eucan

An Introduction to Conservation Volunteering with EuCAN

…..in La Brenne, France.

Helen Fairlamb - volunteer at La Brenne, February 2010.

An Introduction to …... EuCAN

The European Conservation Action Network (EuCAN) was established in 2007 by the Kingcombe Trust, in association with the Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation.

Based in Dorset, EuCAN is entirely funded by the Leonardo da Vinci section of the EU 'Lifelong Learning Programme'.

This funding allows participants to volunteer in conservation projects across Europe, by providing accommodation, meals, travel and insurance.

EuCAN aims to:

- Establish relationships between people in the wildlife conservation field, across the European Union (EU).
- Build European partnerships between conservation organisations, nature reserves and national parks.
- Enable people from the UK to contribute to wildlife conservation in other EU countries.
- Encourage conservation volunteering in other European countries.
- Increase participant's knowledge of wildlife conservation and practical conservation skills.
- Encourage EuCAN participants to become more involved in wildlife conservation in their local area.

To date, 7 partners are involved in the EuCAN. For further details on EuCAN, and these partnerships, please visit:
http://www.eucan.org.uk/

eucan

An Introduction to ….. Conservation Biology:

Conservation biology is a multidisciplinary science that studies how humans impact habitat and species diversity, in order to conserve biodiversity.

Most conservationists aim to increase or maintain biodiversity levels and reduce loss of species or biodiversity.

Human impact on the environment:
Virtually all ecosystems and the species within them are impacted (directly or indirectly) by humans. Through:

- Land use change: Habitat loss and fragmentation
- Overexploitation: Hunting for food, valuable materials, or specimen collecting. Reduction in numbers can lead to population crashes as species enter an 'extinction vortex').
- Introduced species: Exotic/alien/introduced species are organisms that are introduced to non-native habitats. They are seen as 'biological pollutants' and are a cause of loss of biodiversity.
- Climatic Change
- Pollution

Species extinction, as a consequence of human actions, has been taking place for thousands of years. Since 1600 there have been over 1000 recorded extinctions of species!

Why should we conserve biodiversity?

- Usefulness (to humans): Maintaining a large, natural 'genetic bank' is useful to humans as sources of food, medicine etc.
- Ecosystem services: (Pollination, decomposition, cleaning water, preventing flooding… all services humans depend upon that are performed without cost in many ecosystems.
- Loss of functioning.
- Intrinsic / economic value.

Ecosystems are worth much more (economically) than first thought and the degradation of an ecosystem can be very costly…. In ways that we still may not know.

For more information on conservation biology, check –out the:

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

This is the largest assessment of the health of the Earth's ecosystems. It aims to help people understand:

- The state of the world's ecosystems and biodiversity
- Our place in nature
- The gains humans get from 'ecosystem services' i.e.:

http://www.milleniumassessment.org

eucan

An Introduction to ….. Conservation approaches within the UK and Europe:

Natura 2000 sites

This is a network of protected areas across Europe. It was set up under EU legislation, under two directives (Habitats Directive and Birds Directive). The aim of Natura 2000 was to set aside over 16,000 sites (450,000 km^2) in 15 EU countries. This represents ~12% of the total land area.

Conservation objectives and programs of action are determined locally in consultation with each site and are listed in a document of Natura 2000 objectives.

Habitats Directive (1992):

- Sets aside Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- There are currently over 613 sites, covering an area of over 100, 000 ha.
-

Birds Directive (1979):

- Sets aside Special Protected Areas (SPAs)
- Currently over 252 sites.

Ramsar sites

The Ramsar Convention (The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance), is an intergovernmental treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and their resources.

The Ramsar Convention is the only global environmental treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem. The treaty was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971.

The UK also has a more 'species based approach' to conservation; using the **UK biodiversity action plans (UK BAP's):**

There are 3 types of action plan:

- Species action plans
- Habitat action plans
- Local action plans

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

SSSI's are areas of conservation designation notified by English Nature (now Natural England), Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage because of the presence of important plants, animals or geological or physiographical features.

An Introduction to..... La Brenne

Established in late **1989**, the Parc Naturel Régional de la Brenne (The Brenne Natural Regional Park or NRP) is one of the largest inland wetland areas in France. Holding over **2000 lakes**, it is recognised as an area with exceptional species richness and is one of the most important wetland sites in Europe.

- Parc Naturel Régional de la Brenne is ranked **4th** as the "French Wetlands of International Importance" under the IUCN classification and three areas of the Park are **Natura 2000** sites.
- In 1991, **145,000 ha** were designated as **Ramsar** sites
- **227 ha** of the park are classified as **SPA's** for conservation of wild birds (under the birds directive)

La Brenne is situated within the Indre region, in central France and is the 26th regional Natural Park of France. It encompasses over 160,000 ha of land, 46 communes (parishes) and has a population of approximately **30,000 people**.

