASIAN JAY (*Garrulus glandarius*) – Regular in small numbers throughout, though it took a few days before we finally laid eyes on one (instead of just hearing them call). One sitting on a post near the picnic grove at Villandry was particularly obliging, and we saw others flashing across various roads or bouncing along the roadsides.

EURASIAN MAGPIE (*Pica pica*) – Common throughout, including some right in the middle of town.

EURASIAN JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*) – Another common species, with especially nice looks at several pairs sitting together on television aerials in Chinon. The pale eye of this small species is distinctive.

ROOK (*Corvus frugilegus*) – Abundant, with big flocks striding around newly-plowed fields throughout -- and a noisy rookery right across the street from our Chinon hotel. The pale base of the bill of this big-billed species was clearly obvious, even when we were hurtling past them on the highways. [N]

CARRION CROW (*Corvus corone*) – Another abundant species, though in smaller numbers than the previous two. This one looks pretty much like the American Crow, with a recognizably "crow-like" call.

Alaudidae (Larks).

EURASIAN SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*) – Quite common in the Meron grasslands, where we saw some in their hovering display flights and others perched atop taller weeds. We heard others singing in La Brenne, and saw one perched on a vineyard post near the Etang de l'Arche. Their flashy white outer tail feathers are eye-catching in flight.

Hirundinidae (Swallows).

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – Good numbers swirled over the Cher River near our picnic spot at Villandry. This species is known as "Sand Martin" in Europe.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Common throughout, typically zooming low over fields and lakes. The subspecies found in Europe -- *rustica* -- looks a bit odd to our eyes, as it lacks the rusty belly of Barn Swallows in the Americas.

COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (*Delichon urbicum*) – Another very common species -- which is nice to see, as it's declining over much of its range. Particularly fun were the ones peering from their mud nests plastered to the eaves of some houses in Chinon. [N]

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice).

CRESTED TIT (*Lophophanes cristatus*) – A couple of birds flicked through pines along the edge of a little pond in the Forêt Domaniale de Chinon, eventually showing quite nicely -- and reminding some of us of Bridled Titmice. This is Europe's only crested tit; its other tits all have smoothly rounded heads.

MARSH TIT (*Poecile palustris*) – Two flitted along the edge of the Beauregard track in La Brenne, and another little family group rummaged in the trees edging the Etang de Malzone. This species shows only a tiny "bib"; it's actually more of a goatee!

EURASIAN BLUE TIT (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) – Common, particularly on the first half of the trip, including a busy group along the edge of the lake at the picnic area in Savigny-en-Veron our first morning and another family along a back road in Chinon.

GREAT TIT (*Parus major*) – Another very common species, seen (and heard!) on most days. Its loudly musical "teacher teacher" call was a regular part of the tour soundtrack. We saw a number of yellow-faced youngsters trailing along behind their white-faced parents.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits).

LONG-TAILED TIT (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – A busy mob swirled through the trees edging the Etang de Malzone, in company with a mixed flock of Great and Eurasian Blue tits -- great spotting, Judy!

Sittidae (Nuthatches).

EURASIAN NUTHATCH (*Sitta europaea*) – Our first was a rather furtive bird twitching through the treetops in the Forêt Domaniale de Chinon; eventually, it popped out into the open on some dead branches near where we'd parked. We saw others near the Etang Ricot in La Brenne, and around the Etang de Malzone, plus a rather showy one behind the wall at the Chateau Cheverny on our last morning's pre-breakfast walk.

Certhiidae (Trecreepers).

SHORT-TOED TRECREEPER (*Certhia brachydactyla*) – Scattered individuals, including a couple hitching their way up big trunks in the picnic grounds near Savigny-en-Gault our first morning, and a others at the Etang de Malzone. They look enough like Brown Creepers that most of us probably wouldn't notice if they showed up in our backyards in North America!

Troglodytidae (Wrens).

EURASIAN WREN (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – Very common and widespread, though far more regularly heard than seen. One singing from eye-level branches in a pine along a back road in Chinon was particularly obliging.

Regulidae (Kinglets).

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*) – One crept down and down and down through a giant spruce along a back road east of Cour-Cheverny, first sticking to the dark interior of the tree, but eventually working its way to the edges.

COMMON FIRECREST (*Regulus ignicapilla*) – A fired-up bird along the road into the Chateau de Coullaine flashed his red crown as he flicked through the trees. We saw others in the Forêt Domaniale de Chinon, near our parking spot at the Etang Ricot and in Cour-Cheverny, where one apparently held a territory on BOTH sides of the main road!

