

## Conservation trip to La Brenne Nature reserve, France.



In October I went on a volunteer conservation trip to France with The Kingcombe Trust (<http://www.kingcombecentre.org.uk/>) on a placement 100% funded by the Leonardo da Vinci section of the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme.

Before we went to France we had a training weekend in Dorset where I received my brushcutter training and carried out some volunteer work on chalk grassland for the Butterfly Trust.

16 volunteers from all over Britain, all from different backgrounds went on the 16 day trip. The first week was spent at La Brenne, where we worked closely with the ranger of the National Park who worked for LPO (Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux), the French equivalent of RSPB. He set daily tasks for the group and we set about these with his staff and volunteers:

- Digging up water lilies for re-planting at another lake.
- Brushcutting to remove young Blackthorn from a field on the edge of the lake which is botanically rich damp grassland with a strong population of Alcon Blue Butterfly
- Catching and sorting fish using large nets. More catfish than you could imagine.
- Catching, recording and measuring pond tortoise
- Scrub clearance.



The accommodation was all in shared rooms, in very nice typically French accommodation. There were evening activities planned for every night so the schedule was action packed, with plenty to learn. The wildlife knowledge in the group was very high, and the group was very motivated to get involved with all things nature related. The trip was a no fly trip so transport was by bus and ferry. Food was locally sourced and local communities supported so the trip was all round very ethical.

The second week was spent in Congis-Sur-Therouanne, (Two hours East of Paris on a gravel beds) which was my favorite part of the trip due to our accommodation being at a horse riding stables!

Our main projects here were:

- Brushcutting around the reserve to encourage grass and control encroaching scrub.
- Building a willow bird hide.



As well as the conservation work that we carried out over the two weeks, we did a lot of wildlife observing. Plant studies, butterfly observation, bird watching, moth trapping and bat walks to name a few. There were lots of cultural activities that had been planned for us, meeting the mayor, museum and cheese factory visits, cycling tours and lots and lots of eating and drinking. The highlights of the trip for me were seeing the starlings come in at dusk in their thousands; the swarming effect was mind bogglingly beautiful. I also really enjoyed seeing and hearing so many bats every night. You did not have to hunt for a few here or there, there were hundreds feeding all around you in the evenings.



Starlings coming home

The European Conservation Action Network was established in 2007 by The Kingcombe Trust, a charity based at The Kingcombe Centre in west Dorset, dedicated to conservation and environmental education (Reg. Charity no. 1054758), in association with the Dorset branch of Butterfly Conservation. The project is funded through the Leonardo da Vinci section of the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme and has partners in France, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland. Further information can be obtained from [www.kingcombecentre.org.uk](http://www.kingcombecentre.org.uk) or from Nigel Spring (tel: 0044.1963.23559; email: [nigelspring@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nigelspring@yahoo.co.uk)). There are exciting seven trips planned for 2009, so please contact Nigel if you would like more information.