

FRANCE: BIRDS & ART IN BURGUNDY

APRIL 30 – MAY 9, 2021

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Saint-Bénigne is just one of the fine medieval churches of Dijon, the historic city that serves as the base for our tour. Photo: Rick Wright

For well over a thousand years, Europe's major pilgrimage routes have crossed the gentle hills and rolling fields of Burgundy. Six centuries ago, this rich and fertile duchy watered by the mighty Saône River was the site of bitter, often fatal contention between the French, the Burgundians, and the Flemish.

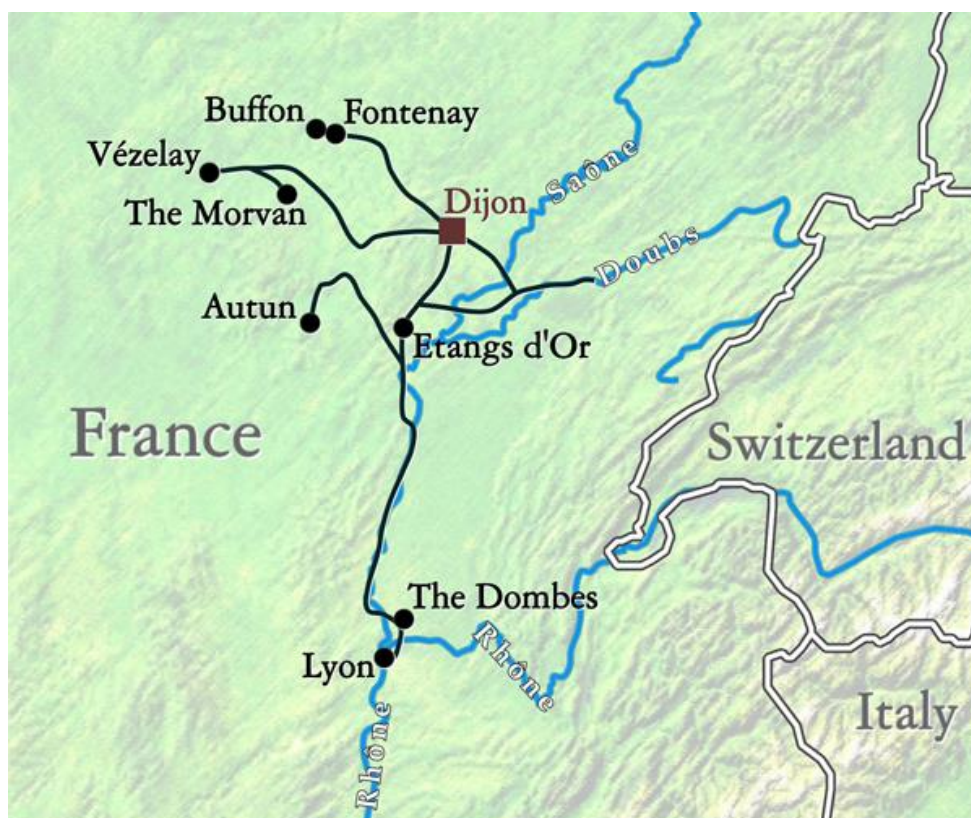
In the autumn of the Middle Ages, the splendor of Burgundy's ducal court was outshone only by the wealth of its ancient churches. The cumulative result is a cultural landscape unmatched anywhere in Europe, with palaces, cathedrals, and imposing castles seemingly around every corner.

Burgundy also occupies a very special place in the history of ornithology: It was in Montbard that Buffon, the greatest of Enlightenment natural historians, composed most of the thirty-six volumes of his monumental encyclopedia.

Our base for this relaxed tour is the charming and compact city of Dijon, with its captivating mix of beautifully preserved medieval monuments and elegant eighteenth-century townhouses.

From Dijon, it is a comfortable drive to the famous architectural masterpieces of Autun and Vézelay, while forests, ponds, and field edges provide summer homes to a good variety of nesting birds.

