



# Vallées et marais de Bretoncelles

## Vales & marshes in Bretoncelles

Water rules here, imposing its presence on every living thing in the ponds, clear streams, marshy meadows and damp woodlands. The visitor can keep dry, thanks to the raised walkway, and be accompanied by the calls of the large gold and large marsh grasshoppers and the short-winged conehead (a wetlands grasshopper). The praying mantis, once completely unknown in Lower Normandy, is now present in particularly large numbers. The lesser marbled fritillary, a butterfly the French call the 'grande violette' (despite its orange colour), can be seen from June through to the end of August. The common grasshopper warbler, a marshlands bird, breeds here. Some examples of the rare southern marsh orchid can also be seen in bloom. Without management by grazing and mowing, this orchid would disappear, forced out by the sedges. On the banks of the Corbionne, the European white elm can be recognised in the springtime by its cilia-edged fruits.

You will discover :

- **13 ha dedicated to nature**, with reeds, damp meadows and marshlands forest home to 270 animal and plant species
- **a 2 km walkway**
- **a protective apiary** of the black honeybee (*Apis mellifera*)
- **an educational orchard** with apple and pear trees

The first and main aim is the conservation of the site from an ecological perspective and the maintenance of the natural inhabitants in the future.

*Hidden behind a housing estate and bushes, at the confluence of the Corbionne and Donnette, around 10 hectares of riches revealed to the visitor via two walkways throughout the seasons.*

*A wet zone with two aspects:*

- *an open, light central area, flat with only a superficial presence of water,*
- *a border area, screened by trees, where views are limited, where light is softened by the vegetation, providing a cool and intimate atmosphere, with ever-present water and more diverse vegetation.*

## Information

The walk begins at  
« Les Grands Prés » (in Bretoncelles village)  
Accessible to persons with reduced mobility.

### For any further information

- ☎ 02 37 37 23 27 (in French) or
- ☎ 02 33 73 71 94 (in English)

This ENS (*sensitive natural area*) located right in the centre of the **Parc naturel régional du Perche** has been classified thanks to its ecological focus.

The Grands Prés' area is divided into different zones and offers various kinds of ecological, faunal and floral habitat. The site has agricultural wasteland, a young willow tree zone, tall grasses, sedges, riverside forest and 2 streams...

We have, therefore, a mosaic of environments of great ecological richness, typical of Perche wetlands.

## A strong presence of water

Water is one of the major, fluctuating components of the landscape. In times of high water, flood meadows create ephemeral landscapes totally disrupting the way in which we perceive the site.

In dry periods the meandering waters of the Corbionne and Donnette can only be made out thanks to the trees of the riverbank. The water can be seen only by approaching the banks. In contrast to these winding courses are the straight lines of the two drainage ditches on the site, the longer of which is hidden under an almost continuous band of willows.

A painting by Eugène Lavielle dated 1881, titled *Moonrise (flooding of the Corbionne in Bretoncelles)*



## 2 loop walks with wooden walkways

**The large discovery loop** allows us to understand the whole site via a walkway usable all year outside the flood periods (*walking shoes or boots are recommended*).

**The small loop**, accessible to persons with reduced mobility, allows a walk to the river via wheelchair-friendly boarding.

## Three educational ponds...

... for visitors to discover the flora and fauna of various bodies of water (aquatic plants, dragonflies, amphibians...).

## Conservatory orchard and apiary 'school', or 'protective apiary', for the Percheron black honeybee in order to...

- protect the 'abeille noire' (black honeybee - *Apis mellifera mellifera*). The black honeybee is threatened with extinction because it is being increasingly replaced by supposedly more productive breeds. However, the black honeybee, because of its local evolutionary adaptation (ecotype), gives positive results, respectful of the environment. This variety has greater advantage as it is more resistant to disease and severe weather, require less treatment and overwinters better.
- preserve the fruit trees of the Orne department...  
... and the local, old varieties of apple and pear, and teach techniques for grafting and pruning trees.

This orchard will help to maintain local varieties, not just for their taste but for their genetic reservoir to draw upon in order to fight against degeneration and disease.

## Flora

Many rare and even very rare species existing in Lower Normandy: **southern marsh orchid**, **various-leaved water-starwort**, **royal fern**, **marsh fern**, **large bittercress**, **marsh valerian**, **zigzag clover** and even **white elm**.

About 30% of the varieties found show we are in a wetland.



Fruits of *Ulmus laevis* (white elm)

*Dactylorhiza praetermissa* (southern marsh orchid)

*Osmunda regalis* (royal fern)

## Wildlife

The area shelters a quality **avifauna**, with the **grasshopper warbler** being the most prominent.

For the **ornithologist**, it is worth noting that the **willow tit** and the **common nightingale** nest here. We are at the southern limit of one species' Norman habitat: the **common European viper**.

Among the **insects**, several species stand out: the **lesser marbled fritillary**, the **large gold grasshopper**, the **large marsh grasshopper**, an important wetlands species, the **short-winged conehead** and the **praying mantis**, formerly completely unknown in this part of Normandy.

There are many butterflies on the site, including the **pearl of the burnet**, the **marsh fritillary** and the **heath fritillary**. Among dragonflies, it is worth mentioning the presence of the **golden-ringed dragonfly**.



The grasshopper warbler  
*Locustella naevia*



The lesser marbled fritillary  
*Brenthis ino*



There is a remarkable fish fauna: **freshwater white-clawed crayfish**, **grayling**, **brown trout**, **bullhead**, **brook lamprey**.



## My Personal Favourite

**Patrick Pinloche, honorary mayor**

«Take a few drops (and more) of water, a spoonful of diversity for this site whose universal character we have done well to keep... a touch of hives and a pinch of fruit trees... there you have a fine recipe to get THE place for which we have been working for several terms of office. The result is far beyond our expectations...

... to be enjoyed without any restriction.

