



Maison du Parc

«L'espace naturel sensible des Ponts d'Ouve» is a spot designed by the Parc naturel régional. A one-kilometre-long nature trail, equipped with entertaining and instructive information kiosks, winding through a landscape of wetlands, will lead you to the edge of a body of water where observatories have been installed for the discovery of marsh birds in their natural environment.



Bluethroat

April is a reliable month to observe most of waders as Ruff on the site, and offers many chances to meet the Bluethroat, the Savi's Warbler and the Garganey. The management of the site favours the reproduction of numerous waterbirds such as the Great Crested Grebe, the Mallard and sometimes the Shoveler and the Garganey.

In August, the Spotted Crake which is the star species of the site, can be seen at the edge of the body of water. It's also a good period to see the Bluethroat and waders. Then from September and for the whole wintry period, the site is wonderful for the numerous migrants which settle there.

Access : Caen-Cherbourg - N 13 road (near Carentan). Exit Saint-Côme-du-Mont - Sainte-Marie-du-Mont - Utah Beach.

Maison du Parc et Espace de découverte des Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin
3 village Ponts d'Ouve - 50500 Saint-Côme-du-Mont

Free admission at the tourist centre : documentation and advice for visiting the area of the Parc naturel régional : hiking in all its forms, discovery paths, nature excursions, the fauna and flora, the museums and cultural sights, the tourist circuits, the crafts and local products, accommodation and restoration. Are also available for visitors : a shop, a picnic area and car park. Access for persons with reduced mobility all the way to the main observatory.

Paying access to the birdwatching area.

- 8 - Havre de Saint-Germain-sur-Ay

It's a rare landscape of salt meadows flooded by the sea at high tide.

Salt marshes are littoral habitats with a very specific flora and fauna. The haven of Ay is one of the biggest and wildest in the west coast of Cotentin. The entrance of the sea which fills it during the equinox tides is an unforgettable show. The Harbor Seal, who frequents the sandy coasts, is occasionally present along the west coast. The Grey Seal, typical of the rocky coasts is rarer.



Brent Geese

When havens are flooded during high tide and in low tide in certain waterways, aquatic birds, mostly fish-eating, can be observed. The most frequent species are the Great Crested Grebe, the Little Grebe, the Great cormorant, the Grey Heron, the Little Egret, the Red-breasted Merganser, the Little Gull and terns. The low tide enables waders (Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Curlew, and Bar-tailed Godwit), Gulls and Common Shelduck to feed on tidal reservoirs.

The Brent Goose, the Ringed Plover, the Ruddy Turnstone and the Eurasian Oystercatcher are species which regularly winter here.

Access : The "Havre de Saint-Germain-sur-Ay" lies on the western coast of the Cotentin peninsula. Drive via Lessay along the D211 and then turn left onto the D652. After 1.5 km, turn left on the D378/D650. After 600 metres turn right on the Route du Haut Dy. After 600 metres turn left and keep going on the minor road which leads to a car park.

To see also : The other havens that lie on the western coast of the Cotentin peninsula, especially the "Havre de Regnéville" which is a good spot for the discovery of the subspecies Light-bellied Brent Goose with almost white underparts which comes from the very north of America and Greenland to winter here. At the extreme western end of Normandy, the famous "Baie du Mont-St.-Michel" is of interest throughout the year.

-7- Lande du Camp

The "Lande du Camp" extends over a surface of 113 ha and is the property of the Conservatoire du Littoral. It is one of the last open heathlands from a vast set called the "Landes de Lessay". Like quite many oceanic heathlands, it is dominated by shrubs such as heathers and gorses which develop on a poor and acid ground.

This is a very attractive place for butterflies such as Large Chequered Skippers which are common, the abundant Silver-studded Blues or the globally threatened Alcon Blue, which is the subject of special conservation management in the area.



European Nightjar

Here you can expect to see birds such as the Crested Tit amongst conifers, the Dartford Warbler, the Linnet, the Stonechat, the Yellowhammer, the Meadow Pipit, the Buzzard and if you are lucky, the Honey Buzzard overhead.

The Nightjar, present on the site, is a rarely observed bird which sings to the twilight and eats moths. It is very difficult to track down in the daytime, because of the camouflage of its plumage in tints of dead leaves or bark.

Access : From Lessay take the D2 towards Coutances and after 1 km turn left on Rue du Hotot. Then keep going until you see the signs "La Lande du Camp" on your left. A footpath allows to walk around the site.

To see also : The "Landes de Lessay" is a vast flat area with poor vegetation, it is situated in the South of Lessay. It is covered with gorses, heather and with short plants. It covers approximately 5 000 ha.

