

France – The Best of Brittany

Naturetrek Tour Report

19th – 26th May 2026



Black-winged Stilts



Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnets



Chateau du Suescino



Green Hairstreak

Tour report by Martyn Williams



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Summary

This two-centred tour was based initially at La Roche Bernard, which lies on the estuary of La Villaine near the southern coast of Brittany, between the great birding sites of the Golfe du Morbihan and La Grande Brière, the second largest wetland in France after the Camargue.

The second venue was Perros Guirec on Brittany's Northern coast, in the Côtes-d'Armor, famous for its granitic coast and for the first-ever LPO (Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux) reserve: Les Sept Iles, a series of islands off the coast and sanctuary for many nesting seabirds, as well as the only breeding colony of Gannets in France. The tour explored the various habitats on offer, including the flower-laden verges of Brittany's quiet roads.

Day 1

Tuesday 19th May

We picked up the clients at 8.00am from the ferry terminal at St. Malo. All seemed to have enjoyed the crossing, and although the weather had been a bit drizzly and overcast, all were in good humour. We loaded the minibus with luggage and headed off east to our first stop at Pointe du Grouin, near Cancale, overlooking the Bay of St Michel. Here there is an offshore island, the Ile des Landes, about five hundred metres from the point. This was a great starting place to look for both seabirds and passerines in the dense blackthorn and gorse hedges. We viewed seabirds, including Cormorants and Shags, Oystercatchers, Great Black-backed Gulls and Shelducks on the steep-sided, rocky and grassy island, and a resident pair of Peregrine Falcons sitting like statues on a high promontory. We enjoyed Linnet, Stonechat, and a short view of Dartford Warbler in the short gorse on the headland.

On the way back to the minibus, we spent time viewing a very showy Melodious Warbler in the surrounding trees, singing away, then flitting to and fro among the branches. We then came across a couple intently looking at something on the wall in front of them, which turned out to be a Western Green Lizard: we joined them until it scurried off into the undergrowth. Next, we headed towards St Malo and Ile Besnard, a small peninsula with great views of the surrounding cliffs.

In overcast weather, we walked along the peninsula and enjoyed lovely views of butterflies, including Speckled Wood, Brimstone and Small White, and saw various birds such as Skylark, Meadow and Rock Pipit, and Common Whitethroat.

The weather was warm enough to allow us to have our picnic on the beach, next to an old collapsed bank which was once a thriving colony of Sand Martin; there was at least one pair still in attendance. Finally, we made the two-hour journey to La Roche Bernard and our first hotel. The hotel is in the old quarter of the town, and we were enthralled by the gangs of Swifts flying through, House Martins nesting, and a Black Redstart hopping along on the old roof tops. We relaxed ahead of supper at a local crêperie, before turning in for the night.

Day 2

Wednesday 20th May

After a great buffet-style breakfast, we headed out to the Golfe du Morbihan, and specifically the marshes at the Chateau du Suscinio and the Marais de Duer. The weather continued to be overcast, but warmed up over the day.

The Chateau du Suscinio is a fairytale chateau, and makes a great backdrop to the saltmarshes and reedbeds. Stopping at various stages to scope the reeds, we were treated to lots of nesting Black-winged Stilts with chicks; in among them were Lapwings and some Avocets. A flock of breeding Common Terns entertained us, and a pair of Sandwich Terns perched in among them; a single Spoonbill flew in, to everyone's delight. A client spotted a brownish bird in among a blackthorn hedge, and a quick look in the binoculars and the bird turning into the sun revealed our first Bluethroat: it stayed for a second or two before flying off into the reeds, with only a few of us getting a glimpse.

A slow stroll revealed several Sedge Warblers, Stonechats, Linnets, Skylarks and Meadow Pipits on the sand dunes and thick hedges alongside the saltmarsh. Another eagle-eyed member of the group called "what's that?" as another nondescript bird alighted on a hedge. It turned and exposed its wonderful iridescent blue breast with a white spot: our second Bluethroat, and this time seen in its full glory by most of the group.

We carried on to the Marais de Duer, where we had our picnic in a hide on stilts, looking over some old saltpans now turned into a refuge for birds. It was very quiet, with only a few Avocets, a couple of Redshanks, Shelducks and various gulls. We enjoyed our lunch and walked to the coast for a view of the Golfe du Morbihan, but the tide was right out, and there were few birds to be seen.

We made our way back to freshen up and enjoy another excellent meal in a local restaurant, and enjoyed the ambience of this beautiful town.

Day 3

Thursday 21st May

Today we left for the city of Vannes to catch a boat to Ile d'Arz, one of the biggest islands in the Golfe du Morbihan. It was a beautiful, warm day, and we had a smooth crossing of about half an hour.

