

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...

Visitors can explore the Loire and its environment by taking a tour on one of three nature trails, or by attending the events and activities which are regularly organised.

For more information, please

visit our Web page at www.reserves-naturelles.org/val-de-loire or contact a local Tourist Office, the Nature Reserve office or the Pavillon du Milieu de Loire, an environmental education centre located in Pouilly-sur-Loire.

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-Montlinard, Herry and Couargues in the French department of Cher.

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

Administrators:

Conservatoire d'espaces naturels de Bourgogne

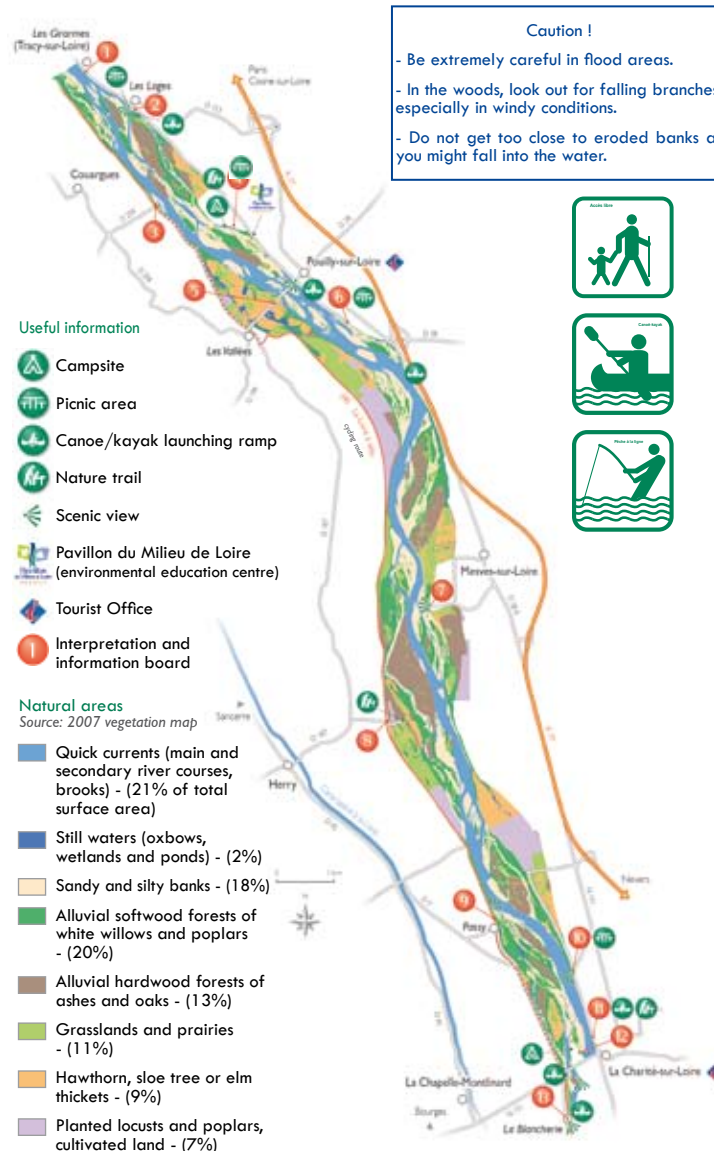
Tel.: 03 80 79 25 99 Website: www.cen-bourgogne.fr

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

Conservatoire d'espaces naturels de la région Centre

Tel.: 02 38 77 02 72 - Website: www.cen-centre.org

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Caution !

- Be extremely careful in flood areas.
- In the woods, look out for falling branches, especially in windy conditions.
- Do not get too close to eroded banks as you might fall into the water.

