

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

6th to 16th June 2020 (11 days)



NEW ITINERARY FOR 2020

ARMENIA

Wild flowers and natural history of the Caucasus

Explore the spectacular landscapes and rich wildlife of the Caucasus biodiversity hotspot.

Nestled amid the Southern Caucasus, the small country of Armenia is characterised by its rugged mountainous landscape, still roamed by Persian Leopards and Syrian Brown Bears, and **notable for its habitat diversity**, encompassing alpine meadows, steppe grasslands, semi-desert, dense forests and more.

Our holiday takes us on an exploration of this fascinating country, in particular searching for its **rich flora**, which includes more than half of the species found in the entire Transcaucasian region.

We start our visit among the magnificent basalt columns of Garni Gorge, before paying a visit to **Ararat Valley** and Armash, an Important Bird Area. We will search for plants around the Selim Pass, before heading to central Armenia to explore the woodlands, meadows and gorges of the Artanish Peninsula on the eastern shores of Lake Sevan. Continuing north we will visit Makaravank and the eastern extremity of the Tsaghkunyats Mountains. Our final days will explore a range of altitude around **Mount Aragats** where as well as plants we hope to find interesting birds.

We can expect to find colourful alpine species such as *Pulsatilla albina*, *Primula algida* and *Colchicum raddianum*, along with several of Armenia's attractive irises and lillies, including *Lilium armenum*, *Iris paradoxa* and *Iris furcata*. With luck we may catch the last flowers of *Tulipa julia*.

Although our focus is on Armenia's botanical diversity, there is an exciting range of birds, butterflies and other species to be uncovered. We will also have the opportunity to experience some of the area's **rich cultural heritage**.



Price
£2,585

Single Room Supplement
£130

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Yerevan
- Day 2** Garni
- Day 3** Ararat Valley, Armash
- Day 4** Selim Pass
- Day 5** Lake Sevan
- Day 6** Artanish Peninsula
- Day 7** Makaravank
- Day 8** Tsaghkunyats
- Day 9** Margahovit, Spitak
- Day 10** Aragats
- Day 11** Return to UK

Leader
Laurie Jackson

Group size
min 5 or 6, max 12
natural history, spring
flowers, mountains

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to the **Wildlife Trusts**



FOCUS OF INTEREST

This is one of our 'mainly wild flowers' holidays. The itineraries for these are mainly based around plants but there may also be visits to certain areas for birds and general wildlife. There is the opportunity to enjoy the birds and general wildlife in each location, as well as the culture of the areas visited.



ITINERARY

The itinerary may change to suit practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 Flight to **Yerevan**. Transfer to our hotel in the village of Geghadir (~1 hour).

Day 2 We will walk through **Garni Gorge** filled with spectacular basalt columns whose crevices hold species such as *Saxifraga cymbalaria* and *Sedum caucasicum*, and provide nest sites for House Martins and Eastern Rock Nuthatch. Nearby we will visit the Graeco-Roman Garni Temple and the monastery at Geghard. o/n Geghadir.

Day 3 We explore the semi-desert and steppe vegetation of the **Ararat Valley** looking for species including *Gladiolus atroviolaceus*, *Matthiola odoratissima*, *Gundelia armeniaca*, the striking hemiparasitic *Phelypaea tournefortii* and the cushion-forming *Gypsophila aretioides*. Our day will include a visit to **Arماش Fish Ponds** where we will look for some of the special birds of the area including White-tailed Lapwing, Menetries's Warbler, Rufous-tailed Bush-robin and the beautiful Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. o/n Hermon.

Day 4 Starting our journey north we will explore the **Selim Pass** area with species such as *Smyrniopsis aucheri*, *Pedicularis armena* and the delicate *Primula auriculata*, along with butterflies such as Caucasian Vernal Copper. o/n Nerkin Getashen.

Day 5 Our day starts with a visit to **Noratus Cemetery** with its traditional *khachkar* memorial stones. The rest of the day will be a relaxed walk along Old Sevan Road overlooking **Lake Sevan**. Plants should include *Pontechium maculatum*, *Centaurea cheiranthifolia*, *Campanula stevenii* and the imposing *Lilium armenum*. We'll keep watch for butterflies, along with raptors and Armenian Gulls rising on the thermals. o/n Tsapatagh.

Day 6 We visit the **Artanish Peninsula** passing through juniper woodland, meadows and stony slopes where we will look for species including the vibrant *Hedysarum elegans* and the beautiful *Prometheum sempervivoides*. This is an important area for butterflies and with luck we may find species such as Clouded Apollo and Turquoise Blue. o/n Tsapatagh.

Day 7 Heading north towards **Goshavank Monastery**, we will make several stops for plants including *Iris paradoxa* and *Anacamptis coriophora*. In the afternoon we will visit **Makaravank Monastery**, one of the most beautiful in Armenia, where several impressive ancient trees can be found including elm *Ulmus elliptica* and Hornbeam. o/n Margahovit.

