

France – Cranes and Champagne

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Eurostar (or fly) to Paris. Transfer Mesnil St- Pere
Day 2	Forêt d'Orient
Day 3	Foret d'Orient & Champagne Drappier
Day 4	Troyes & Etang de Ramerupt
Day 5	Lac du Der
Day 6	Lac du Der & Etang de la Horre
Day 7	Eurostar to UK

Departs

March/November

Focus

Birds

Grading

Grade A. Birdwatching walks only

Dates and Prices

Please see website (FRA28)

Highlights

- Watch up to 30,000 Common Cranes flying to roost at dusk.
- Learn about Champagne production and enjoy tasting.
- White-tailed Eagle, plus Merlin, Hen Harrier & other raptors.
- Middle Spotted, Black & elusive Grey-headed Woodpecker possible



Common Cranes



Black Woodpecker



Champagne



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Eurostar to Paris transfer Mesnil St-Père

After travelling on the excellent Eurostar service direct from London St. Pancras to Paris (or, alternatively, flying if you prefer) we will transfer by minibus to a comfortable hotel in Mesnil St-Père, our base for the first three nights of the tour.

Day 2/3

Exploring Forêt d'Orient & Champagne Drappier

From our comfortable base we will make the most of our time spent around the vast woodland area of the Forêt d'Orient; several areas within this forest have been set aside as reserves and we shall explore these areas in search of the special birds that reside here. Six species of woodpecker are resident and this is an ideal time to find them as the deciduous trees will not yet be in leaf. The birds are therefore at their most conspicuous as they proclaim territories by bursts of 'drumming' and indulge in courtship displays.

During our time in the forest we will hope to find the impressive Black Woodpecker, plus Middle Spotted Woodpecker, its smaller cousin, and a variety of other bird species including Short-toed Treecreeper, Crested Tit, Firecrest and Hawfinch.



Middle-spotted Woodpecker

Conveniently located between these two key bird areas, we will keenly anticipate a visit to Champagne Drappier, a friendly, family-run champagne producer located in the Côte des Bar. Renowned for organic and natural methods of cultivation and production, the Drappier champagnes have rich, coppery-gold hues, expansive aromas and a fine, subtle effervescence. Oozing with charm and good humour, proprietor Michel Drappier takes great care and pride in welcoming visitors to his domain. The visit starts in the magnificent 12th century vaulted cellars, originally built by Cistercian monks. We then continue to the winery where we will see the grape press, huge fermentation vats and the wooden ageing barrels as well as the disgorging and labelling lines. The visit will be rounded off with a tasting of several of the Drappier cuvées.

Day 4

Troyes and Etang de Ramerupt

After three nights in Mesnil-St-Père, today we head north towards Lac du Der where we spend our remaining nights in Giffaumont. Enroute we will explore the exquisite town of Troyes, with its historic centre

of half-timbered houses and beautiful squares. Situated on the River Seine, the city was the capital of the ancient Province of Champagne in the 12th and 13th centuries and great trading fairs took place here. The prosperity of the city has left a very rich heritage, including 10 churches with exceptional stained-glass windows, fine Renaissance statuary and some notable museums. A guided tour will provide a fascinating insight.

Leaving Troyes we head towards our next hotel situated close to the shore of Lac du Der. The journey, although not long, will be broken with some birdwatching along the northern edge of the Orient complex - Lac du Temple and Amance - as well as a visit to Etang de Ramerupt, a new location where Bittern is known to breed and in March it may even be heard 'booming'.

Day 5

Lac du Der

Today we will explore the Lac du Der, looking in particular for Common Cranes. Twice every year more than



60,000 Common Cranes pass through the area on their journeys between breeding grounds in northern Europe and wintering sites in Spain. In mid-March and early November vast numbers arrive at much the same time and pause here to rest and feed before continuing their journey. We should observe many hundreds feeding in the nearby fields during the day, and thousands coming to roost in the late afternoon, filling the air with their evocative trumpeting calls. As many as 25,000 Cranes have been estimated at the roost, making this one of Western Europe's most spectacular assemblages of birds.

The lakes and meadows attract a wide variety of other species. Birds of prey are varied and plentiful, the most interesting being White-tailed Eagle. This is their only regular wintering site in France, attracting a minimum of two or three birds every year. Other regularly recorded raptors include Rough-legged Buzzard, Merlin, and both Marsh and Hen Harrier. Waterfowl are plentiful on the lakes and of particular interest will be parties of Smew bobbing on the open water and flocks of Tundra Bean Geese grazing in waterside fields.

Day 6

Lac du Der & Etang de la Horre

Lac du Der is the largest artificial lake in Western Europe covering 48km² and time will be spent exploring the areas not seen the previous day. We will also make a visit to another very productive lake just a short drive away – Etang de la Horre. The lake here is less well known, perhaps overshadowed by its famous

neighbour, however, it often hosts a large and interesting assemblage of wintering species which can include Goosander, Smew and Black-necked Grebe.

As we leave France after this memorable taste of two very contrasting bird habitats deep within Champagne country, we may choose to toast the thousands of roosting Cranes as they bid us adieu from the fields of winter stubble.

Day 7

Travel to London

Today sees us heading for the train station as we make our way back to London.

Accommodation and meals

Comfortable hotels with ensuite facilities. All meals included in the price, except for any refreshments required on the Eurostar journey.

Grading

This tour is graded A and will consist of day walks only and as such is suitable for any age and level of fitness. It is based on two hotels from which we will take day trips by minibus visiting the various sites looking for birds and taking a picnic lunch with us. There will be some gentle walking involved at nearly all of the sites.

Weather

Very variable. It may be mild and sunny but be prepared for cold weather. Lac du Der is very open and a chilly wind can make fleeces and wind-breaking waterproofs a must – on the other hand if warm and settled we may be in T-shirts.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.