Scotocercidae (Bush Warblers and Allies).

CETTI'S WARBLER (*Cettia cetti*) – We heard one sing several times from the scruffy vegetation along the edge of the Vienne River, under the bridge near Candes St. Martin and finally laid eyes on one -- all too briefly -- along the Beauregard trail in La Brenne. It shot back and forth across the trail several times, but never really sat out in the open. Some folks got lucky when it landed, but many saw it only in flight.

Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers).

WOOD WARBLER (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*) – This one, on the other hand, was wonderfully cooperative, singing from various perches low in the forest along the track at Marcilly-en-Gault.

WESTERN BONELLI'S WARBLER (*Phylloscopus bonelli*) – Another warbler seen well, this time among the pines of Forêt Domaniale de Chinon. We watched one make repeated trips to a two-rutted track near where we parked, gathering big mouthfuls of dead vegetation for its nest. [N]

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*) – Well-named. It's "chiff chaff" call was one everybody knew well by the end of the tour, and it certainly was common -- recorded every day but our first afternoon. We had great looks at many, including one singing from the top of a dead tree in a front yard in Cour-Cheverny.

Acrocephalidae (Reed Warblers and Allies).

MELODIOUS WARBLER (*Hippolais polyglotta*) – Another regular species, with nice views of one along the river near our hotel on our first pre-breakfast walk and another sharing bushes with a European Stonechat in the Forêt Domaniale de Chinon.

SEDGE WARBLER (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) – Superb views of at least one (and maybe two) from the blind at the Etang de Ricot. It spent considerable time sitting right up at the top of tall reed stems, giving us the chance to study it in the scopes. We saw another at the Etang de Beaumont the following morning.

EURASIAN REED WARBLER (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) – Another obliging species, with a couple of pairs showing well along the edges of the reed bed at the Etang de Ricot. This species is considerably plainer than the previous, with a more horizontal posture and a longer bill. Their songs, however, can be strikingly similar, consisting of lots of mimicry.

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies).

ZITTING CISTICOLA (*Cisticola juncidis*) – Several males bounded around over their grassy territories along the Beauregard trail in La Brenne, giving their distinctive little "zit" calls every time they hit the apex of a bound -- miles and miles from where the books say they should be!

Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers).

EURASIAN BLACKCAP (*Sylvia atricapilla*) – Abundant throughout, with far more males than females seen. Their lovely, warbling songs were among the most commonly heard of the tour.

GARDEN WARBLER (*Sylvia borin*) – One flitting through a hedge and some nearby trees on a track near Montour showed well for some and hardly at all for others. We had another equally furtive bird in La Brenne the next day. This is probably the plainest of Europe's famously plain warblers, best identified by its almost complete lack of field marks.

GREATER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia communis*) – Our first, flitting through a field along a back road near Montour, proved surprisingly elusive as it moved from song perch to song perch. With some persistence (and lots of scuttling back and forth along the road), we finally found a spot or two where everybody could get a look. We had another singing from the top of a dead shrub across the dried-up lake bed from where we stood in Chinon on our last pre-breakfast walk there, and heard others on several other days.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa striata*) – A couple near where we parked at the Savigny-en-Veron picnic area on our first morning gave us the chance to study them in the scopes, as did another near the Etang de Malzone. The spots on this species are rather overemphasized by its name; in reality, they're more like smudgy streaks!

EUROPEAN ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*) – Small numbers on most days, typically hunting from low perches along lakesides or tracks. Seeing this cute little bird in person makes one realize just how homesick the colonists must have been to have named our big American Robin after it!

COMMON NIGHTINGALE (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) – Regular throughout, but almost always heard rather than seen. Some of the gang did get great (though brief) looks at a singing bird perched on a fence post in a field near Montour one morning, and we had another flit back and forth across the Beauregard track several times in La Brenne. This is the famous nightingale of poem and song.

COMMON REDSTART (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) – A male on the lawn of our hotel in Cour-Cheverny one morning was a surprise -- and allowed nice comparisons with the nearby Black Redstarts.

BLACK REDSTART (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) – Common and widespread, seen on every day but the first. We heard plenty too, singing their "radio static" songs from television aerials and chimney pots throughout.