We will be based in a single hotel for the entire tour. The easy-going atmosphere, fine food, and, of course, renowned wines make the days in Burgundy fly by for birders and non-birders alike.



April 30-May 1, Days 1-2: Departure from home and arrival in Dijon. Most flights from the United States will depart on Day 1, arriving in France the following morning. Dijon is well served by trains departing from Paris's principal train station, the Gare de Lyon; there are also a very few (and not always conveniently timed) non-stop TGV trains from the airport station at Roissy-Charles-de-Gaulle (CDG). Our hotel is a five-minute taxi ride from the Dijon station. Private services offer transfers by car and van from CDG (typically about three hours) and from Lyon's St-Exupéry airport (LYS) (typically about two hours).

Some participants may wish to arrive early to avoid difficulties with the time change or to spend additional time in Dijon or elsewhere in France. On request, the VENT office will be happy to assist early arrivals with hotel and airport transfer arrangements.

NIGHT (Day 1): In transit (overnight flight)

NIGHT (Day 2): Hôtel des Ducs, Dijon

May 2, Day 3: The Etangs d'Or and Dijon. Early risers can join an optional excursion to the shallow lakes and woodlands of the Etangs d'Or, a bit less than an hour from Dijon. Later in the summer, this area is overrun by human swimmers and splashers, but at this season we are likely to have the easy trails nearly to ourselves, with only the occasional fisherman to return our greetings. In addition to a wide range of migrants and residents on fields and in hedges, we will be looking especially for such classic wetland species as Little Bittern, Common Kingfisher, Penduline Tit, and Reed Bunting. Irregularly distributed and usually somewhat shy, Bearded Reedling is possible here and at several other sites on our itinerary.



Claus Sluter's tombs for the Dukes of Burgundy are among the most famous pieces of Gothic art in the world. © Rick Wright

Back in the city, we will have a brief break, then meet up with the not-so-early risers to spend the rest of the day getting to know the delights of Dijon, our home base for the tour. The *Parcours de la Chouette*, a walking route accompanied by a delightful booklet in English, takes us through the medieval city and past traditional small shops and restaurants, one of which will provide us with a leisurely lunch.

One of our first stops will be the cathedral of St-Bénigne, named for a local saint who is said to be entombed in the church's spectacular Romanesque crypt. We will also pay a visit to the ducal palace and its Musée des Beaux Arts, whose rich collections include countless masterpieces of painting and sculpture, among them the deeply moving *plorants* carved by Claus Sluter for the tomb of Philip the Bold.

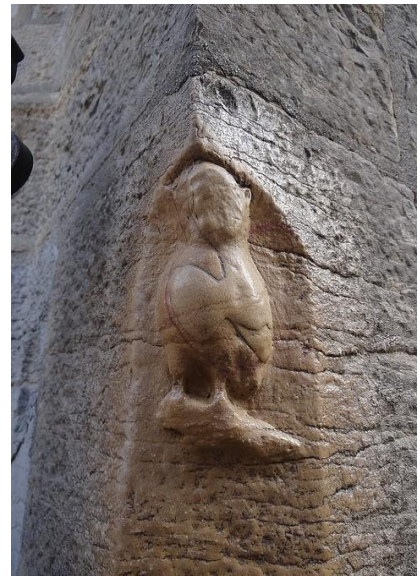
We can hope to see such typical city birds as Wood Pigeon, Serin, and Greenfinch along our route, and we will make a point of paying our respects at some point to Dijon's "chouette," the sculpture of a scops owl on the exterior of the handsome Gothic church of Notre-Dame. Tradition has it that touching the owl with one's left hand brings good luck—as a result, the sculpture is now almost smooth.