Day 8 We explore the eastern end of the **Tsaghkunyats Mountains**, which should be awash with *Anemone fasciculata*, with a great deal of plants to be uncovered including



Veronica gentianoides, *Linum hypericifolium*, *Tanacetum coccineum* and *Allium aucheri*. We will also make a stop in **Dilijan** to visit its historic old town and perhaps add the striking *Rhynchocorys orientalis* to our list. o/n Margahovit.

Day 9 This morning we will explore the meadows and woodlands surrounding our hotel before moving on to the **Spitak Pass**. Plants today should include *Pedicularis sibthorpii*, *Salvia staminea*, *Lilium szovitsianum* and *Arnebia pulchra*. o/n Byurakan.

Day 10 Our last day in Armenia will be spent on **Mount Ararats** where we will stop at different altitudes including Amberd Fortress (~2,300m) and the alpine zone (~3,200m). We can expect see many interesting species here including *Primula algida*, *Colchicum raddeanum*, *Myosotis alpestris*, *Pulsatilla albana* and the rare and delicate *Allium tripedale*. There are also a number of interesting mountain birds to be found and we will keep an eye out for Radde's Accentor, White-throated Robin, Horned Lark and more. o/n Byurakan.

Day 11 We make our way back to Yerevan (~1.5 hours) for our morning flight to Paris and from there back to the UK.

Accommodation, meals, and transport

We will stay at six locations: two nights at the Hyelandz Eco Village Resort, Geghadir; one night at Lucy Tour, Hermon; one night in Nerkin Getashen; two nights in Avan Marak Tsapatagh Hotel; two nights in Tezh Ler Resort, Margahovit; and two nights in Amberd Hotel, Byurakan. The hotels are all of a good standard, with en-suite rooms. Evening meals will be taken at the hotel or in local restaurants. Lunches will be mostly picnics, with a couple of lunches taken in local restaurants. We will travel by minibus, with our visit to Makaravank Monastery including a journey in an off-road van (~5km). The roads are generally good, with comfortable travelling conditions.

Weather

At this time of year the weather is usually warm and sunny but not too hot. There may be some cooler weather and some rain.

Health and fitness

The walking is not strenuous but we will be walking (relatively gently) uphill in some places: paths may be rocky and uneven and some walking is 'off-track'. Walking boots are **essential** for most excursions (lightweight boots are fine). **All excursions are optional except those on days when transferring between hotels.** The hotel rooms are likely to be reached by stairs rather than lifts (but help will be given with luggage). On some days we will take longer walks (2 hours+) but on most days, walks will be shorter (1-2 hours).

We will be visiting high altitude, up to 3,200m on Mount Aragats, however anyone not wishing to travel to this height can stay in the area around Amberd Church (2,300m). All accommodation is below 2000m. If you have any reason to believe you will be adversely affected at these altitudes, you should consult your doctor prior to booking.



Leaders

Laurie Jackson is an excellent all round naturalist and experienced Wildlife Travel leader, who joined our team in 2013. She has led many of our trips in recent years from Morocco and Bulgaria, to Svalbard and Chile. Laurie visited Armenia in 2019 and is looking forward to introducing this fascinating country to our travellers.

Our local guide is **Anna Asatryan**, an expert Armenian botanist and researcher at the National Academy of Sciences in Armenia.

Passports and Visa

British Citizen passport holders can stay in Armenia without a visa up to 180 days per year. Your passport should be valid for a minimum period of six months from the date of entry into Armenia.

Group Travel

Flights are with Air France from London Heathrow, via Paris:

6th June depart London Heathrow 09.00, arrive Paris 11.25
depart Paris 13.45, arrive Yerevan 20.25

16th June depart Yerevan 09.00, arrive Paris 12.10
depart Paris 13.20, arrive London Heathrow 13.45

It is also possible to fly via Paris from Manchester and Edinburgh - speak to us about the options.

France is one hour and Armenia four hours ahead of the UK.



TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

DEPOSIT PER PERSON £800, SECOND INSTALLMENT ON CONFIRMATION OF HOLIDAY £500, BALANCE DUE BY 07/03/2020

INCLUDED: Return flight from London to Yerevan via Paris. Local transport as specified in itinerary. Ten nights accommodation full board (picnic lunches). Services of leaders.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Entrances (optional). Gratuities. Insurance.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Front (clockwise from top): *Astragalus chardinii* and Mount Ararat, *Phelypaea tournefortii*, *Lilium armenum* (A. Asatryan), *Iris paradoxa*; Garni Gorge; **Inside** (L to R): *Scutellaria orientalis*, khachkar at Noratus cemetery, *Allium tripedale* (A. Asatryan), *Pulsatilla albana*, *Anemonastrum fasciculatum* (A. Asatryan), Black-headed Bunting, Amberd Church, *Gladiolus atroviolaceus*. **Back** (top to bottom): Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, *Gundelia armeniaca*, White-throated Robin