**La Brenne, Friday 30th May to Saturday 7th June**.

**Diary of the week**

Friday 30th May.

We all met at the Bridge Tavern in Portsmouth for supper and boarded the LD lines ferry at 11pm.

Saturday 31st May

Departed Le Havre at 8.30am after breakfast on the boat. Travelled to Sées where we stopped for coffee and a quick look round the cathedral and then the market to find something tasty for lunch. We stopped later at a service picnic site on the motorway and had lunch serenaded by Nightingales. We arrived in Mézières at about 4pm and since our hotel was closed we enjoyed the first of many beers at the Bar Bêlem, while actually sitting in warm sunshine in the square. Before supper, having found our rooms and begun to unpack, we went to the Maison de la Nature at Chérine and met Tony Williams who took us to the Cistude hide and showed us the nesting Black necked Grebes and Black-headed Gulls..

Sunday 1st June

At 7am we went to the Ricôt Hide.

After breakfast we went to St Sulpice and had a productive walk down a wooded track (Woodland Brown, White Admiral, Sooty Copper, Wood White) followed by a picnic in the clearing near the little chapel and spring.

We found there was no bank machine in Vendoeuvres and went back to Chérine to look at the visitor centre and then visited the hide at Essarts. Remember the Wryneck, Red Backed Shrike and Corn Bunting!

In the evening, Nigel put the moth trap out at the Maison de la Nature.

Monday 2nd June

7am at Etang de Sous for early birdwatching. Whiskered Tern nesting on water lilies in protected wire cage. Little Bittern, Great Reed Warbler etc.

After breakfast we went through the moth trap which took several hours as there were so many, but we did have time to see Southern White Admirals down the track beside the car park. We had lunch at Purais and enjoyed birdwatching from this beautiful new hide. Lots of water lilies and nesting Whiskered Terns and very peaceful without Black-headed Gulls.

We then drove to La Boudinière to visit the limestone valley full of wonderful flowers and: Pearly Heath, Adonis Blue, Woodland Brown, Black Hairstreak, Clouded Yellow. Needing refreshment after all that excitement we had ice cream and beer sitting in a café beside the River Creuse at Le Blanc, and found that elusive bank machine.

Tuesday 3rd June

6.30am at Etang des Vigneaux, Black Winged Stilts, Coypu, and Golden Orioles calling.

We visited the hide at Foucault after breakfast where there were nesting Black-winged Stilts and White Wagtails nesting in the tree near the hide. We followed Tony’s directions to a new site for Bee-Eaters beside the River Creuse and although a field away, we had lovely views and clearly heard their calls.

Our picnic by the river at Ciron was memorable for the stunning Water Crowfoot filling the water with white stars and the enormous fish some people saw from the bridge. And of course the backdrop of a beautiful privately owned chateau.

Sadly by the time we got to Rosnay Common it was overcast and then started to rain. Not the best way to see the most stunning display of Lesser Butterfly Orchids and Tongue Orchids. We dried off at the Maison du Parc with a cup of tea and a bit of souvenir shopping.

After supper Tony took us to listen to the Nightjars, and with a bit of extra help and plentiful hanky waving we got fleeting views (amidst the giggles).

Wednesday 4th June

6.30am Bellebouche Hide to see nesting Herons, including Purple, Grey and Night. Also Great White and Little Egrets. After breakfast it was still damp so we set off to find the Brenne Orchid which is conveniently situated on a verge NE of Mézières and then went to look at Paulnay Church and patronize the bar opposite which served good coffee. The covered picnic site at Paulnay was perfect for lunch. We found Monkey and Spider Orchids among several other species in really good numbers at Obterre off the D63 and then headed back to Etang de Sous for a spot of comfortable birdwatching before returning to the hotel.

Thursday 5th June

6.30am a walk at Cherine.

Market day in Mezieres.

Then off to Angles-sur-l’Anglin where we had a picnic overlooking the gorge, before descending via the ancient and worn steps to the river and from there through the pretty village to the castle and ultimately the bar…. Not forgetting the stunning views of 2 male Montagu’s Harriers over a hay field on the outward journey.More excitement on the way back where the verge beside the lane was full of orchids, noteably Violet Bird’s-Nest and Red Helleborine. Also Green Hairstreak and Woodland Brown butterflies.

Friday 6th June

6.30am Le Blizon where there were Golden Orioles and close views of Night Heron.

We went back to the hide at Vigneaux and went on to Bellebouche for lunch where we chose a shady spot because it was so hot. Some people walked to the Heron Hide while others looked for Red Squirrels etc etc!

We met for a final drink in the Square before having aperitifs at Bernard’s and our last meal there. It was a warm evening and we looked for Barn Owls later and had a lovely wander through the village and beside the leat accompanied by bats but at that hour, no owls.

Saturday 7th June

7.15am breakfast. We had already packed before breakfast and rather sadly left about 8.am. We stopped twice before our final picnic lunch which we had at St Philbert sur Rilse, a pretty village not far off the motorway with an Abbey, potentially interesting gardens in the making and an artificial waterwheel. Also now renowned as the place where Nigel left his tripod..

We reached Le Havre and had only a short wait before we boarded the ferry. We all met for supper on the boat, which got to Portsmouth on time.

What an amazing action packed week with good weather and great company. Thank you all for such a memorable trip.

Kathy Henderson