For more information on La Brenne and its reserves, visit: **www.parc-natural-brenne.fr**

An introduction to ..... the species of La Brenne

Insects: La Brenne is home to 61 species of **dragonflies** (of the 91 species found in France) and to rare **butterflies**, such as the Alcon Blue, Large Copper and The Checkerboard of Succisa (the French term for the Marsh Fritillary).

32 species of **fish** have been recorded to date, including the river lamprey, sea and Planer.

In La Brenne there are 15 of the 28 species of **amphibians** found in France.

La Brenne's 'reptile star' is the **European Pond Tortoise**. La Brenne is recognised as Europe's most important site for the creature. Other reptiles found in the park include: Asp, Snake, viper (green and yellow), and green lizard.

Waterfowl: La Brenne has been ranked as the 4th most important of the "French Wetlands of International Importance" under the IUCN classification, with over 200 species of birds sighted in a year!

Breeding species include: Black-necked Grebe, Great Bittern, Little Bittern, the Marsh Harrier and Black Tern.

In winter, lakes are commonly filled with ducks, grebes, coots, cormorants, great egrets, lapwings, goldeneye, smew, goosander and tufted ducks.

During the migration period, thousands of cranes can be spotted flying over La Brenne.

Wildfowl: There are thought to be 109 species of birds currently nesting in the Park. These include; Nightjar, Honey Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Curlew, Grey Harrier, Little Bustard, Dartford Warbler and the Montagu's Harrier.

Mammals: There are large populations of deer residing within La Brenne. Voles and bats have also been observed in the area and Muskrats and Coypu (both escaped exotics) are found in large numbers in the lakes of La Brenne.

Invasive & problematic species:
American Crayfish are non-native occupants of La Brenne's lakes and damage the area's ecosystem. Coypu are another 'pest' species, introduced from South America.
Wild Boar are also a problematic species in La Brenne, as they can inflict a lot of damage to farmland. They are therefore hunted at times, to reduce the population. Yet they are a native species to the area…….This is just one example of confliction over land usage in La Brenne.

eucan

.....La Réserve de Chérine

La Maison de la Nature, in Chérine, acts as a headquarters for various conservation bodies, including:

- La LPO (the League for the Protection of Birds)
- Indre Nature
- La Réserve de Chérine (the Sherine Nature reserve)

La Réserve de Chérine was founded in **1985** and is owned by The Department de l'Indre, with the active participation of WWF-France, it aims to maintain diversity of species and their habitats.

Covering an area of **145 ha** La Réserve de Chérine contains nearly half of the known plant species of La Brenne and two - thirds of the vertebrate fauna.

It is **home** to:

- Over **2,300** animal species

- Including; Bittern, Great Reed Warbler, Black Tern, European Pond tortoise, Water Violets and several orchid species.

- 12 - **15,000** insects (estimated)

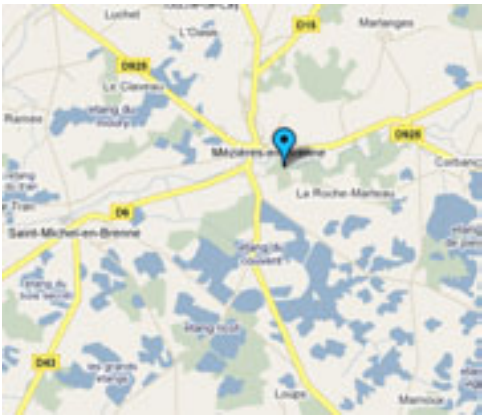
One of the last area's of extensive **reed-bed** in La Brenne. **An Introduction ..... to staying in Mézières-en-Brenne**

Mézières-en-Brenne is a village situated in the heart of the Brenne regional Natural Park. There are approximately 1200 inhabitants.

Accommodation:
A gîte, just off the central village square, was the accommodation choice for EuCAN participants (gîte de groupe).
Alternative accommodation in Mezieres consists of the village hotel; L'Hôtel Au Boeuf Couronné, and a nearby campsite.

Office de Tourisme:
Le Moulin – 1 rue du Nord
Tel: +33 (0)254381224

Details on the local area, walks, cycle hire, kayak hire, horse trekking and accommodation can all be found here. There is also internet access and an adjoining art gallery.



Bar:
A focal point of the village (especially when the 6 Nations Rugby Tournament is on)! The food is good during the day, there is also a pool table and table-football. Late-night opening hours on Friday nights with a disco area upstairs.

In the village there is also a bakery, corner shop (with friendly Lhasen), hardware store, pharmacy, phone box and post box. A market is held in the village square once a week.

An introduction to ..... EuCAN's Conservation efforts in La Brenne:

The maintenance of native grassland is a priority for conservation efforts in La Brenne. Land management and conservation is based on '"Natura 2000 objectives document, developed locally, and the principle of voluntary contract".