EUROPEAN STONECHAT (*Saxicola rubicola rubicola*) – Regular, though not particularly common, including some sprinkled on roadside wires. Our best looks came near the little village of Le Gateau, where we found a male perched up and hunting from some shrubs at the back edge of a farm field, and at the Etang de Beaumont, where Susan spotted us a female hopping around on the ground among the reeds.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

MISTLE THRUSH (*Turdus viscivorus*) – Unfortunately, we never got a great look at this big thrush, with our only sightings being of birds flushing off the roads in the Forêt Domaniale de Chinon. This species is larger and grayer than the next, with a white underwing and a slightly paler rump.

SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelos*) – Our best looks came at the Cherine Nature Reserve, where we found one perched up and preening along the trail out to the Etang Cistudes. We had others on our last morning's walk west of Chinon, though they didn't prove very obliging!

EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*) – Abundant throughout, with dozens and dozens -- mostly males -- seen. Despite its name, this is actually a thrush, and its song is quite like that of the American Robin.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Also common and widespread here in the place where they belong. Surprisingly though, the species is in steep decline across much of Europe, for reasons that have not yet been determined.

Prunellidae (Accentors)

DUNNOCK (*Prunella modularis*) – Great, leisurely views of one sitting perched up on the top of a brush pile one morning near Montour. Though their plumage is strongly reminiscent of a New World sparrow, these are actually accentors -- a family of insectivorous birds that does not occur in the New World.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*) – Far less common than the next species, and far more tied to water than the White Wagtail. Our best looks came on our final morning's outing, when we found a newly-fledged youngster still being fed by an attentive adult along the edge of the Etang de l'Arche.

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*) – Regular throughout, including some waggling their way around the grounds of the various chateaux that we visited -- and one having a vigorous preen along the edge of the Cher River near Villandry, where they were probably nesting among the gravel.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

COMMON CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*) – Another every day species, with DOZENS seen on some days. Their flashy white wing and tail patches made them easy to identify, even in flight. And by the end of the tour, everybody certainly knew their songs -- we heard them EVERYWHERE.

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH (*Chloris chloris*) – Regular throughout, though in far smaller numbers than the previous species. We had some lovely looks at a singing male in one of the big trees over the Savigny-en-Gault picnic area our first morning, and another singing from the top of a tall pine in the middle of Chinon on our last pre-breakfast walk there.

EURASIAN LINNET (*Linaria cannabina*) – A few bounded over while we birded in the Meron grasslands, and some perched birds on bushes near the far end of the track there gave many a good chance for study. We saw others around Chinon on our last pre-breakfast walk.

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis*) – Common and widespread, including one singing from a birch tree near Montour and others in the fields around the Etang de Beaumont.

EUROPEAN SERIN (*Serinus serinus*) – Another common species, and their tinkly "grating glass" song was a regular part of the tour soundtrack. We had particularly nice views of a male in a tree right outside the Fontevraud Abbey at the end of our tour.

Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)

CORN BUNTING (*Emberiza calandra*) – A handful of this declining species in the Meron grasslands, including one singing from one of the high-tension wire towers near the start of the track we followed. They look a bit like female House Finches on steroids, and some of the gang could even see the extra "prongs" they have on the side of their beaks to help hold larger seeds.

CIRL BUNTING (*Emberiza cirulus*) – An adult fed a just-fledged youngster along the edge of the picnic grove at Savigny-en-Gault our first morning, and another sang from the top of a nearby evergreen at the start of our soggy visit to the Etang de Beaumont.

YELLOWHAMMER (*Emberiza citrinella*) – Unfortunately, though we heard the distinctive "Just a little bit of butter and CHEEEEESE" song of this species on several days, we never caught up with one to actually see it. [*]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Ubiquitous, including numbers around both hotels. Nice to see, considering how rapidly (and precipitously) they're declining across much of Europe.

MAMMALS

EUROPEAN HEDGEHOG (*Erinaceus europaeus*) – Lannois turned a corner in the Villandry gardens and came nose to toes with one of these endearing little critters along the gravel walkway. She managed a quick picture (which inspired much jealousy in the rest of us!) before it scurried away. This is a primarily nocturnal species, so unlikely to be seen on the tour.

OLD WORLD RABBIT (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) – One along the road en route to the Etang de Beaumont, with another rocketing off into the vineyard near the Etang de l'Arche. This species is much smaller than the next, with shorter ears and an all-white tail.

EUROPEAN BROWN HARE (*Lepus europaeus*) – A few in the Meron grasslands (including one the streaked off across the fields, its ears held low) with others hiding in a crop field near the Etang de l'Arche. When they put their ears down and huddle down, they look amazingly like big clumps of mud!

