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MAGICAL FRANCE

A TRIP TO A COUNTRY'S NATURAL WONDERS

produced by Flying Pangolin Film



4 films showing a country full of wonders

From the Alps to the Pyrenees: France is the biggest and most varied country in Western Europe. The variety of landscapes is one-of-a-kind: from alpine mountains to fertile wine-growing districts, from rough cliffs to Mediterranean beaches. There is not just one picture describing France in its complexity.

With the romantic Mont-Saint-Michel the Normandy, the picturesque Loire River, the blooming Provence and the wine regions of Burgundy and Bordeaux, France has got some of the top-touristic sites in the world to present with breathtaking sceneries.

But France has also a rich and diverse wildlife corresponding to the number of ecosystems in one country, expanding from the North Sea over the Atlantic to the Mediterranean Sea.

There are very few discoveries of new species in our neighboring country. A lot of the animals also live in Germany and Austria. However, who takes a closer look still discovers something unfamiliar, something never-seen before. Especially some small creatures often show behavior hardly anybody knows. Thus, bioluminescent worms or catfish hunting pigeons are not a well-known sight – and we can still surprise...

France is one of those countries that we think we know. This assumption is, in part, what protects so many of its most secret places from invasion. Time to explore those places; regions we think we know that may still surprise, but also those less popular habitats that hold fascinating creatures.

So far, spectacular stories have been filmed about the wildlife of France in different parts of the country. However, it has been hard to get a complex picture of the whole country. We want to give a broader overview about France, by dividing it into 4 films, each focusing on a different geographical part of France:

- 1) **The North-West:** from Paris along the rough coast
- 2) **The South-West:** the garden of France along the Atlantic Ocean
- 3) **The South:** where mountains meet the Mediterranean
- 4) **The East:** mountain area

4x50 Minutes / 4K
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THE NORTHWEST

BRITTANY - NORMANDY - PARIS



MONT-SAINT-MICHEL BAY

The Mont-Saint-Michel Bay, famous UNESCO World Heritage Site, has Europe's biggest tidal range. Oysters and mussels are constantly filtering the incoming and outgoing water, they form huge colonies. The bay is nursery for soles, rays, black seabreams and perches. From here, salmon and eels start their journey upriver to their spawning grounds. Such a variety of fish lures predators like dolphins or seals, who gather in masses.



Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)
F: grand dauphin / D: Großer Tümmler

550 km², twice the size of Paris, the bay is an ideal playground and feeding ground. More than 400 specimens form one of the largest colonies in Europe.



Lesser Black-backed gull (*larus fuscus*) F:
Goéland brun / D: Heringsmöwe

Everywhere in town, gulls have built their nests and eagerly defend their eggs and chicks from the tourists.



Honeycomb Worm (*Sabellaria alveolata*)

An enormous structure becomes visible as the water drains off. It is the largest biogenic construction in Europe: roughly 100 hectares of reef, built by honeycomb worms. Saint-Anne reef, a unique natural heritage, is one of two honeycomb worm reefs in the Mont-Saint-Michel Bay. Honeycomb worms build tubes from sand or shell fragments, which protect them from predators and which they never leave. Their enormous construction is used by lots of animals, especially crustaceans as a hiding place.

The "Baie de Mont-Saint-Michel" includes the largest polder and salt marsh area in France. All the animals of the tide pool live to the rhythm of the tides.

Numerous animals and many algae live in the ponds. They all need oxygen. But no oxygen is produced in the dark. However, it will continue to be consumed. How do you survive when the oxygen content of the water is zero? Rock shrimp roll onto their backs and hang onto the water surface with their legs. So, they can at least absorb the rest of the oxygen that slowly gets out of the atmosphere into the pond water.



Montagu's blenny (*Coryphoblennius galerita*)
F: Blennie coiffée / D: Marmorierter Schleimfisch

Another animal has the perfect solution: the blenny just goes ashore. There it breathes air – through the skin! It has no scales and can absorb oxygen through the skin!