We walked along the coastal path and saw Linnets, Blackbirds, Starlings and Pheasants in the long grass. We came across Meadow Pipits perching on fenceposts, and heard and had a quick glimpse of a Green Woodpecker. In the dense cover of blackthorn and gorse bushes, we heard and saw a Melodious Warbler singing again, and had some good views.

We ate our picnic looking over a nearly deserted beach, sitting on the sea wall and enjoyed the peace and quiet. After lunch, we ambled across the island to a large étang (a tidal pond in this case), passing a variety of habitats where we encountered several butterflies: Painted Lady, Common Blue and Small Heath. We headed to the port to catch the ferry back to Vannes, and managed to squeeze in a delicious coffee in a small café near the port. Although we had not scored a very high bird count, the island had been lovely, and being relatively small, easy enough to get around without having to rush.

We finally headed back to our hotel in La Roche Bernard, wandered around the old quarter watching the Swifts, and then headed to another excellent restaurant before turning in to bed.

Day 4

Friday 22nd May

After another good breakfast at the hotel, we set off to meet Anthony Mahé, a barque operator on the western side of the Grand Brière, the second largest wetland in France. It was a warm start, and temperatures rose into the high twenties as Anthony set off around the marsh, with a silent electric motor and a long pole for punting when we approached sensitive areas of the marsh. The Brière reserve comprises 7000ha, of which 1000ha is a strict reserve and highly protected. It was a really magical and exciting trip, with good views of Bluethroat, Sedge Warbler, Yellow Wagtail, Grey, Night and Purple Herons, Spoonbill, Black Kite, Marsh Harriers and lots of Whiskered Terns. Everyone had a most relaxing couple of hours in this absolutely calm paradise of wildlife.

We had our picnic on benches in the shade as it was 30°C and too hot to venture out in the sun; then we had a stroll along shady paths, mainly seeing butterflies and the odd dragonfly. We headed off to see some flower meadows, but unfortunately we had a puncture! Sadly, this cut our day short somewhat.

Day 5

Saturday 23rd May

Today we left our hotel at La Roche Bernard, and went straight to a garage to sort the tyre out. Once all sorted out, our first stop on our way to Perros Guirec in the north of Brittany was a walk around the riverside, meadows and woodlands at Talroch, home of the tour leader. We had a great couple of hours walking alongside the River Sarre, encountering Beautiful Demoiselles and Large Red Damsels, and headed into the woods again as the temperature was in the thirties again. It made things fairly quiet on the bird front, and rather tiring.

We returned to Talroch and ate our picnics before heading off on the two-hour journey to Perros Guirec. Once unpacked and refreshed, we wandered down to a seaside-facing restaurant, enjoyed another great meal, and watched the sunset on our stroll back to the hotel.

Day 6

Sunday 24th May

After an excellent breakfast, we headed west to the Monts D'Arrée part of the Parque Amorique, a National Park and the highest part of Brittany. The weather was again very hot. We stopped at a small car park at the Lande de Cragou, a moorland landscape with gorse and heather and small copses of woodland. This was primarily to look for Montagu's Harrier, of which there are around twenty breeding pairs in the region. We walked along a wooded area on a shaded path, and saw Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Wren, Robin, Chiffchaff and a pair of Bullfinches flitting from ground to a small bush, probably feeding youngsters. On several occasions we heard Cuckoos, and then had great views as one which came flying almost over our heads. A great deal of patience would be required for the harriers, but at least we were in the shade, looking over the moorland towards a sloping area where they tend to breed.

In the meantime, we watched Meadow Pipits, a Tree Pipit perched a few metres away, Cuckoos all around us, Stonechats, and lots of fritillaries: although none of them settled, we identified them as Marsh Fritillaries, a lovely species. Finally, the Montagu's Harriers put on a show: they took off from the long grass and scrub a hundred metres or so in front of us and headed north; then another one appeared above the treeline.

We moved on towards Brennelis and the Venec peat bogs, to enjoy the ambience of a clear stream with Beautiful Demoiselles flitting about, River Crowfoot in the stream and singing birds where we had our picnic over the stream.

Our last stop was at the Chapelle de St Michel, on a hill top (380m) overlooking the Lac de St Michel and the surrounding countryside. On the way there, we had a fantastic sighting of a female Montagu's Harrier flying towards us: it was a very close view this time, and it nearly came right over the top of the van.

We saw Swallowtail and Painted Lady butterflies being blown around on the hill top next to the Chapel, 'high' on the small 'mountain', and had great views of the surrounding countryside. We then headed back to Perros Guirec for another meal in a restaurant.

Day 7

Monday 25th May

The Sillon de Talbert was our next destination on the northern coast. It is a reserve on a large spit on the tip of a headland, and is a very important site for breeding birds, notably Kentish Plover and Little Terns. The Little Terns nest on the furthest tip of the spit, and access is strictly controlled near the birds. The spit is one of the largest in Europe and although it was breached several years ago, it is accessible at low tide.

Again, it was a very hot day, but after walking along the spit and with the tide out, we managed to see Ringed Plovers, and several Kentish Plovers with chicks. We saw another wader among the Ringed Plover, and after much deliberation decided it was a solitary Knot: it was at a distance and the heat haze did not help!

After our picnic lunch we moved on to the LPO site for injured birds at Ile Grande, further west on the northern coast. There were few birds that were viewable at their centre, but it was located on a beautiful headland with views of the remarkable coastline and wild waters. Several Meadow Pipits, Stonechats and Zitting Cisticolas were seen, as well as a variety of gulls and the odd Gannet.

After an hour, we headed back to the hotel for a freshen up, and had a lovely final meal together, overlooking the beach.

Day 8

Tuesday 26th May

Today was our final day, and to finish off a wonderful week, we drove down to the local slipway and caught a boat to see the bird colonies on the Sept Iles, an LPO reserve and home to the second-largest breeding colony of Gannets in Europe, and the only one in France. We managed to get to the bow of the boat, and enjoyed a great crossing in sunny weather and on fairly calm seas.

We set off to the rocky islets and the main island of Rouzic, and were greeted by the amazing sight of Gannets nesting everywhere, using every available space. There were good numbers of Guillemots, as well as Razorbills, Fulmars and Puffins, to which we managed to get pretty close. There were also a couple of Grey Seals lazing on the odd rock, waiting for the tide to rise before floating off to find their next meal. We all enjoyed seeing this spectacle: after suffering huge losses caused by bird flu, the numbers of Gannets are beginning to increase. It was

also good to see quite a few Puffins after devastating losses during last winter's storms: thousands were washed up dead or emaciated and moribund on the beaches of Brittany, and also Devon and Cornwall.

It was a wonderful way to end our tour of Brittany: all we had left was to make our way east to the Chateau de Huyande nearer to St Malo for a final stop. Again, it was very hot as we spent an hour around the chateau, watching nesting Swallows flying in and out the ramparts, and enjoying great sightings of dragonflies on the lake.

Finally, we said goodbye to each other at St Malo port; some were heading home, while others were staying on for a few days. It had been an enjoyable week, despite the really hot weather, and I'd like to give a big "thank you" to the group for making it such fun.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026							
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		✓						
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>				✓				
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				✓				
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓		✓				
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓						
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			✓	✓				
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		H		H		✓		
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>				✓				
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓		✓				✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓		✓				
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓				
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓		H					
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		✓						
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓						
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓			✓	
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓						
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>							✓	
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		H	H					
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			✓					
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓					
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>							✓	
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>				✓				
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓	✓					
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		✓						
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓		✓					✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓		✓				✓	
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>								✓
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>								✓
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>								✓
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>								✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>							✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓							✓
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		✓		✓				
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>				✓				
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓				
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>				✓				
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>						✓		

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026							
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓				
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓		✓				
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓	✓			
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓	✓	✓				H
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓							✓
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>				H				H
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>								
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓				✓	✓	
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓						✓	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H	H	H			H	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓				✓		
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>						H		
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	H	✓	H	H	H	H	H
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		✓		✓				
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		✓						
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	✓		✓	H				
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>				H				
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	H	✓	H	H		
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	✓	H		H	H	H		
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	✓	✓	✓					
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>	✓							
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	H	H	H	✓	H	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓						
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				H	H			
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>						H	H	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>					✓	✓		
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>		✓		✓				
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			✓	✓		✓		
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>				✓				✓
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓		✓				✓	
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓							✓
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>						✓		

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026							
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓					✓	✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓		
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓					
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	✓							
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓				

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026							
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓							
Coypu	<i>Myocastor coypus</i>		✓						
European Mole	<i>Talpa europaea</i>	✓							
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓							
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>								✓

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026							
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>						✓	✓	
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>			✓					
Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>		✓						
Common Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>				✓				
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓				✓		✓	✓
Common Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>							✓	✓
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>					✓			
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>					✓	✓		
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>			✓					
Map Butterfly	<i>Araschnia levana</i>						✓		
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>					✓			
Marsh Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>						✓		
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			✓				✓	
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	✓							
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓		

Moths

Common name	Scientific name
Ash-bud Moth	<i>Prays fraxinella</i>
Green Oak Tortrix	<i>Tortrix viridana</i>
Six-spot Burnet	<i>Zygaena filipendulae</i>
Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet	<i>Zygaena lonicerae</i>
Lackey	<i>Malacosoma neustria</i>
Feathered Footman	<i>Coscinia striata</i>
Figure of Eight	<i>Diloba caeruleocephala</i>

Damselflies & dragonflies

Common name	Scientific name
Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>
Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>
Common Bluetail	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>
Large Redeye	<i>Erythromma najas</i>
Large Red Damsel	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>
Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Small Pincertail	<i>Onychogomphus forcipatus</i>
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>
Blue Chaser	<i>Libellula fulva</i>
Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>