NIGHT: Hôtel des Ducs, Dijon

May 3, Day 4: The Morvan and Vézelay. Just southwest of Dijon, the forested hills of the Morvan rise from the gentle farmlands of Burgundy. It was in these still wild woodlands that the French Resistance sought safety during the German occupation, and the Morvannais are still justly proud of their reputation for a fierce independent streak.

Much of the Morvan is now a regional natural park. We will take a short, easy walk around the park headquarters in search of such captivating residents as Blue Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, and Hawfinch. As the morning warms, raptors will rise into the sky; among the nesting species in the Morvan are Red Kite, Northern Goshawk, and Honey Buzzard.

Afternoon will find us walking the steep streets of Vézelay, site of the grandest structure in all of Burgundy, the twelfth-century abbey church of the Magdalene. The interior—high, bright, and perfectly proportioned—is a marvel of Romanesque architecture; the eighty historiated capitals in the naves and narthex are equally stunning.



Five centuries of affection (and the occasional vandalism) has left Dijon's beloved "chouette" barely recognizable as a tiny eared owl. © Rick Wright

France: Birds & Art in Burgundy, Page 4

Still an important pilgrimage site on the road to Compostela, Vézelay has a rich political past, too: in 1146, St. Bernard preached the Second Crusade here, and twenty years later, the exiled Thomas Becket railed at King Henry from the pulpit.

NIGHT: Hôtel des Ducs, Dijon



The somber appearance of the male Blackcap belies his estimable skills as a singer, to many ears excelling even the Nightingale as the most beautiful voice among European birds. © Rick Wright

May 4, Day 5: The Lower Doubs. As the river Doubs crosses Burgundy on its way to the Saône, its waters slow and its course meanders, creating sandbars, gravel islands, and quiet shallows that attract an impressive array of nesting birds, from Little Ringed Plover to Blue-headed Wagtail. Common Kingfishers breed in the steep banks, while damp fields are the home of Yellowhammers and White Wagtails. Little and Great Crested Grebes build their floating nests on the oxbows, and Little Egrets and Gray Herons hunt the shallows.

We'll spend the entire morning along the river, then have a late lunch nearby before returning to Dijon, where we should have time to continue our explorations of the city at our leisure before convening for dinner.



Little Egrets are often the commonest heron on the roadsides and marshes of Burgundy. © Rick Wright

Night: Hôtel des Ducs, Dijon



The sometimes elusive European Bee-eater is a colorful summer resident of open river lowlands. © Rick Wright

May 5, Day 6: Buffon and Fontenay. The reputation of Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, has risen and fallen and risen again since his death on the eve of the French Revolution. Hailed during his lifetime as one of the finest prose stylists France ever produced, he was equally honored as an intellectual, and no less a figure than Rousseau admiringly quotes Buffon's *Natural History* some 50 times. With the professionalization of science in the nineteenth century, Buffon's stock fell, and for much of the twentieth century, academic zoology dismissed him as simply a compiler with a good turn of phrase. Today, he is once again recognized as an innovator who anticipated many of the modern views of the relationship between organisms and their environment.

For almost 50 years, Buffon held the prestigious position of intendant of the royal collections in Paris, but he much preferred working at his castle in Montbard, where he wrote and conducted experiments in fields from metallurgy to probability theory. We will pay our respects by searching the small park that now occupies the site for descendants of the Great Tits, Chaffinches, and Rooks once watched by the father of Enlightenment natural history.



The lovely cloister of Fontenay is as peaceful today as it was 850 years ago. © Rick Wright

Two miles away is Fontenay, the oldest surviving Cistercian abbey in the world. Founded by St. Bernard on land donated by his uncle, the twelfth-century complex preserves the monks' dormitory, scriptorium, bakery, and church, the most striking Romanesque ensemble in France. For centuries, the monks ran a forge here, and the local forests were cut down for their wood; today, the trees have regrown, and the silence of the setting is broken only by the songs of nightingales, cuckoos, and other forest birds.

We will return to Dijon in time for a short break before dinner.