NUTRIA (*Myocastor coypus*) – Abundant in lakes and rivers across the region. This is a South American species, introduced to France (and much of the rest of Europe) by the fur trade. When the fur market collapsed, the animals were released -- greatly to the detriment of the local environments!

[1]

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*) – A warily inquisitive young kit along a back road in the Foret Domaniale de Chinon was cute, particularly when he levitated over the grasses and bounded away. We saw a more distant adult on the dry bed of the Etang de la Gabriere, shortly after finishing our lunch in the nearby auberge.

ROE DEER (*Capreolus capreolus*) – Seen in small numbers on most days, typically feeding along the edges of farm fields near wooded tracts but occasionally leaping off the road.

Herps

EUROPEAN POND TURTLE (*Emys orbicularis*) – One sunbathed on a log on one of the little islets directly in front of the blind at the (appropriately named) Etang Cistudes in the Cherine Nature Reserve.

EDIBLE FROG (*Pelophylax kl. esculentus*) – Common throughout, with far more heard than seen. We had especially nice scope views of some calling males in the pond at the Savigny-en-Gault picnic area on our first morning. Their little air sacs can expand to some impressive dimensions! The longer, rather pointed snout of this species helps to identify it. As its name suggests, this is the one that gets turned into France's famous frog legs entree.

COMMON WALL LIZARD (*Podarcis muralis*) – The lizard basking on the edge of the boardwalk at the Cherine Nature Reserve showed the big throat spots and blue flank spots of this species, which is widespread across France.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Marcelo has provided this list of the wines we enjoyed during the tour. Each entry is listed in the following order:

Producer, Name of the wine. Vintage, appellation. Type of wine

Domaine du colombier, Clos du Centenaire. 2018, Chinon Blanc. White

Clothilde Pain, Ma Petite Robe Rouge. 2017, Chinon. Red

Valentin Deze, Pause Rose. 2018, Saumur. Rose

Domaine Fabrice Gasnier, La Queue de Poelon. 2015, Chinon. Red

Earl Vacher, Methode Traditionnelle. (No vintage) Saumur. Sparkling

Pierre & Bertrand Couly, St Louans Le Parc. 2015, Chinon. Red

Pierre & Bertrand Couly, Rose de Saignee. 2018, Chinon. Rose

Pierre & Bertrand Couly, Le Blancs Closeaux. 2018, Chinon Blanc. White

Pierre & Bertrand Couly, Chinon. 2017, Chinon. Red

Pierre & Bertrand Couly, V. 2015, Chinon. Red

Pierre & Bertrand Couly, La Haute Olive. 2016, Chinon. Red

Chateau de Ligre, Chateau de Ligre. 2014, Chinon Blanc. White

Baudry-Dutour, Chateau de Saint Louans, 2014, Chinon. Red

Baudry-Dutour, Marie Justine. 2018, Chinon. Rose

E.A.R.L Delalande, Domaine De La Poterne. 2010, Chinon. Rose

Chateau Gaudrelle, Reserve Speciale. 2017, Vouvray. Desert wine

Chateau Gaudrelle, Clos le Vigneau. 2017, Vouvray. White

Chateau Gaudrelle, Les Gues d'Amand. 2017, Vouvray. White
Chateau Gaudrelle, Brut Millesime. 2016, Vouvray. Sparkling
Vendange Manuelles, Vigneau Selection. 2012, Vouvray. White
Domaine de la Desoucherie, Quartet de la Desoucherie. 2015, Cheverny. Red
Daridan Pere et Fils, Benoit Daridan. 2016, Cheverny. Red
Domaine de Huards, Envol. 2015, Cheverny. Red
Vignobles Berthier, Domaine de Clairneaux. 2014, Sancerre. White
Claude Lafond, Les Gandes Vignes. 2018, Reuilly. Red
Chateau de la Presle, Jean-Marie Penet Brut. (No vintage), Cremant de Loire. Sparkling
Andre Dezat et Fils, Domaine Thibault. 2017, Pouilly-Fume. White
Francois Cazin, Le Petit Chambord. 2018, Cheverny. Rose
Domaine Huards, Francois Ier Vieilles Vignes. 2015, Cour-Cheverny. White
Chateau de Beauregard, Cuvee les Fontenelles. 2009, Saumur. Red
La Cave des Vins de Sancerre, Les Chataigniers. 2017, Sancerre. White
Joseph Mellot, Le Moulingenet. 2016, St. Nicolas de Bourgueil. Red

Totals for the tour: 108 bird taxa and 6 mammal taxa