



boat trip or
ferry crossing



car route



bicycle route



walking route



beautiful
scenery



interesting
history



interesting
geology

About this guide

This guide is meant for all those who enjoy being in and learning about nature, whether you already know all about it or not. It is set up a little differently from most guides. We focus on explaining the natural and ecological features of an area rather than merely describing the site. We choose this approach because the nature of an area is more interesting, enjoyable and valuable when seen in the context of its complex relationships. The interplay of different species with each other and with their environment is simply mind-blowing. The clever tricks and gimmicks that are put to use to beat life's challenges are as fascinating as they are countless.

Take our namesake the Crossbill: at first glance it's just a big finch with an awkward bill. But there is more to the Crossbill than meets the eye. This bill is beautifully adapted for life in coniferous forests. It is used like a scissor to cut open pinecones and eat the seeds that are unobtainable for other birds. In the Scandinavian countries where pine and spruce take up the greater part of the forests, several Crossbill species have each managed to answer two of life's most pressing questions: how to get food and how to avoid direct competition. By evolving crossed bills, each differing subtly, they have secured a monopoly of the seeds produced by cones of varying sizes. So complex is this relationship that scientists are still debating exactly how many different species of Crossbill actually exist. Now this should heighten the appreciation of what at first glance was merely a plumb red bird with a beak that doesn't seem to fit properly. Once its interrelationships are seen, nature comes alive, wherever you are.

To some, impressed by the "virtual" familiarity that television has granted to the wilderness of the Amazon, the vastness of the Serengeti or the sublimity of Yellowstone, European nature may seem a puny surrogate, good merely for the casual stroll. In short, the argument seems to be that if you haven't seen some impressive predator, be it a Jaguar, Lion or Grizzly Bear, then you haven't seen the "real thing". Nonsense, of course.

But where to go? And how? What is there to see? That is where this guide comes in. We describe the how, the why, the when, the where and the how come of Europe's most beautiful areas. In clear and accessible language, we explain the nature of Dordogne and refer extensively to routes where the area's features can be observed best. We try to make Dordogne come alive. We hope that we succeed.

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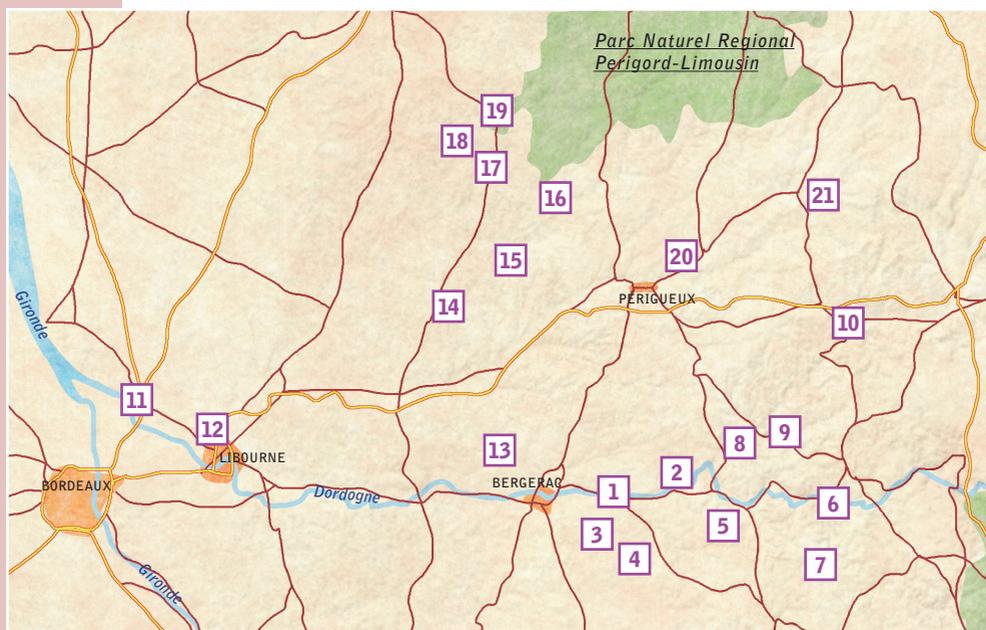
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Geographical overview

Dordogne lies in the heart of south-west France. The terrain is generally hilly and cut through by the main valleys which run westward towards the sea. Much of the area lies between 150 and 250 metres, dropping down to below 10 metres in the south-west along the Dordogne valley and rising up to nearly 500 metres in the extreme north-east towards Limousin. Eastward lies the Massif Central, a land of ancient eroded volcanoes and the source of the River Dordogne. To the south the Aquitaine Basin spreads out for over 200 kilometres across largely rolling agricultural land towards the foothills of the Pyrenees, the source of the Garonne river which flows north to join the Dordogne near Bordeaux. To the north-west are the cereal growing plains of the Poitou-Charentes region.