NIGHT: Hôtel des Ducs, Dijon

May 6, Day 7: The Etangs d'Or II and the Archaeology Museum. At this time of year, bird populations shift quickly and unpredictably, and no two days at a site like the Etangs d'Or are ever the same. Those who wish can pay another early morning visit to the ponds and fields here, while others are welcome to make a more leisurely start into the day.



Autun. © Rick Wright

We will all have lunch together back in Dijon, then visit the Archaeology Museum, housed in the former abbey of St-Bénigne, just a few blocks from our hotel. Up to this point, like most visitors to the city, our attention will have been chiefly to the artistic and architectural riches left from the days of the Burgundian dukes—but as the exhibits here remind us, this region has been the site of complex cultures for some thousands of years. Bronze Age jewelry, Greek coins and medals, and votive statues from the Roman period all serve to fill in the historic (and prehistoric) picture of one of Europe's most ancient landscapes.

NIGHT: Hôtel des Ducs, Dijon

May 7, Day 8: Jardin de l'Arquebuse and Autun. We'll start the day with the 15-minute walk to Dijon's botanical garden, the Jardin de l'Arquebuse, where formal plantings alternate with shaded ponds and century-old trees. If conditions are just right, we could encounter small numbers of migrants alongside the usual city birds, but even if not, this urban oasis is one of the most charming spots in a charming city.

We'll continue with an hour-and-a-half drive to the ancient Roman city of Autun, where in the mid-twelfth century the greatest sculptor of his age, Gislebertus, was engaged to decorate the new cathedral of St-Lazare. The extravagant dynamism and range of expression in Gislebertus's work make the west front and the capitals of the nave and chapter house some of the most startlingly original in any Romanesque church. After lunch we plan a brief visit to Autun's Musée Rolin, where Gislebertus's languid Eve, one of the very few large-scale female nudes produced in the period, is the undisputed highlight.

NIGHT: Hôtel des Ducs, Dijon

May 8, Day 9: The Lower Doubs River II and Dijon.

An optional early morning excursion will take us back to the pastures and gravel bars of the Doubs. If the weather is good and the birding productive, we will plan on spending the entire morning checking several new spots along the river, hoping to luck into such unpredictable birds as European Bee-eaters, Hoopoes, or Eurasian Thick-knees; somewhat more reliable are Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, and Gray Heron.

We will reassemble in Dijon for lunch, then have the rest of the afternoon free before we meet for a final dinner together in one of our favorite restaurants.

NIGHT: Hôtel des Ducs, Dijon



The Doubs River at Lays. © Rick Wright

May 9, Day 10: Departures. You can arrange your departure from Dijon for any time today.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements, and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Rick Wright and Alison Beringer



Rick Wright is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages. Among Rick's recent books are the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey* and the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of Arizona*; his *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows* was published in 2019. Especially

interested in the history and culture of birding, he is hard at work on a study of hummingbird collecting in France from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Rick lives in northern New Jersey with his wife, Alison Beringer; their little girl, Avril; and their chocolate lab, Gellert.



Marco Valtriani holds a degree in biology with an ornithology major from the University of Pisa; his thesis was on the ecology of the Dunlin in the Mediterranean basin. A passionate hiker, birder, and field researcher, Marco has spent years exploring wild areas around the world, from France to Nepal, Syria, and Venezuela. He is a licensed private guide and tour planner, creating and leading itineraries for international conservation organizations, schools, and private travelers. Marco specializes in the natural and cultural history of the Mediterranean, above all his native Italy. He is the author of numerous scientific papers and popular articles on the birds and natural landscapes of central Italy, and has co-authored guides to Tuscany's natural habitats, trails, and wildlife.