When the tide returns with force, it claws at the rock with hooks. Once the wave has swept over the fish, it jumps back into its tide pool. Here it is the dread of the other animals. Because it is the TOP predator!

BRITTANY

Common murre (*Uria aalge*)

F: Guiellemot de Troïl/ D: Trottellumme

Brittany is the largest peninsula in France and also the roughest part of the country. Steep cliffs stretch almost along the entire coastline. In the midst of the raging sea, a lighthouse defies the power of the sea: the famous Ar Men. In the past, the Bretons were considered as well-fortified as their country appears. In the last century BC, Brittany became part of Roman Gaul for about 500 years. The West proved to be particularly recalcitrant. One extraordinary place is the Cap Frehel. It has a big breeding colony of common murre and penguins.



Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)

F: phoque gris / D: Kegelrobbe

Some of them even breed in the Mont-Saint-Michel Bay, but most of them only come here to forage. After a good 2 hours the seal swims out of the bay along the coast up the English Channel. Finally, it goes ashore on a wide sandy beach. Not only harbor seals lie together here, but grey seals also use this place, especially in winter.

Great scallop (*Pecten maximus*)

F: Coquilles Saint-Jacques/Große Pilgermuschel

Brittany is the region of the scallop. The Saint-Brieuc Bay in northern Brittany is one of the largest producers of scallops in Europe. Here eggs are fertilized in the laboratory, raised in large tanks and released as young mussels in the bay.





Paris – city of ... crickets

Paris, capital of France and "city of love"—its name rises beautiful images of the Eiffel tower, a small café with a view on Notre Dame. And the chirping sound of cricket... Wait! The chirping of crickets in a metropolis? To hear this, you cannot go into a beautiful garden. Instead, you need to go down to the Paris Metro. The crickets live between the rails. Here in the volcanic rocks, they have numerous hideouts.

The crickets arrived as stowaways in boxes full of spices from Afghanistan to the south of France. Quickly they spread to other regions. In Paris they found ideal living conditions in the wood stoves of bakeries. The construction of the Parisian Metro opened up a new Eldorado. The temperature always stays between 27 and 34 degrees and food is always present.



FRANCE's SOUTH-WEST

Pays de la Loire - Atlantic Coast - Pyrenees



Life along France's wildest river

The Loire is France's longest river. In order to prevent further flooding, the upper reaches were dammed several times, but in the middle and lower reaches the Loire is still a free-flowing body of water without dams. Due to the large amount of sediment transported by the river, the Loire constantly changes its appearance: sandbanks and river islands are built up and shifted. The Loire, also known as "the last wild river in Europe", has survived in its current form for centuries. With around 1,000 islands and flood plains, the Loire is a refuge for many animal species that have long been extinct or rare elsewhere in Europe.



Bioluminescent Earthworm (*Avelona ligra*)

F: Ver bioluminiscent / E: Biolumineszierender Regenwurm



The bioluminescent worm lives in the soils along the Loire. The cells of his epidermis are bioluminescent, meaning his whole body glows.

Loire Valley

The Garden of France

Over 400 castles and castle complexes with beautiful gardens are spread across the Pays de la Loire, Center Val de Loire and Burgundy regions. This area is also called the "Garden of France".

The castles are big tourist magnets, and yet some animals have made them their home. Villandry Castle is one of the very few refuges of greater mouse-eared bats. In the attic, dozens of them even give birth to their babies. The Château de Chenonceau, the most famous castle in France after Versailles, is almost overpopulated by house martins. The chateau is built directly over the River Cher, a tributary of the Loire. So, the martins have a good spot to catch insects right at their "doorstep".



Atlantic Coast

Europe's largest estuary

The French Atlantic coast extends from Brittany through the countries of the Loire to New Aquitaine on the Spanish border. The largest estuary in Europe lies below La Rochelle: Gironde. Here the two rivers Garonne and Dordogne meet.

