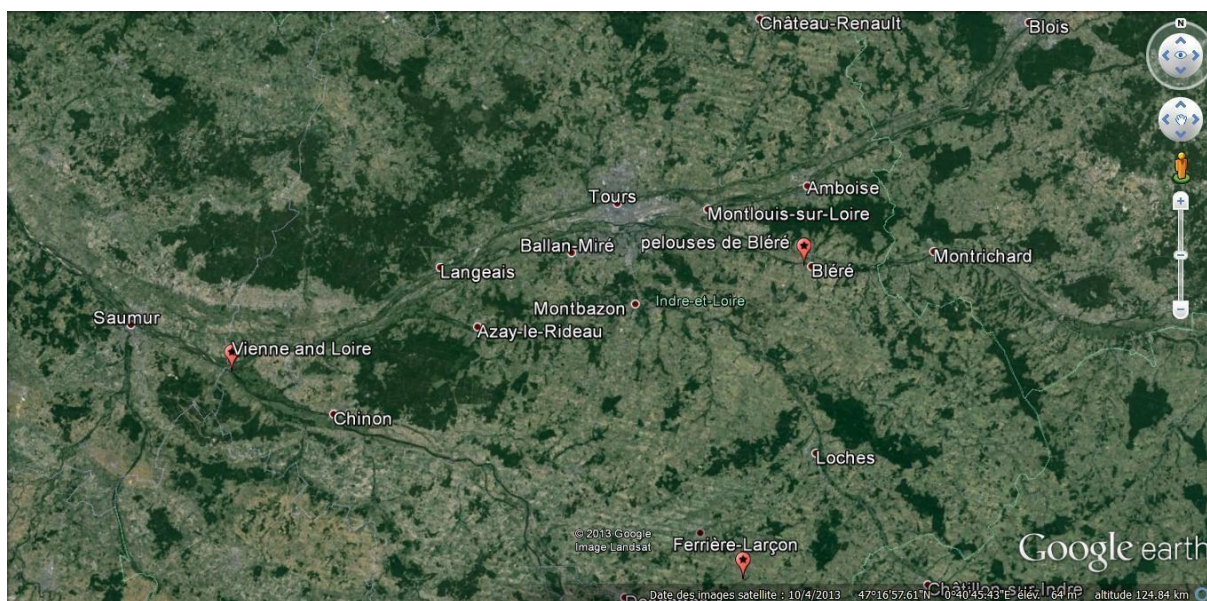




## Southern Central Loire Valley, France

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Google Southern Central Loire

### Useful References:

<http://loirenature.blogspot.fr/search/label/Butterflies> – Loire Valley Nature butterfly pages, written by Susan Walter. Far from complete, but covers the species you are going to see easily, with photos and species accounts.

The Crossbill Guide to the Loire Valley. The most useful general natural history guide to the area is the Crossbill Guide to the Loire Valley.

### Habitat and Geography:

Strictly speaking, the area covered is the southern half of the Touraine, mainly encompassed by the modern administrative département Indre et Loire (37), part of Loir et Cher (41) in the east and part of Maine et Loire (49) in the west, but these are names not everyone knows. The area covered is within the central southern boundaries of the Loire Valley in its broadest sense, ie all the rivers within the area are tributaries of the Loire and feeding into the Loire Valley system. Scattered across the area are many small villages and towns but the only city with a population over 100 000 is Tours. The area forms a triangle from Saumur in the west to Chambord in the east, and south to Tournon-Saint-Pierre (a small town south of Loches).



It is bounded on the west by Poitou- Charentes, to the east by the Brenne and to the north the great flat fields of wheat that make up the Beauce.



### Habitat

Geomorphically, it is on the southern edge of the Paris Basin, just before the land starts to rise into the Massif Central. This is lowland central France, never significantly more than 100 metres above sea level. The area is situated in the heart of western Europe, but is home to a surprisingly high level of biodiversity due to its position on the northern and eastern edge of the range of Mediterranean, Turkish and Iberian species and similarly, it is on the southern edge of the range of northern European species.

The soil is mostly calcareous, often with a high clay content, but there are many pockets of sand. The land is used for cereal, oilseed and silage farming, vineyards, many mixed farms, both cow and goat dairy herds and large areas of woodland, both deciduous broadleaf and conifer. The riparian and wetland habitats are of national importance, with numerous rivers and streams. Of particular note are the man-made fish lakes, known as étangs, the increasingly rare water meadows and most importantly, the dry limestone buttes, called éperons, which host a noteworthy assemblage of plants, including many orchids, adapted to very dry, poor, shallow, calcareous soils. There are also remnant pockets of heathland and dense besom heath scrub on woodland margins.

Species: About 110 species of butterflies have been recorded for the Southern Central Loire Valley. A species list is available [here](#); and includes flight times.

#### Selected Species: **Hesperiidae**

Dingy Skipper (*Erynnis tages*), Mallow Skipper (*Carcharodus alceae*) and Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*) can be spotted regularly in flower rich sunny grassland and vegetable gardens (potagers) where they are attracted to damp bare soil.

Large Chequered Skipper (*Heteropterus Morpheus*) is present in damp heathland and scrub. Chequered Skipper (*Carterocephalus palaemon*) and Silver-spotted Skipper (*Hesperia comma*) can be seen visiting flowers in sunny forest clearings and rides.

Large Skipper (*Ochlodes sylvanus*), Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*) and Essex Skipper (*T. lineolus*) are common and ubiquitous in open grassy areas, especially sunny flower rich banks.

#### **Papilionidae**

Scarce Swallowtail (*Iphiclides podalirius*) and Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*) common, the former being much associated with gardens and orchards, the latter is seen nectaring on flowering crops such as lucerne and at wild flowers on forest margins. Check cherry trees in orchards and gardens for caterpillars of *Iphiclides* and French Hog's-fennel (*Peucedanum gallicum*) for caterpillars of *Papilio*.



Knapweed Fritillary *Melitaea phoebe*



Swallowtail *Papilio machaon*



## **Pieridae**

Wood White (*Leptidea Sinapis*) is the only Leptidea species that occurs in the area. They are common and widespread.

Black-veined White (*Aporia crataegi*) will be extremely numerous every 2 -3 years in the early summer.

OrangeTip (*Anthocharis cardamines*) is one of the most visible early spring species.

Clouded Yellow (*Colias crocea*) is by far the most common Colias, but 2 other species are possible.

## **Lycaenidae**

Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis lucina*) – regularly seen on woodland fringes at certain sites in May, but definitely localised.

## **Hairstreaks**

Purple Hairstreak (*Favonius quercus*) and Ilex Hairstreak (*Satyrium ilicis*) easily seen, in numbers for a few weeks June/July on limestone buttes with favourite host plant Downy Oak (*Quercus pubescens*). (*F. quercus*) can also be seen in the grounds of the chateau of Chenonceau, where they use a large Holm Oak *Q. ilex* situated between the stableblock and the Orangerie. If you can get permission to access a truffle oak plantation, that would also be worth checking out.

Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*) will visit flowers of all sorts, from its various pea flower host plants growing on sunny grassy slopes to gardens with flowering shrubs.

## **Coppers**

Sooty Copper (*Lycaena tityrus*) is by far the most commonly encountered Copper.

Large Copper (*L. dispar*) has been recorded in the area, but is extremely rare.

## **Blues**

Provencal Short-tailed Blue (*Everes alcetas*) and Short-tailed Blue (*E. argiades*) are both commonly encountered in grassland and open woodland of all sorts (*E. argiades* has a preference for damper sites).

Adonis Blue (*Polyommatus bellargus*) and Chalkhill Blue (*P. coridon*) are restricted to dry calcareous sites with plentiful Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*). (*P. bellargus*) has a long flight period and can be seen from May to September, (*P. coridon*) is only around for a few weeks in July/August. Large Blue (*Phengaris arion*) is not uncommon and should be sought in rank grassland invaded by its host plant Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)



Adonis Blue *Polyommatus bellargus*



Short-tailed Blue *Everes argiades*

### **Nymphalidae Satyrinae**

Pearly Heath (*Coenonympha arcania*) is common in early summer on the dry limestone buttes where the slopes are being invaded by Juniper (*Juniperus communis*).

Great Banded Grayling (*Brintesia circe*) emerges in numbers in late summer.

### **Apaturinae**

Lesser Purple Emperor (*Apatura ilia*) can be seen in forests and large gardens (the French tolerance of dog faeces on paths does have its uses...).

### **Fritillaries**

Weaver's Fritillary (*Boloria dia*) is by far the most abundant species of Fritillary. It also has the longest flight season, having 2 -3 generations from April to October, and can be found in numbers anywhere its host plants Violets (*Viola*) ssp grow.



Weavers Fritillary *Boloria dia*

Ilex Hairstreak *Satyrium ilicis*

Silver-washed Fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*), Queen of Spain (*Issoria lathonia*), Glanville Fritillary (*Melitaea cinxia*) and Knapweed Fritillary (*M. phoebe*) are also common.

The two Pearl-bordered species (*B. selene*) and (*B. euphrosyne*) have both been recorded in the area, but seem to be very uncommon, presumably supplanted by (*B. dia*).

Heath Fritillary (*Mellicta athalia*) can be abundant, but has a very limited flight period of just a few weeks in June.

Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*) may be seen in damp meadows.

### **Limenitinae**

Southern White Admiral (*Limenitis reducta*) is common and widespread, and can be seen in gardens or wooded areas – anywhere its host plants Honeysuckles (*Lonicera*) spp occur.

White Admiral (*L. Camilla*) is much more restricted to forested areas.

### **Nymphalinae**

Camberwell Beauty (*Nymphalis antiopa*) can be encountered from time to time near mature trees. Map (*Araschnia levana*) is abundant most years, favouring the vegetation close to rivers and other watercourses.



### **Selected Sites**

The Creuse, Vienne, Indre and Claise river valleys and their tributaries, particularly the water meadows associated with the bigger rivers near Chinon, Loches, the confluence of the Loire and the Vienne, from Avoine to Candes.

The limestone buttes along the Creuse, Vienne and the Claise and their tributaries eg the Eperon de Murat at Ferrière-Larçon or les Puys du Chinonais.

Dry calcareous grassland and juniper scrub eg les pelouses de Bléré, les pelouses de Bertignolles.

The ancient hunting forests, mixed broadleaf forests, dominated by Oak *Quercus robur*, with many rides and forest trails eg the Forêt Royale de Loches, the Forêt de Preuilley