Clearing scrubland

EuCAN's work focused on habitat restoration for Lepidoptera, notably the Alcon Blue butterfly. This involved clearing encroaching scrubland and willow wildings. The main site for habitat restoration in 2010 was Étang Purais.
Further work was undertaken opposite Étang Miclos, which included opening-up ponds and further scrub clearance.
Previous sites of work include La Touche, which was shown to be a success the following year with increased sightings of butterfly species and increases in *Fritillaria* number.

Why?

Most grassland areas in La Brenne are composed of primarily of grasses (Poaceae) and also sedges (Cyperaceae) and rush (Juncaceae). These areas can be deemed as 'Semi-natural Grassland', as although the vegetation is 'natural', the maintenance of the ecosystem is dependant on anthropogenic activity (cutting regimes or grazing). Without anthropogenic intervention the grasslands of La Brenne are often colonised and dominated by shrub species (autogenic succession).
The encroaching scrubland area's that EuCAN's work targeted consisted mostly of blackthorn, dog wood and bramble. Willow encroachment was also a threat to the grassland community.

Without such active clearing, the biodiversity of the area would decrease as the numerous grass species are dominated by fewer scrub species. This would consequently decrease the number of pollinators found in the area, which again would impact higher tropic levels.

Helen Fairlamb - volunteer at La Brenne, Febuary 2010.

An introduction to.....fire lighting

- Select area – it's usually best to choose a fire site on bare ground, to prevent damage to existing grassland.
- Clear ~5 m space around the fire site to decrease the risk of fire spreading.
- Make a base for fire – dry logs and paper
- Lay kindling (small dead wood, brambles or blackthorn especially good) horizontally.
- Feed the fire, with more kindling, but do not overfeed.
- Build up the fire with larger dead /dry branches.
- Keep laying branches horizontally on the fire.
- The fire may hollow out – if so the material (branches) needs to be compressed …..jump on it!
- Make the most of your hard work, put the kettle on, put the potatoes in and get the marsh-mallows out!

.....brush-cutting:

- Get your licence!
- For cutting large areas of grass, adopt the wind-rowing method, so grass can be cleared up easily.
- For cutting scrubland, 'tap' the brush cutter blade repeatedly against the base of each shrub.
- Make sure you stay well clear of other workers
- Increase efficiency by donning a MP3 player, and putting energetic music on…. Pendulum is found to work especially well ☺

Conservation Glossary of terms:

Species: The biological species concept dictates a species is: 'reproductively isolated, and if they were to interbreed they would not produce fertile offspring'.

Biodiversity: 'The variety of life'. A good measure of biodiversity is species richness.

Ancient Woodland:
Land which has been woodland since at least AD 1600.

Coppice:
Trees which are cut back to near ground level every few years and then grow again from the stump. The many straight stems which grow from each stump can be used for firewood, tools and other purposes.

Coppice rotation:
The cycle of cutting back and re-growth in coppiced woodland, usually between 3 and 25 years.

Coppice-with-standards:
A two-storey woodland management system where among the coppice (or "underwood") some trees are left to grow on as larger size timber ("standards").

Ecosystem:
The interactions of animals, plants, fungi, and micro organisms with each other and the non-living world around within a defined area.

Exotic species (non-native species):
Species from other countries not naturally found growing in Britain

Family
A natural grouping of genera, which have important structural characters of the species in common

Genus
A group of species that have characters in common and are closely related

Habitat
A place where animals, plants, fungi, and micro organisms live, in a wider sense it can mean an association of plants, and fungi, for example that have become linked.

Indicators
A species indicative of an ecosystem or habitat

Keystone
A species critical to the operation of an ecosystem

Native species
Species which arrived in Britain in prehistoric times after the last Ice Age and before the English Channel formed

Pollard
Tree which is cut at eight to twelve feet above ground level and allowed to grow again from the stump to produce successive crops of wood.

Regeneration
Perpetuation of a species by natural or artificial means

Retrievable
A species that has been extinct from an area in recent times (usually

for about 25 years), and may be "brought back" through appropriate conservation measures

Semi Natural Habitat
A habitat that has been modified or created by human activities, still holding species that occur naturally in the area, in which natural processes are the most significant force in their development

Succession
The gradual alteration of an area of vegetation changing by more or less natural processes, usually involving the arrival and decline of species.

Understory
Layer of small trees and shrubs beneath the main tree canopy

Priorities for conservation ……. 'Food for thought'!

We can't conserve everything so:

- Should we aim to maximise diversity?
- Or try and maintain the 'status quo'?
- Does a 'status quo' exist?
- How do you value a species' worth?
- Are all species equally deserving?
- Should endemic species have priority …. Even with climatic variations?

- 
The End