Dordogne Valley

The Dordogne is the only river in France classified by UNESCO as a World Biosphere Reserve. Over a length of 483 kilometers, it flows through a region that was never heavily industrialized. Unspoiled landscapes and very well-preserved towns and villages line the river banks. From its source to its mouth in the Gironde, the Dordogne is one of the cleanest rivers in Europe.



The cleanliness of the river and the unspoiled surrounding forests allow some plants and mushrooms to grow particularly well, most notably the world-famous truffle. Périgord is home to the world-renowned Tuber melanosporum, the black or Périgord truffle. The mysterious mushroom hides underground for nine months before it is harvested. It is not easy to find the delicate sac fungi, which usually thrive under oak trees in fairly acidic soil. You need a keen nose...



DUNE OF PILAT

42 kilometers southwest of Bordeaux is Arcachon Bay, a large bay with mud flats and sandbanks. Surrounded by a large pine forest, the highest shifting dune in Europe rises at the southern end of the bay. Due to the lack of vegetation, it is still on the move today and migrates further inland every year. The pine forest is gradually being swallowed up by this enormous mass of 60,000,000 cubic meters of sand. Only a few plants defy the sand. Millions of tourists trudge up the dune every year. After Mont-Saint-Michel, it is the largest "natural" attraction.





The Pyrenees

In the very south of France rise the Pyrenees. The mountain range forms the border to Andorra and Spain. Crystal clear mountain streams flow between rocks and through forests. A bearded vulture approaches, wings spread out. His destination: the puddle. On the ground he walks directly into the water and starts to take a bath, trying to get his feathers soaked with the muddy water. Indeed, there is no physical need for a bearded vulture to bath in red mud – it's a kind of fashion! The more reddish a male looks, the better his chances to find a mate.



Bearded Vulture
(*Gypaetus barbatus*)

F: gypaète barbu

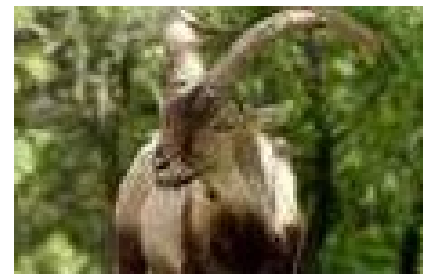
/ D: Bartgeier

Western Spanish Ibex (*Capra pyrenaica victoriae*)

F: Bouquetin ibérique / D: Iberischer Steinbock

The Pyrenean Ibex can only be seen on paintings like in the Cave of Niaux. 12.000 years old, it proves that the subspecies must have been abundant in the region in the past. Despite huge efforts to preserve it, this subspecies got extinct in 2000.

In 2014 some individuals of the western Iberian ibex were released. This subspecies is very close to the Pyrenean species. Usually, ibexes have a strict sex segregation. Only during mating season, they form a herd.





SOUTHERN FRANCE

Massif Central - Provence - Côte d'Azur



Massif Central

Almost 15% of the total land area of France is occupied by the Massif Central with 90,000 km². The mountains in southern France offer an extraordinary variety of different landscapes and a climate that brings very different conditions depending on the direction of the compass.

The Cévennes are the south-eastern part of the Massif Central. Karst mountains with narrow, steep gorges and plateaus characterize the landscape. Montane and Mediterranean flora and fauna blend into one another. The many limestone plateaus, the so-called Causses, which are separated from each other by deep, steep gorges and river valleys, are particularly spectacular. The largest of the Grand Causses is the Causse Méjean.

The famous Roquefort cheese is made in the small town of Roquefort-sur-Soulzon. Just behind the village lie a total of 17 caves, which stretch over 12 floors and up to two kilometers deep through the rock. In the caves, very special fungi colonize the stored cheese and give it the typical blue mould.



The Grand Causses

Przewalski's Horse (*Equus ferus przewalskii*)

F: Le cheval de Przewalski / D: Przewalski-Pferd

Przewalski's horses were settled in a sanctuary. They are zoo animals that after a few years in the wild began to behave like wild horses. They formed their own family groups and began to reproduce - the starting signal for the most important part of the project: In 2004 and 2005 the first horses were brought to Mongolia. In their original habitat, in which they were exterminated, they should from now on resettle and move freely. But in France, too, the herds are constantly evolving.

Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*)

F: Vautour moine / E: Mönchsgeier

The Grands Causses offer a breeding ground to around 25 pairs of black vultures every year. A successful reintroduction program for black and griffon vultures began in France in 2004.

PROVENCE

"Little Africa" in France: CRAU D'ARLE

Purple lavender fields as far as the eye can see, Mediterranean climate, gentle, green hills - when you think of Provence, you probably first think of the breathtakingly luminous lavender fields that have become a symbol of the metropolitan region of southern France. The vegetation in south-eastern France is characterized by the garrigue, a Mediterranean shrub landscape with evergreen dwarf shrubs that thrive particularly well on dry and rocky soil. Typical garrigue plants are broom, cistus and juniper as well as the famous *herbes de Provence* - including thyme, oregano, rosemary and of course lavender. Lavender is one of France's most important exports. The essential oil extracted from the plants is exported all over the world.

Etruscan Shrew (*Suncus etruscus*)

F: Musaraigne étrusque / D: Etrusker Spitzmaus



Besides the hog-nosed bat, the Etruscan shrew is the smallest mammal in the world. Without tail, it reaches a maximum length of five centimeters. With its long snout it digs in the ground. The mouse is constantly on the move and has to eat masses of tiny insects because it has a very high metabolic rate.

The Crau d'Arles is France's last gravel steppe, formed by the deposition of sediment from large rivers. This unique natural site in France is home to a fauna normally typical of the North African steppes or the Iberian Peninsula. The only type of use of this steppe is as pastureland. The sheep graze on the Coussouls, as the dry crau is also called, in spring when it turns green again. Then, before the summer heat, they are herded onto alpine meadows.

CAMARGUE



Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)
F : Flamant rose / D : Rosa flamingo

The Provence is the warmest and, with around 2,600 to 3,000 hours of sunshine per year, also the sunniest region in France. From the air, the large blob of color can be seen from afar. Where the Rhône, one of France's largest rivers, flows into the Mediterranean Sea, it forms a huge estuary delta: the Camargue. The hardly inhabited stretch of land is one of Europe's most important wetlands. Swamps, ponds and shallow lakes offer ideal living and breeding conditions for countless water and marsh birds, including up to 20,000 flamingos.



Camargue Horse

F: Camargue cheval / D: Camargue Perd

The famous Camargue snow-white horses live all year round in the marshy meadows without a stable or additional feed. They are the only horse breed in the world that can even eat under water by closing their nostrils.



Camargue Cattle/Bull Das Camargue-Rind

F: Taureau de Camargue / D: Das Camargue-Rind

Not only have men tamed bulls and horses, but they have also partially curbed the unpredictable nature of the delta by damming the Rhône and building a dike to the sea. Hydrotechnical devices regulate the water level and allow the cultivation of grain, vegetables and fruits. The ecological balance got destabilized by the cultivation of rice, as large quantities of fresh water from the rice basins were pumped into the lagoon before harvest, along with the fertilizers and weed killers it contained.

CÔTE D'AZUR

The Côte d'Azur is the stretch of Mediterranean coast that extends to the Italian border. The "French Riviera" suggests paradisiacal luxury, eternal youth, dream beaches. Places like St. Tropez, Nice or Cannes are magnets for the rich and famous to the international jet set.