- 6 - Falaises de Carolles



Cabane Vauban

The cliffs at Carolles, backed by heathland and traditional farmland, reach 60 metres in height and are one of the best places in Europe to witness large numbers of birds on diurnal migration from the north and east. Between late August and November, hundreds of thousands of passerines as the Chaffinch, the Starling, the Meadow Pipit, the Linnet, the Song Thrush... and also various waders, birds of prey migrate through the area. With good conditions, the first hours after dawn are the most productive and provide excitement by offering a constant stream of birds which often pass through at eye level. Seabirds like Scoters, the Cormorant, the Shag, Terns, the Little Gull, the Guillemot, the Razorbill, Skuas and the Balearic Shearwater can also be seen from the cliffs. In spring, the heathland and farmland back from the cliffs are frequented by typical species of this habitat such as the Melodious Warbler, the Dartford Warbler, the Cirl Bunting, the Yellowhammer...

Access : From Granville via the coast road D911, cross the village of Carolles, and turn right following the signs towards the Cabane Vauban and after 750 meters, park in the car park. Then take the footpath towards the sea to reach the Cabane Vauban (northwards) which is a shelter overlooking the cliffs.

GREAT BRITAIN



Body of water



Spotted Crake

The lighthouse in Gatteville, 20 km east of Cherbourg in the north-east corner of the Cotentin peninsula, is the second highest lighthouse in Europe with a height of 74.85 metres. The area is also one of the best seawatching localities in northern Europe, not just on account of the diversity of species observed here, but because many pass so close inshore. The best time to admire the birds is when a strong northeasterly wind is blowing, particularly between September and December. Three species of Divers, the Northern Gannet, Sooty and Balearic Shearwaters, Skuas, Terns (including Black), Little and Sabine's Gulls, the Little Auk can be seen passing offshore. In addition, various migrant passerines appear in the bushes and fields of the surrounding countryside in autumn. In winter the Purple Sandpiper can be found in the rocks and it is the good period to look for the Shore Lark, the Lapland and the Snow Bunting, in the dunes around the "Etang de Gattemare", westward to the lighthouse.



Red-throated Diver



Gatteville's Lighthouse

Access : From Cherbourg take the D116 towards Gatteville (25 km). Turn left onto the D10. Then keep going towards the lighthouse (le Phare). From Valognes take the D902 to Barfleur, and then turn left onto the D901/Rue de la Halle and turn right onto the D116 to Gatteville (2.5 km), turn right and keep going to the lighthouse.

To see also : Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue, on the east side of the Cotentin peninsula, forms the northern limit of the low sandy coast. The "Cap de la Hague" at the far west corner of the Cotentin peninsula is of great interest for birdwatching and present very good spots as Nez-Bayard, Nez-de-Voidries, Nez-de-Jobourg.

- 2 - Domaine de Beauguillot

This nature reserve of 500 ha is recognized as nationally important for hosting large numbers of waterbirds that stop over or winter here. Facilities allow to visit the spot by yourself. Situated on the edge of the seaside, the site is characterized by the presence of fresh water and salt water.

The "Domaine de Beauguillot" lies close to the "Baie des Veys" which is a vast zone of mudflats privileged for migratory avifauna. Thousands of ducks and waders stop there for all the winter. The number of birds on the domain is considerable : we can watch the Lapwing, the Mallard, the Common Shelduck, the Coot, the Moorhen, the Little Grebe, the Eurasian Oystercatcher, the Grey plover, the Curlew, the Dunlin, the Pintail, the Shoveler, the Ringed Plover, the Little Stint, the Red Knot, the Bar-tailed Godwit, the Teal, the Wigeon, the Herring Gull, the Mew Gull, the Sandwich Tern, the Greylag Goose, the Brent Goose... and birds of prey such as Peregrine and Marsh Harrier.



Curlew

Access : Via Sainte-Marie-du-Mont by the D913/Rue du Général Eisenhower which runs from Carentan, keep going until Utah Beach, then turn right and after 1.5 km the car park of the "Domaine de Beauguillot" is the left.

To see also : The "Baie des Veys" offers many opportunities to spot flocks of migratory birds.

- 3 - Pointe du Hoc



Falaises du Bessin

In the early hours of June 6th, the "Pointe du Hoc" was taken by assault by the Rangers of Colonel Rudder during the operation Overlord. In this place, the Germans had established the fortifications, at the edge of 30-metre-cliffs. On the 225 Rangers who landed on this place, about 80 were killed there. The "Pointe du Hoc" was bequeathed to the United States in January, 1979.

