

New Year in Champagne-Ardenne

Lac du Der Chantecoq is the largest artificial lake in France. It was constructed in the 1970s to take the overflow from the Seine and Marne rivers. Almost by accident the lake was built on a major migration route of Common Cranes which now stop and winter here in large numbers. Lac du Temple is nearby and covers a huge area towards the historic and timber-built town of Troyes. The whole area is experiencing human population decline and consequently this has affected the main industries of farming and forestry, resulting in several abandoned villages. This tour should produce some excellent birding, especially if the weather is not too cold and the lakes remain unfrozen.

Day 1: Morning flight to Paris and then travel east to St Dizier, a small country town close to Lac du Der our base for the tour.

Days 2-5: St Dizier town centre has wooded parks and fast-flowing rivers which attract Grey Wagtail and in some winters the 'black-bellied' race of White-throated Dipper. Mature trees within the parkland landscape are home to Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, Eurasian Nuthatch, Firecrest, Goldcrest and the continental race of Coal Tit. Depending on water levels Lac du Der can be excellent for Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes, Taiga Bean, Tundra Bean and Greater White-fronted Geese, Great Egret, Eurasian Wigeon, Smew and Common Merganser. A

Dates

TOUR A: Tuesday December 28th 2021 – Sunday January 2nd 2022

TOUR B: Wednesday December 28th 2022 – Monday January 2nd 2023

Leader: Mark Finn

Group Size: 8

Birds 90–110

few waders winter on the muddy fringes of the lakes with recent visits finding Dunlin, Green Sandpiper, Common Redshank, Common Greenshank and Eurasian Curlew. Birds of prey using the region consist mainly of Common Buzzard, Red Kite, Western Marsh and Hen Harriers, Peregrine



Common Cranes Photo: Jo Finn



Western Cattle Egret *Photo: Simon Papps*

Falcon and Merlin, while there is a chance of the rarer Rough-legged Buzzard. Lac du Der is famous for wintering Common Cranes and these may number several thousand if the weather remains mild. Etang de la Horre and Lac d'Orient are situated close to Troyes. Species we may encounter include Eurasian Bittern, Water Rail, Common Kingfisher and if we are lucky a wintering Great Grey Shrike. Open fields of the area often attract parties of Whooper and Bewick's Swans, Fieldfare and Redwing. Lac du Temple is a relatively new lake attracting White-tailed Eagle and Peregrine Falcon. Wildfowl find a safe refuge here and recent visits have seen Common Eider and Velvet Scoter occur in bad weather. Trois Fontaine is north of St Dizier and has extensive oak and beech forests that are home to Black, Middle Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Hawfinch, Brambling, Eurasian Siskin, Common Redpoll and, if we are fortunate, Northern Goshawk.

Day 6: Today we leave the region and travel back towards Reims with a stop at Lac de l'Ailette near Laon, which is a good place for wildfowl and woodland species. Ducks may include Red-crested Pochard

and Smew whilst the muddy margins attract wintering Water Pipits. The woodland is predominately oak with an understorey of hornbeam – a favourite haunt of Short-toed Treecreeper, Eurasian Nuthatch, Hawfinch and Marsh, Willow and Crested Tits. Later in the afternoon we take a flight back to the UK where the tour concludes.

Prices

Ground Price: Tour A: £1495

Tour B: £1595

Single room: £ No Charge

Deposit: £150

*Air Fare: £200

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation, meals, transport and permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, baggage charges, items of a personal nature.

* Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights