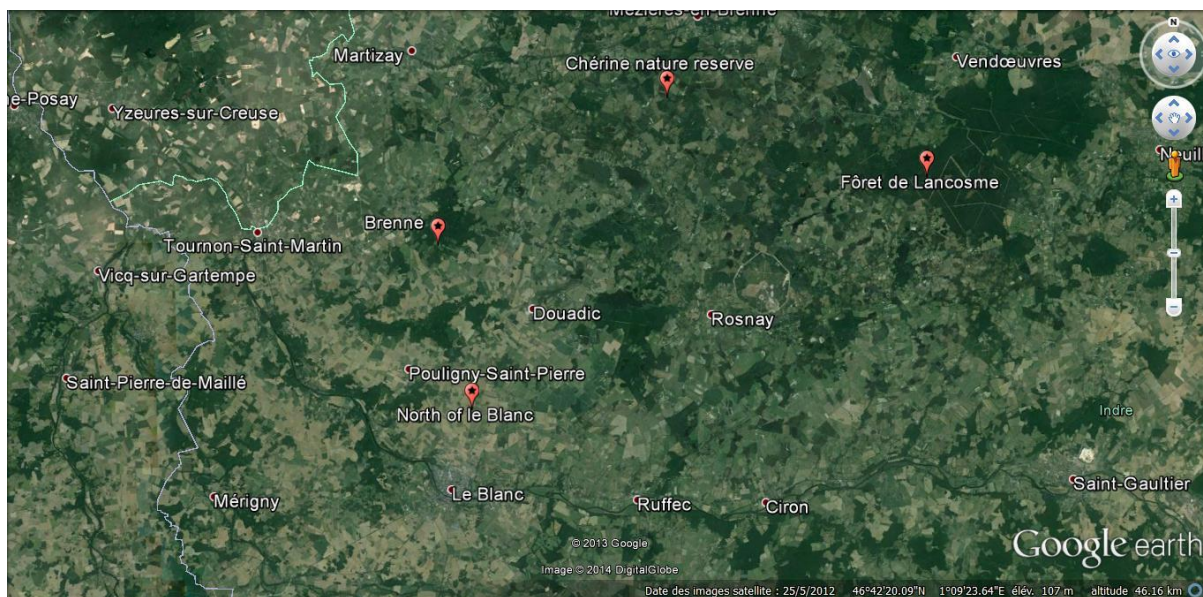


## *The Brenne - 100 butterfly species on your doorstep*

Unfortunately a bit of an exaggeration; only 99 species have been identified with certainty here in the last few years, and it does take the best part of a day to get to the Brenne from Britain. That said the Brenne is an easy six or seven hours drive from England's channel ports, readily accessible from three regional airports (Tours, Poitiers and Limoges) served by Ryanair, or can be reached by Eurostar from St.Pancras to Poitiers via Lille and then car hire.



Google la Brenne

**Any butterfly enthusiast visiting the area can help conservation by sending in their records.** The Brenne is a very good area for butterflies yet relatively under-watched. It is hoped that this short article may induce more butterfly-knowledgeable people to visit the area and for them and others who already know the area to send in their records. They could well contribute to the local conservation effort and we particularly need more information on some of the rarer species.

The Woodland Brown (*Lopinga achine*), first discovered in 1999 by an organised group of Brits, is now known to be quite widespread and locally common in the area, unknown localities almost certainly exist and need to be found.

The Duke-of-Burgandy (*Hamearis lucina*) occurs, but appears to be very rare, once again the first recent record was provided by visiting British naturalists but in the last 5 years there have been only 3 sightings, as far as we know, all in the Lancosme forest.

A previously unknown Alcon blue colony was discovered in 2010, one of only 5 in the Brenne; management for the species has started at the site, without its discovery it may well have disappeared forever without anybody knowing.

In this short article we include information of some of the better known interesting sites with public access which are well worth a visit. However there are probably many good sites that are still under-recorded or unknown.



Habitat

The Brenne in central France is now well known as a birding destination, particularly as an easy place to start foreign birdwatching. The same is true for butterflies with numerous species of both woodland and grassland habitats, many species that are rare in Britain are fairly common here: Camberwell Beauty (*Nymphalis antiopa*), Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*), Wood White (*Leptidea sinapis*)... There are many others that aren't found in Britain: Black-veined White (*Aporia crataegi*), Weaver's (*Boloria dia*) and Marbled Fritillaries (*Brenthis daphne*), Map (*Araschnia levana*), Alcon (*Phengaris alcon*) and Idas Blues (*Plebejus idas*) and Lesser Purple Emperor (*Apatura ilia*) to mention just a few. With nearly 100 species of butterflies to look for over a relatively small area, 30 miles by 20, and with many sites open and easily accessible to the public from the many small lanes and public footpaths that criss-cross the area, it's easy to see 50 species in a few days during late spring or summer; providing that the weather is cooperative, which it usually is..

For the more localised species there are three main areas:

- limestone sites to the west (mainly north of Le Blanc), the wet meadows of central Brenne (the best bird-watching area) and the extensive Lancosme forest to the east.

The most accessible and rewarding limestone sites include the valley at "La Boudinière" (Woodland grayling (*Lopinga achine*), Weaver's Fritillary (*Boloria dia*), Berger's Clouded Yellow (*Colias alpharcariensis*), Ilex hairstreak (*Satyrium ilicis*)...), the "Bois des Roches" regional nature reserve with the same species, the hikers trail on the disused railway track at "les Cloîtres" has Large Blue (*Phengaris arion*) and the dry stone meadows at "le Grand Veillon" next to the main road just south of Poulligny-St.-Pierre (Berger's Clouded Yellow (*Colias alpharcariensis*), Red underwing skipper (*Spialia Sertorius*), False grayling (*Arethusana arethusa*)...). The area is well worth a day's exploration.



