

The nature reserve : for protecting, managing, and familiarizing

What is a nature reserve ?

- * a regulatory tool which prohibits certain environmental nuisances and supervises agricultural, pastoral, forestry and leisure activities whilst ensuring their preservation,
- * a means of managing natural environments by implementing actions designed to keep them under control or restore them, by studies and by scientific monitoring,
- * an area open to the public.



For further information...

A choice of three familiarization trails and organized guided tours make it possible to explore along the river banks (Details can be obtained from local Tourist Information Offices, the Pavillon du Milieu de Loire and the Réserve Naturelle du Val de Loire Office). The Pavillon du Milieu de Loire is a museographical edifice in which the diversity and the working of the natural Ligerian environments are explained.

Classification : French Ministerial Order dated 21st November 1995.

Surface area : 1,500 hectares (3,706.5 acres) along a 19 kilometre stretch of the Loire.

French communes : La Charité-sur-Loire, Mesves-sur-Loire, Pouilly-sur-Loire and Tracy-sur-Loire in the French department of Nièvre; La Chapelle-Montinard, Herry and Couargues in the French department of Cher.

Ownership : French state 72%, French communes 3%, privately owned 25%.

Administrators :

Conservatoire des Sites Naturels Bourguignons

Tél. : 03 80 79 25 99 Website : www.sitesnaturelsbourgogne.asso.fr

The current events concerning nature in Burgundy can be found on www.bourgogne-nature.fr

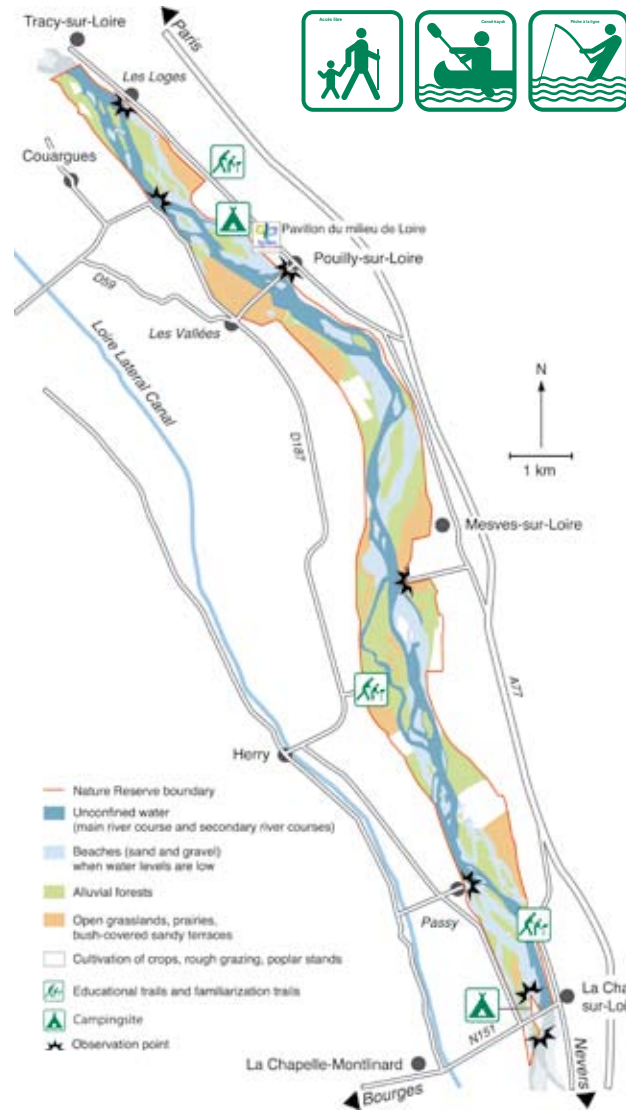
Conservatoire du Patrimoine Naturel de la Région Centre

Tél. : 02 38 77 02 72 - Website : cahiersnaturalistes.free.fr/cpnrc

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In accordance with F. Mosse - RNF



Access to the nesting sites is prohibited from April through to September in order to guarantee the reproduction of certain birds.

The French Decree is available in the prefecture, town halls or the nature reserve office for those who would like further details on the regulatory controls governing the Réserve Naturelle du Val de Loire.



Réserve Naturelle VAL DE LOIRE



common terns

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A landscaping river



Often seen as the last of the untamed European rivers, the Loire shapes the landscape from its source through to the estuary in many different ways. In the middle Loire, it will sometimes erode the banks, or

it will sometimes deposit sand, creating an island that elsewhere it will sweep away. At times of flooding, secondary courses can be created, or cut off, forming oxbows.

All of these phenomena come under the heading of "fluvial dynamics".