Our region covers nearly 150 kms of the central section of the Dordogne valley from west to east, starting around Libourne and ending near Souillac. In addition this guide covers a further 120 kms north to south including the larger tributary rivers on the northern side of the

Overview of Dordogne with the location of the numbered routes that feature from page 124 onwards.

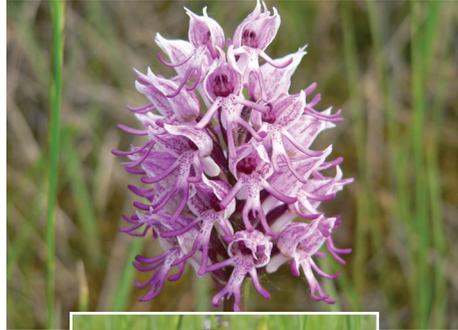


and localised, but hosts such rare species as Meadow Orchid* (*Anacamptis palustris*), Marsh Helleborine, Short-spurred Fragrant and Robust Marsh Orchids. Most sites for these species are in the south-east of the region, while these habitats are also the haunts of the commoner Loose-flowered and Early Marsh Orchids in Dordogne. Heath Spotted Orchid is one of the very few orchids to grow on more acid ground, especially the subspecies *ericetorum*, which is found in the Double and Bessède Forests.

All the above (except Mirror Orchid) are either common and widespread or occur in good numbers locally in suitable habitat. There are a number of species though, that are quite rare. Summer Lady's-tresses for example, is found at less than five sites today, as is the Frog Orchid, which is well-camouflaged and therefore difficult to find! Other rarities are Fragrant Bug Orchid, which has probably just one site in a well-protected place near Bergerac. Considered as extinct in Dordogne since 1989, Heart-flowered Tongue Orchid was rediscovered in Isle valley 2006. This site isn't protected and so its future is uncertain. On an orchid hunt you never quite know what will turn up!

Limestone or *causse* grasslands

Dordogne has a largely limestone geology with wild limestone grasslands, a typical habitat and one that is very rich in wildflowers. The hills around Faux, Verteillac, Paussac, Daglan, Condat and Argentine are just a few examples. In spring these warm dry places are colourful and you can find many sub-Mediterranean species set amidst



Just a few of the many orchids of Dordogne: Monkey Orchid (top), Long-lipped Tongue Orchid (centre) and Lesser Butterfly Orchid (bottom).



Stone Curlew are well-camouflaged especially when crouched down in a field. However sometimes the large yellow staring eye shows up (top). The Hen Harrier looks like a butterfly, when it twists and turns to drop on prey (bottom).

Stone Curlew is another bird of dry *causeuse* and pastures that almost disappeared from the region. Fortunately, it has adapted to the changing environment and seems to be making a recovery. You can't miss the Corn Bunting when it is singing in the open on the top of a tree or on a wire. Though much less common, the Woodchat Shrike also inhabits hedges amongst fields. In the extreme south of the department on the *Causse de Daglan* you may be lucky enough to observe the Subalpine Warbler in summer on Common Juniper dominated *causeuse*. This Mediterranean species is present in nearby Lot-et-Garonne and it seems to be expanding its territory northwards. The Western Orphean Warbler has been recorded occasionally in warm dry bushy places, even nesting on the Plateau de Faux not so long ago.

Around hamlets, a variety of habitats create an interesting mosaic. On a fine spring morning, birds are everywhere! Hoopoe, Common Redstart, Black Redstart, White Wagtail and Tree Sparrow (especially near rivers)

where they are easier to spot. The Hobby, an agile and graceful bird of prey often associated with small wetlands where they frequently prey on dragonflies and small birds, can also be found in the open habitats on the plateaux and in the valleys.