Woodland Brown *Lopinga achine*



Black Hairstreak *Satyrium pruni*

Much of central Brenne can be of interest, walking the many paths near Chérine nature reserve can be rewarding (Camberwell Beauty (*Nymphalis antiopa*), Large Tortoiseshell (*Nymphalis polychloros*), many fritillaries, hairstreaks, skippers...). Other productive sites open to the public include the “Communaux” and “Champs de Foix” at Rosnay and the public footpaths around the Blizon village a little farther north.

The Lancosme forest can be very good and is worth at least a full day’s visit. The tracks around the “Rond de St.-Sulpice” and small road between the “Rond de St.-Sulpice” and the “Rond des Cinq Frères” are the best known places for sightings of the rare Woodland Brown (*Lopinga achine*) as well as both Purple Emperors (*Apatura iris* and *ilia*) and Large Chequered Skipper (*Heteropterus morpheus*).

Nearby, a walk along the D21 road west of the “Carrefour du Gué Rossignol” may provide sightings of many species including Chequered Skipper (*Carterocephalus palaemon*), Pearly Heath (*Coenonympha arcania*), Map (*Araschnia levana*), Heath Fritillary (*Mellitea athalia*) and maybe even Duke-of-Burgandy (*Hamearis lucina*). The Dryad (*Minois dryas*) can be found, sometimes in large numbers, along tracks to the north-west of the forest; but this species flies late, in late July and August at a time when fewer other interesting species are active.



Alcon Blue *Phengaris alcon*



Black-veined Whites *Aporia crataegi*

There are many more sites and many more interesting species but space doesn't allow mention of them all. Nearly all the species that occur here can be seen using tracks or sites that open to the public. However, a handful of species only occur on private land and are thus difficult to see. Two species that spring to mind are Alcon Blue (*Phengaris alcon*) and Idas Blue (*Plebejus idas*); they occur at a few restricted sites here and can only be seen during accompanied outings organised by the LPO.

When to come! This obviously depends to a large extent on the desired species. Mid-May to mid-July is generally the best period. Many of the rarer species have just one generation a year so that the visitor needs to choose the correct dates if a particular species is sought-after, some examples: Woodland brown (*Lopinga achine*) throughout June, Purple Emperors late June early July, Camberwell Beauty (*Nymphalis antiopa*) very early spring or July/August, Large Blue (*Phengaris arion*) late June and most of July, Alcon Blue (*Phengaris alcon*) most of July, Dryad (*Minois dryas*) in August.



Swallowtail *Papilio machaon*



Large Blue *Phengaris arion*

Butterflies haven't been extensively studied here and there are probably undiscovered species to be found and new sites to be uncovered. If you come to the area and see some interesting species we should very much appreciate receiving your records that may well contribute to our knowledge and thus conservation efforts here. Whatever, I am sure that if you do come looking for butterflies and the weather is sunny and mild (as it often is), you won't be disappointed.

So if you come have a look at any seemingly interesting habitat and please send in your records – Tony Williams (LPO – Brenne, Maison de la Nature, 36290 St.-Michel-en-Brenne, France) [lpo.brenne@aliceadsl.fr](mailto:lpo.brenne@aliceadsl.fr) - all information will be kept confidential in order to protect sites. And if you come across any incorrect behaviour such as collecting please let us know as soon as possible so that we can take immediate and suitable action.

Below is a list of more interesting species that are regularly seen here.

Species		Status	Flight period
Mallo Skipper	<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>	small numbers throughout	summer
Tufted Marbled Skipper	<i>C. flocciferus</i>	no recent records, confirmation needed	summer
Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus armoricanus</i>	fairly common throughout	May, June and August
Chequered Skipper	<i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>	local, around "forêt de Lancosme"	June
Large Chequered Skipper	<i>Heteropterus morpheus</i>	local, sometimes common	June and July
Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>	common throughout	summer
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	fairly common throughout	summer
Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapsis</i>	common throughout	summer
Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>	abundant throughout	late May and June
Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>	common on limestone in west	June/July
Clouded Yellow	<i>C. crocea</i>	often abundant, widespread	Commonest in summer
Duke of Burgundy Fritillary	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>	a few observations since 2006,	late April/late May
Sloe Hairstreak	<i>Satyrion acaciae</i>	uncommon	June/July
Ilex Hairstreak	<i>S. ilicis</i>	locally common	June/July
Black Hairstreak	<i>S. pruni</i>	uncommon	May/June
Sooty Copper	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>	widespread and common	summer
Large Copper	<i>L. dispar</i>	local, has declined	Late May and late August/early September
Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>	rare	autumn
Short-tailed Blue	<i>Everes argiades</i>	widespread and common	summer
Provençal Short-tailed Blue	<i>E. alcetas</i>	uncommon in west, apparently increasing	summer
Alcon Blue	<i>Maculinea alcon</i>	rare and very localised, five known sites	July
Large Blue	<i>M. arion</i>	a few sites in west	Late June/July
Woodland Brown	<i>Lopinga achine</i>	locally common	Late May/early July
Pearly Heath	<i>Coenonympha arcania</i>	locally common	Late May, June and July
Great Banded Grayling	<i>Brintesia circe</i>	common	July to early September
Dryad	<i>Minois dryas</i>	Very local	early August/early September

So, please don't hesitate to come, and send in those records. Tony Williams (Brenne and Indre Butterfly recorder for EIG [lpo.brenne@aliceadsl.fr](mailto:lpo.brenne@aliceadsl.fr). Tony Williams.