Hence, numerous channels are spread out between the moving sand banks and the many wooded islands.

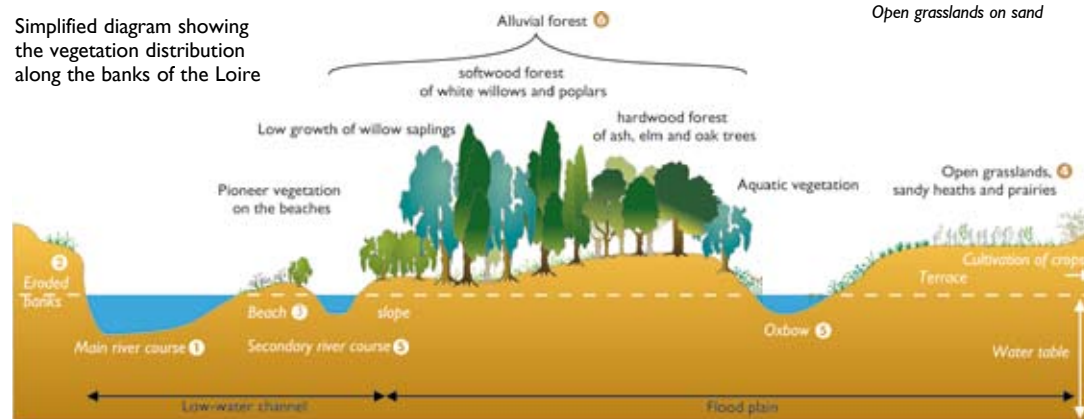
This is the heart of the Loire valley with all its islands.

A distinctive vegetation

Various types of vegetation grow on the sand deposits depending on the proximity of surface and subsurface water, and the force, frequency and duration of the flooding. The countryside changes with every step...

This mosaic of highly contrasted natural environments, subject to the constraints of the river, provides favourable living conditions for a distinctive and diversified flora and fauna which is, at times, threatened.

Simplified diagram showing the vegetation distribution along the banks of the Loire



In accordance with a diagram by J.-C. Felzines

The main river course ① is a major migratory corridor for Atlantic salmon and lamprey. In the spring, kingfishers, bank swallows and European bee-eaters hollow out the eroded banks ② to make their nests. During the migration season, sandpipers, tattlers, lpwings and plovers can be seen feeding in marshy areas.



The Loire hawkweed is the only plant that grows all the way along this river, resisting the current thanks to its powerful root system.



Open grasslands on sand

Living conditions on the banks of sand and gravel (beaches) ③ change from one extreme to another : although the beach is under water for most of the year, summer temperatures can go as high as 50°C and the ground does not hold the water. The only plants able to grow are those suited to the current and this lack of water.

Access to the beaches is prohibited during the nesting seasons as terns nest directly on the ground; their eggs and chicks being difficult to spot on the ground.

On its open grasslands and prairies, ④ coverings of moss, lichen and stonecrop characterize the poor, extremely dry, soils. The whitish corynephorus, this small member of the grass family, has thin leaves which, thus, restrict its transpiration. The grasslands and prairies on a sand bed provide an environment particularly suitable for crickets, grasshoppers and butterflies.

These environments, previously kept under control by grazing, are currently covered by sloe, dog rose, bushes and brambles which provide food, nesting places and shelter for numerous birds such as the red-backed shrike.

A natural, living mosaic

Oxbows and secondary river courses ⑤ can dry up for part of the year. Water levels permitting, pike come and spawn in the beds of aquatic grass that make up this still water environment. In winter, numerous birds find shelter here. Common fleabane grows in the sandy areas. These watery annexes play a significant role in water resource preservation.



The natterjack toad seeks damp, sandy places.

The alluvial forests ⑥ , comprising a huge variety of species, are subject to flooding. Great quantities of deadwood and miscellaneous "creepers" (vines, clematis, etc.) encourage the presence of rare insects such as the longicorn beetle. Willows and black poplars, the first to take root in the sands, make up the softwood forest. When new sand deposits raise the level of the ground, a forest of English oak, European ash and elm trees takes its place.



Alluvial forest

These forests provide nesting sites for numerous woodpeckers (great spotted, black, middle spotted, grey-headed).

Bushes resembling sharpened pencils betray the presence of the European beavers, once hunted in this area to the point of extinction. Now reintroduced and protected, they have re-colonized their former territory. By feeding on the willows and the poplars, they help keep the Ligerian landscape under control.



The rarity of certain natural environments characteristic of a river, still uncontained, and the protection status of numerous species of animals and plant life justify the existence of this protected conservation area, the "Réserve Naturelle du Val de Loire".