

**Conservation trip to France with European Conservation Action Network,
October 10th – 25th 2008.**

Report by Emma Harrison.

Our trip began in the Bridge Tavern pub on the harbourside in Portsmouth. This was a great introduction to the conservation work placement as it showed us what was to be expected over the next two weeks; great company accompanied with delicious food.

After spending a comfortable night on the ferry we arrived in Caen and made our way to Mezieres-en-Brenne, which was to be our home for the next week. The following day, Tony Williams, who works for the LPO (Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux), within La Cherine Reserve in the Parc Naturel of the Brenne, gave us an informative introduction into the practices of the Reserve, highlighting any conservation successes and problems. On Monday morning, we spent a very enjoyable two hours, opening the moth trap that had been set up the previous night. It was the first time I had ever tried to identify moths, and although for a beginner it can be very confusing (especially as France has even more species than the United Kingdom), I did manage with the assistance of Cathy to identify a few moths. My favourite moth of the whole trip would have to be the Garden Tiger (*arctia caja*), whose beauty can easily match that of any butterflies.

Over the next few days our work consisted of clearing a woodland avenue to enable the Reserves warden's access to the reeds of one of their lakes. This will help them monitor different species which live in and around the lake whilst improving means of entry to the surrounding area for any conservation work that may need to be done. The other job that I helped with was digging up waterlilies from one lake and transporting them to another lake. Parc Naturel of the Brenne has great problems with the local population of coypu, who eat the waterlilies at a faster rate than the plants can reproduce.

For the second week of our trip we travelled to a lovely gite in May-en Multien, where we would be staying for the remainder of our trip. On our first evening there we were all invited for a reception with the Mayor at Congis-sur-Therouanne. Here we met some of the members of the Association of AVEN, who were in charge of our next site, Le Grand Voyeux Reserve. Our main task here was to build a willow screen on the edge of the lake, providing birdwatchers with an ideal position to observe the birds from,

without disturbing them. This job really encouraged team work within the group and allowed us to bounce ideas off each other for the construction of the screen (especially concerning the position and style of the windows).

On the Wednesday, I went with Nigel and some of the others to go and watch the murmuration of Starlings (Common Starling – *sturnus vulgaris*) roost. It is one of the most spectacular natural occurrences I have ever seen; the flight of thousands of birds forming gigantic waves in the air.

The trip to France was a brilliant opportunity to learn conservation skills within Europe. It was really encouraging to meet people of similar interests and learn from their knowledge. Everyone seemed to add a different dynamic to the group, so you always had the chance to learn something new. I feel the group really worked together as a team and all enjoyed the different tasks we were set. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in France, it has opened up many new avenues and I have made many new friends.

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 or from Nigel Spring (tel: 0044.1963.23559; email: nigelspring@yahoo.co.uk).