Marco lives with his family in Arezzo, where he devotes his free time to exploring new natural sites and discovering new aspects of familiar localities.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$4090** per person in double occupancy from Lyon. This includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 2 to dinner on Day 9, all lodging and ground transportation as stated in the itinerary, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare and transfers from your home to Dijon and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$395**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa, American Express), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (November 30, 2020) prior to the tour departure date.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also apply to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For your protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If you cancel:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing. This policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Resolutions as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™**. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most highly regarded travel insurance programs available.

Critical benefits of **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance** include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available but must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause (must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit). Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordrescuetravelinsurance.com/ventbird; or click the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. ***Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

BAGGAGE: The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. **Please consult your airline to determine specific weight restrictions.** Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government’s attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

Our vehicles will be comfortable for our daily excursions, but space for bags may be tight. As we will be making the transfer to and from our hotel as a group, please limit your baggage to one piece of luggage and one smaller carry-on or daypack. Soft-sided luggage is recommended.

CLOTHING: The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple of pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable in the field. On our visits to restaurants, churches, and museums, neater but still informal clothing will be best.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela’s and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular.
- **Shirts:** Several comfortable long-sleeved shirts in styles suitable for warm weather or for layering under a sweater or jacket; short sleeves may work for the evenings in Dijon, though at this season even the warmest days turn cool after sunset.
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** We expect mostly warm weather on this trip, but a sweater, fleece, or light coat will definitely be useful for cool mornings and evenings. You should also bring a warmer water-repellent jacket in case of rain.

FOOTWEAR: We recommend a good trail-walking shoe or light hiking boot when in the field. Athletic shoes are acceptable, but will not keep your feet dry in rain or mud. A lighter-weight walking shoe may be preferred when not in the field and for evenings in Dijon.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available in Dijon, but it is always best to bring enough clothes to get you through the entire tour.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with the proper equipment. There is almost nothing that cannot be purchased in Dijon, but you will find it most convenient to bring from home.

- Small daypack for extra clothing, books, supplies, and optics.
- Notebook and pencils.
- Alarm clock.
- Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection and high-SPF sunscreen.
- Lip balm and lotions.
- Cameras, lenses, extra batteries, and memory cards (not always conveniently available in Dijon, oddly).
- Telescoping walking stick – highly recommended for those who have trouble walking.
- Pocket packages of tissues.

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 binoculars. Do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Your tour leaders will have a scope available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Scopes will be most useful along the Doubs and at the Etangs d’Or; they will be less helpful in the habitats we will be birding on other days.

OTHER ITEMS : Bring your favorite field guide. We recommend the second edition of *Birds of Europe* by Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney, and Dan Zetterström. If you bring another guide, it should be in addition to, rather than instead of, Svensson et al.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: xxx is a changeable month in central France, but we can hope for pleasantly warm, with highs reaching into the upper xxx F and lows unlikely to go below x0. Rain is possible at any time, but rarely lasts more than a few hours or a day at this time of year; our schedule is flexible enough to accommodate being rained out of one or the other of our destinations.

A rain jacket is essential; that jacket can be layered over a shirt or sweater in the cool of early morning and evening. Light gloves can also keep you comfortable (and are useful deterrents should we unexpectedly encounter any biting insects). Water-resistant hiking shoes or boots are best for our birding expeditions; in the city, lighter-weight shoes will be more comfortable. A sun hat is essential for both our time afield and our strolls in Dijon and other towns.

French birders wear the same clothing as American birders in the field. For our visits to museums, churches, and restaurants, you will be most comfortable in neat, but still informal, attire.

CONDITIONS: Our days will be full, but our pace will always be easy and relaxed. Some of our activities are optional, and it is always possible to simply take the day off to enjoy Dijon on your own if you’d like. While we are birding, our walking will be restricted to paths and roadsides, and we are not likely to walk more than a mile at a time; all of our walking will be at a slow pace. Towns and villages often have uneven pavement.

The physical demands of this trip are light to moderate, but please bear in mind that our visits to museums, churches, and other monuments may require a moderate amount of walking and standing. We emphasize that you will not be subjected to physical demands beyond your capabilities.