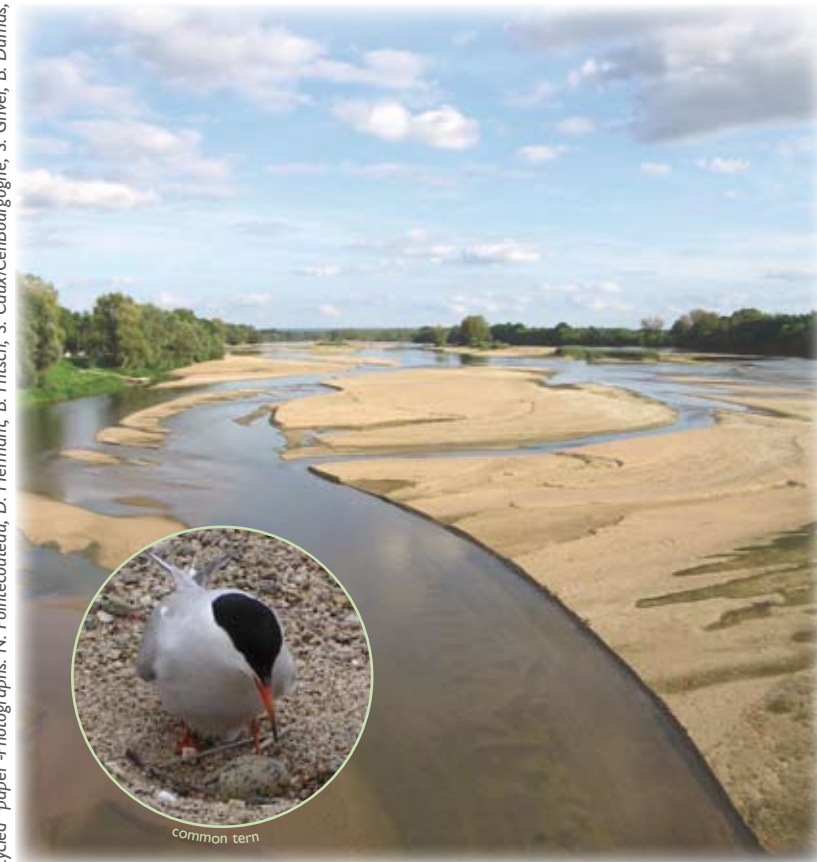


Access to the nesting sites is prohibited from April through to September in order to guarantee the reproduction of certain birds.

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



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ADMINISTRATORS:

Conservatoire d'espaces naturels de Bourgogne
Conservatoire d'espaces naturels de la région Centre



Réserve Naturelle Nationale du Val de Loire



11 bis, rue Ferdinand Gambon
58150 Pouilly sur Loire

Tel.: 03 86 39 05 10 / Fax: 03 86 39 17 67

E-mail: reservenaturelle-valde Loire@wanadoo.fr
Website: www.reserves-naturelles.org/val-de-loire

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".

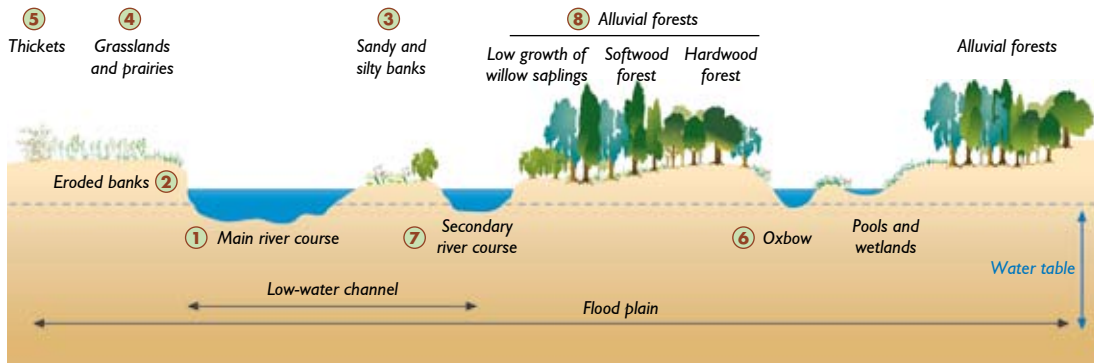
Hence, numerous channels are spread out between the moving sand banks and the many wooded islands.

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, forming an ever-changing landscape.

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.



A natural, living mosaic



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

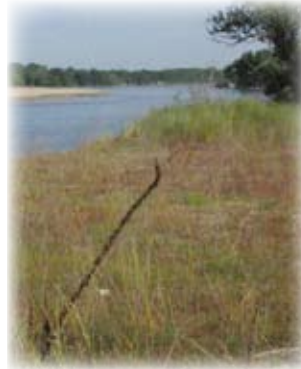
Living conditions on the banks of sand and gravel (3) (beaches) change from one extreme to another: although the beach is under water for most of the year, summer temperatures can go as high as 50°C and the ground does not hold the water. The only plants able to grow are those suited to the current and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



Common tern eggs

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.

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.



Open grasslands on sand

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.

(5) 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.

Oxbows (6) and secondary river courses (7) can dry up for part of the year. Water levels permitting, pike come and



The natterjack toad seeks damp, sandy places.

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 alluvial forests, (8) 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".