Quail and Red-legged Partridge use farmland with hedges whereas Skylark and Zitting Cisticola live in cultivated open fields and in the case of the former sometimes on limestone plateaux. The

the rare Black, Sloe and Brown Hairstreaks. Grassland patches amongst the scrub are a good place to search for Duke of Burgundy in spring and late summer.

Marshlands are host to some notable scarce species like Large Copper, False Heath and Lesser Marbled Fritillaries, Scarce Large Blue and Alcon Blue as well as commoner ones like the Marsh Fritillary (also found on dry grasslands) which has European-wide protection.

Particularly in damp heathland look out for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary but also Chequered Skipper in spring and the darker Large Chequered Skipper (also in alkaline fens) with its funny bouncy flight, which flies in mid summer.

At a few sites, notably in the Double forest, you can find a great European rarity: the False Ringlet. It is found amongst the Purple Moor-grass.

Although woodlands and forest don't support the most diverse range of butterflies, they are the place to find some of

Dordogne's most charismatic species. In early spring, Large Tortoiseshells come out of hibernation and bask in the spring sunshine and are often quite easy to find. The most attractive species, however, occur in summer. Two white admiral species and two purple emperors species are possible in summer and several big fritillaries including High Brown can be common. All of them are large, stunningly beautiful and gracious as they drift by amongst a sun-drenched forest on a fine summer's morning. The two white admiral species patrol forest edges, with Southern White Admiral being the commonest. The emperors frequent poplars and willows (hence they are often found around river valleys) with Lesser Purple Emperor much the commoner species. Both emperors have the peculiar habit of coming down to take nutrients from animal scats. The males are gorgeous with their flashing purple iridescent wings and it's preferred



High Brown Fritillary basking in a meadow (top). These large fritillaries worship the sun and disappear high up into surrounding trees when clouds arrive.

Knapweed Fritillaries indulge in a spot of display ballet (bottom)!

Route 6: River Dordogne from Beynac to Groléjac

FULL DAY, 21 KM
EASY, ONE WAY

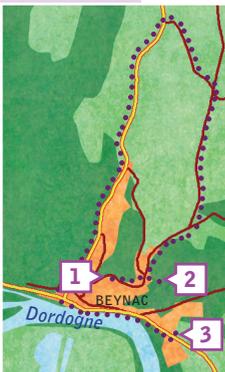
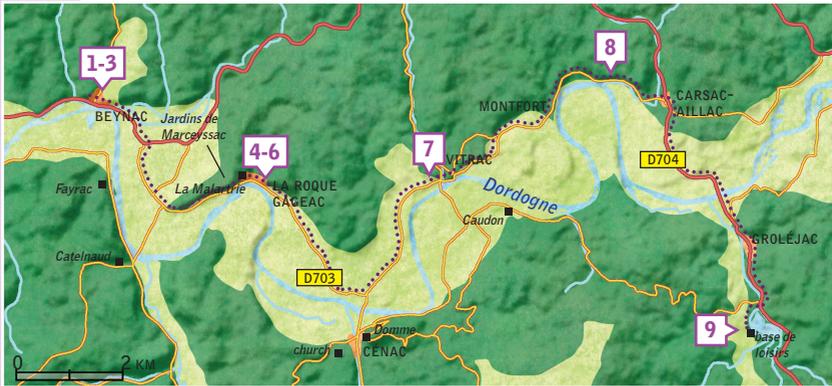


Iconic Dordogne landscape with chateaux, the majestic valley and sweeping meanders of the great River Dordogne.



Habitats river, stream, islands, riverine woodland, cliff, holm oak woodland, fen, lake, cultivated land, village

Selected species Robust Marsh Orchid, Peregrine, Eagle Owl, Crag Martin, Firecrest, Bonelli's Warbler, Alpine Swift, Alpine Accentor (winter), Wallcreeper (winter), Otter, Genet, Cleopatra, Brilliant Emerald, Marsh Fritillary