Special note: This tour offers experiences with the natural history and the architecture, culture, and art of one of Europe's richest historical landscapes. It is neither a birding itinerary exclusively nor entirely a cultural excursion, but combines the two in ways that seek to do justice to the human and natural complexity of this region. Anyone considering this trip should strongly consider these points before registering.

Though we will be visiting many of what we consider the most important and most interesting sites in Burgundy, there is very much more to see than can be covered on a short trip. Participants with an interest in enjoying more of Burgundy or other regions should come early or stay on after the end of the tour.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS - A passport valid for at least six months after your return from the tour is required. If your passport expires earlier than that, you must get it renewed. Also make certain that you have at least one empty page in your passport for stamps.

If you need to obtain or renew a passport or request extra pages, you should apply well in advance of your trip departure. Passports can be expedited for an additional fee. In the United States, you can apply for a passport or renewal at passport offices, most post offices, and county clerk's offices. You can also visit www.state.gov/travel for information about obtaining and renewing passports.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport and keep the copies in a safe place so that you have proof of identification if your passport is lost. Your passport should be signed and easily accessible at all times. You will need it to check in at airports and to clear immigration controls in France, so **do not pack your passport in your checked luggage**.

VISAS – As of June 2020, citizens of the United States and Canada do not need a visa to enter France. Citizens of other countries should check with their local French consulate or embassy.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your tour payment includes most necessary expenses while you are in France. You will need cash to cover such personal expenses as taxi rides, gifts, laundry, gratuities, and snacks and meals on your own. It is best to carry small bills, as some of the places we visit may not be able to change larger denominations.

The official currency in France is the euro; US dollars are not accepted anywhere in the country. You can see the current exchange rate at www.xe.com. You can order euros through your bank before leaving home, or withdraw them from ATMs at the airport or in towns. Please ask your bank or credit card issuer about the use of your ATM and credit cards abroad.

ELECTRICITY: Electrical current in France is 220V; outlets accept two round prongs. Most of the newer electronic devices can run on 220V, but if you have items that do not, you will need a step-down transformer in addition to a plug adapter of Europlug Type C or Schuko type F.

LANGUAGE: French is the language of Burgundy; younger people and people in the cities also generally speak good English. Our hotel staff is fluent in English.

TIME: France is on Central European Time, which is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Time and 9 hours ahead of Pacific Time.

HEALTH: As of June 2019, no major shots or inoculations are required for entry into France. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with the “routine vaccines,” including influenza, chickenpox (varicella), polio, measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), and diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT). Some health care professional also considers inoculations against hepatitis types A and B standard.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

Those who are not fit for light to moderate physical activity, including those with physical disabilities that affect mobility and balance, heart or immune deficiencies, or other conditions associated with poor health, are advised not to join the trip. **Comprehensive optional travel insurance is available and recommended. This coverage is available through your trip cancellation policy if purchased from Travel Insured International. Please consult your insurance agent or existing policy for the terms and limitations of your existing coverage. Refer to the section on Trip Cancellation Insurance.**

Sun exposure – Prolonged exposure to the sun’s ultraviolet rays’ damages eyes and skin. Protect your skin, lips, eyes, nose, and ears whenever you are outdoors. We strongly recommend the use of high-SPF sunscreen and lip balm, along with ultraviolet-blocking, polarized sunglasses. Severe sunburn is very painful and will affect your enjoyment of the trip.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636), or you can check the website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and, for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Birds

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. 2nd ed. Princeton UP, 2009.

Mammals

MacDonald, David and Priscilla Barrett. *Mammals of Europe*. Princeton UP, 1993.

Odonates

Dijkstra, K., and R. Lewington. *Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Britain and Europe*. British Wildlife Publishing, 2006.

Butterflies

Tolman, T., and R. Lewington. *Collins Butterfly Guide*. HarperCollins, 2009.

History, Art, Architecture

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TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

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