Today the "Pointe du Hoc" is also a reserve followed by the "Groupe Ornithologique Normand". France's largest Kittiwake colony is sited here on the cliffs, and other nesting species including the Fulmar, the Cormorant, Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls, the Stock Dove and the Dartford Warbler which nest in the undergrowth of gorses.



Kittiwake

The maritime zone is of interest for the numerous seabirds and waterbirds which winter there, and several species are well represented such as the Red-breasted Merganser, the Great Crested Grebe, the Razorbill, Red-throated and Black-throated Divers. During the migratory period between August and December many birds can be seen from there.

Access : From Grandcamp-Maisy take the D514 eastwards which leads you to a roundabout after 2 km. At the roundabout, turn left and follow the signs towards the "Pointe du Hoc".

To see also : The "Pointe du Hoc" is the western extremity of 8 km-long cliff (the Falaise du Bessin Occidental). This cliff provides other possibilities for birdwatching.

- 4 - Maison des Ormes

The lock keeper's house "La Maison des Ormes" is located at the junction between Vire-et-Taute canal and the Taute river, in the middle of the Carentan's marshes.

Besides its historic charm, the site is also a very good place to appreciate the atmosphere offered by swampland areas. From March we can observe here the first migratory birds such as the first Swallows or the Bluethroat for example.

From April till July the breeding birds such as the Sedge Warbler, the Yellow Wagtail, the Meadow Pipit, the Winchat, the Grasshopper Warbler, the Reed Bunting, the Marsh Warbler, the Lapwing, the Curlew, the Cuckoo can be observed. You may also see the Marsh Harrier gliding above the grasslands.

It's also here the best spot to hear the Great Bittern singing between February and June. That bird breeds in the numerous surrounding reed beds, for that reason, it is very difficult to see it.

In addition to the pleasure of strolling along the edge of the water the place enables us to observe White Storks which fly around in circles not far from there or a Kingfisher which suddenly appears to immediately disappears behind a reed bed.

Access : From Carentan drive across Saint-Hilaire-Petitville and take the N174 in the direction of Saint-Lô. After 5 km turn right at the crossroad "Le Rata". Then keep going for 2 km before turning to your right in the direction of "Le Cap". Then keep going on this road which leads to a little car park near the canal Vire et Taute. Also accessible on foot or by bike via Saint-Hilaire-Petitville along the Taute river.

To see also : The Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin Regional Nature Park covers an area of 145,000 acres including 25,000 of wetland zones. Many birds take advantage of this area, starting with the nearly 65 pairs of White Storks which breed in the Park.

- 5 - Forêt de Cerisy

Between Bayeux and Saint-Lô, the state-owned forest of Cerisy is 2129 ha big. It is the biggest forested nature reserve of lowland. This Atlantic beech wood, typical of Western forests of France, was classified reserve since 1976 owing to the presence of an unique and very particular subspecies of beetle : The carabe with gold images (Chrysocarabus auronitens cupreonitens). The methods of forestry were adapted to guarantee the conservation of this endemic beetle. Because it winters in stumps and in soil, management plan for preservation proscribed any job of the soil as well as the digging out of the cut trees stumps. The dead trees are left standing.



Black Woodpecker

The forest of Cerisy is of great interest for the entomologists with the presence of remarkable butterflies. It's also possible there to catch sight of cervids such as Deers and Roe Deers, but also Wild Boars, Badgers and Foxes.

Concerning birdwatching, the Black Woodpecker can be found here and occasionally the Middle Spotted Woodpecker. Both are sought-after species which are associated with older trees. It would also be the right place for the observation of the Short-toed Treecreeper. The woodland area hosts birds such as the Buzzard, the Sparrow Hawk, the Honey Buzzard, the Hobby, the Long-eared Owl, the Redstart, the Wood Warbler, the Willow Warbler, the Tree Pipit, the Redstart and many other birds which are typical of the woodlands of northern France.



Forêt de Cerisy

Access : From Saint-Lô, take the D972 towards Bayeux and keep going to the large roundabout (Rond point de l'embranchement) located in the forest. When you arrive at the roundabout, it's easy to find a car park. From Bayeux, take the D572 toward Saint-Lô and keep going to the Rond point de l'embranchement. From Isigny-sur-Mer, take the D5 towards Le Molay-Littry, and then take the D10 and keep going to the Rond point de l'embranchement.

To see also : hedgerow landscape areas which are widespread in Basse-Normandie give many possibilities for birdwatching.