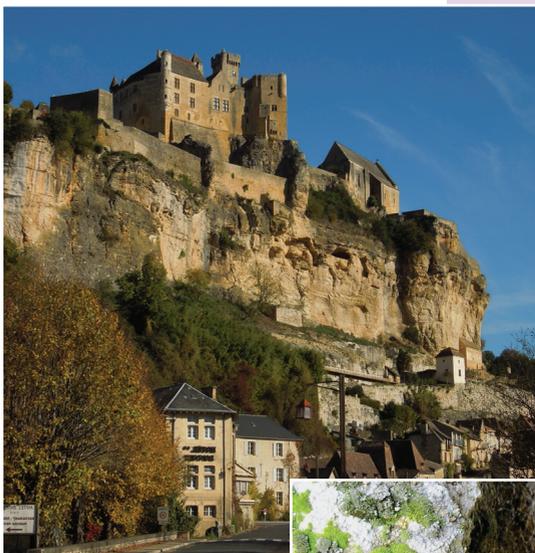
This route cuts through classic Dordogne landscape. It starts with ancient chateaux and villages set amongst spectacular cliffs and includes beautiful stretches of river edged with Holm Oak forest before finishing at a marshy wooded tributary stream. Along the way you will see cliff, forest and riverside birds (including in winter the possibility of Wallcreeper and Alpine Accentor) and have a chance to look for signs of rare mammals whilst exploring an interesting marshland flora and fauna. Furthermore, you have the opportunity to visit two of 'Les Plus Jolis Villages de France' and to savour their wonderful atmosphere, steeped in history.

Starting Point Chateau de Beynac car park (small fee). Walk towards the chateau entrance but instead of going inside, take the cobbled path to the right beneath the massive walls, which leads to the ramparts and village. Rather than following it downhill, take the left fork which rises a little. Proceed under the portcullis and continue on the path to the chapel and viewpoint.

1 Crag Martins often accompany you on this walk in summer. The viewpoint looks south-westward down the river which braids into several channels, creating islands and backwaters. Grey Herons nest in the island trees and are active in spring. In winter (November to March) Alpine Accentor and Wallcreeper frequent the chateau buildings and cliffs. If you fail to see them outside the chateau it is worth paying the small entrance fee to search inside and to enjoy the wonderfully restored chateau and views.

Return back to the chateau entrance and walk straight on through the upper village street. As you emerge into a little square turn right and take a short walk to another viewpoint looking south-eastward along the river.

2 The wall has an interesting mix of ferns including Rusty-back, Maidenhair Spleenwort and various polypodies. This is often a warm sunny corner in summer with a Mediterranean 'feel' backed by Holm Oak woodland where warmth-loving shrubs like Montpellier Maple, Turpentine Tree, Box and Mediterranean Buckthorn can be found. Butterflies such as Cleopatra are regular in summer. In autumn, look for Wild Cyclamen in the gardens.



Beynac chateau set atop the limestone cliffs high above the village (top). The Wallcreeper is a winter visitor here. Look for the flicking wing movement as it moves up the cliff face (bottom).

Two tree climbing snakes that occur in the Dronne Valley. The Western Whip Snake grows up to 150 cm in length and has a pattern of irregular and broken dark green bands on a creamy-yellow background (top). The Aesculapian Snake is plainer and probably the more arboreal of these two species (bottom).

The south side of the valley is perhaps less interesting for wildlife, but there are few good sites with wildflowers at Saint Sulpice de Roumagnac and Saint Pardoux de Drôme. To go to the best one, head south on the D104 from St Méard de Drôme and after a couple of kilometres take the right turn to Saint Pardoux de Drôme. Drive through the village and turn south-westward dropping down to the valley road near Le Moulin de la Faye. Continue along the valley and after 500m turn left towards Les Martailles and afterwards towards Montagut. Park your vehicle where the road turns right at the junction with the footpath.

3 Violet Limodore and Lizard Orchid flower nearby. Follow the footpath southward and you will find various orchids in spring and hear Golden Oriole and Cirl Bunting singing. Then continue on to the cultivated fields following a small trail (a regular badger route). The dry hillside above you is a good site for Yellow Bee Orchid.

Return to the car and continue down towards La Moulin de la Faye. At the T-junction turn left and drive a couple of kilometres to the pretty Saint Sulpice de Roumagnac.

4 Enjoy a visit to the little village first and then continue on to have a look at the *repositoir* in the cemetery, as well as the church. The beautiful Wild Gladiolus grows around the cemetery together with Lizard Orchid.