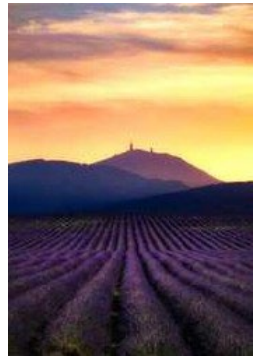
The hinterland is less well known. Just a few kilometers inland from the famous tourist destinations one finds landscapes and villages that seem to have changed little in the last hundred years.



Mont Ventoux

The Romans called it "Mons ventosus", wind mountain, and it is actually always windy on Mont Ventoux. Sometimes the mistral sweeps over the bare hilltop at 250km/h. With a height of 1909 m, the mountain - apart from the Alps and the Pyrenees - is the highest elevation in France.

Hardly any animals get lost on the summit with nordic, partly arctic vegetation. Red deer and mouflon have been reintroduced.



Meadow Viper (*Vipera ursinii*) F: Vispère d'Orsini / D: Wiesenotter

While other venomous snakes mainly hunt rodents and lizards, the small meadow viper has specialized in insects. It is one of the most endangered snake species in Europe. Although it has very small venom glands, its venom is stronger than that of larger vipers.

The image is a composite of two landscape photographs. The top half shows a range of rugged, rocky mountains under a sky with soft, golden light from a low sun, creating a dramatic and somewhat ethereal atmosphere. The bottom half shows a vibrant, sunlit valley with a river in the foreground. The river has white water rapids and is surrounded by lush green grass, shrubs, and trees. The overall scene is a beautiful representation of the French Alps.

FRANCE'S EAST

Alps - Alsace - Lorraine

THE ALPS

The Top of Europe



The highest peaks in Western Europe are bundled in the three-country triangle between France, Italy and Switzerland, crowned by the 4810m high Mont Blanc Massif. Deep snow, flowering mountain meadows, thundering waterfalls and mighty glaciers - a landscape of extremes. Those who live in the high mountains are survivors who have masterfully adapted to their alpine habitat.

Alpine Acrobates

Chartreuse-Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra cartusiana*)

F: Chamois / D: Gämse

The Chartreuse-chamois is a subspecies endemic here, slightly larger and darker than its high mountain relatives. Only here, on the steep walls of the Chartreuse, can the animals lick up the highly sought-after minerals that are washed out of the limestone rocks by the rain.



Glacier Flea (*Desoria saltans*)

F: la puce des glaciers / D: Gletscherfloh



Glacier fleas belong to the insects, more precisely to the springtail class. They are the only creatures that live in glaciers all year round. The little black guys are clearly visible on the light surface, but they don't have to be afraid of predators in this cold place. And surprisingly, they have enough to eat.

Summer, on the other hand, is dangerous. Perfectly adapted to the cold, its body does not endure excessive temperatures. The little glacier flea dies at 12 °C.

GRAND-EST

Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx*)

F: *Lynx boréal* / D: Eurasischer Luchs

On the border with Germany lie the Vosges. They are directly connected with the Palatinate Forest, with which they also form the cross-border Biosphere Reserve Palatinate Forest-Vosges du Nord. A joint reintroduction project brought a shy forest dweller back to France.



Alsace

Alsace borders on the Vosges. The three most famous cities in the region near the German border are Strasbourg, Colmar and Mulhouse. Many of the small half-timbered houses have a stork's nest in which the stork parents raise their chicks in the spring.

In the Rhine meadows near Woerr, European pond turtles were released into the wild as part of a reintroduction program. Their numbers are constantly increasing. In this way, a viable population was settled in a habitat from which it had previously completely disappeared.

Towering over the Alsace plain rises Haut-Koenigsbourg castle. The mountain which the castle was built on is covered in dense deciduous forest. While thousands of tourists visit the castle, the forest is quiet. Shy wild cats roam the area, and a badger even uses its large burrow to hide its babies. The huge burrow system with several corridors, entrances and exits is also used by a pair of raccoon dogs to raise their litter.

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