

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



25th June to 2nd July 2020 (1 week)

NORTH MACEDONIA

Balkan butterflies and mountain wildlife

NEW
ITINERARY
FOR 2020

Our second visit of the year to the unspoilt countryside of North Macedonia in the company of popular guide and butterfly expert Martin Hrouzek, this time heading higher into the mountains in search of the diversity of butterflies and interesting plant life.

The newly-renamed Republic of North Macedonia is a small country, the same size as Belgium, in the heart of the Balkans. Its **varied landscapes** and position at the crossroads of the Balkans combine with traditional rural life to create the right ingredients for abundant and diverse wildlife. Almost one third of the country is still covered with traditionally sheep-grazed steppe.

The landscapes themselves are reason enough to visit, but this is one of Europe's best destinations for those interested in butterflies: the country boasts **over 200 species of butterflies**, a staggering diversity for a country of this size. We will explore some of the best butterfly habitats in search of the country's flagship species, as well as enjoying many of the other wildlife and floral treats on offer. We will spend most of our time in the south and west of this small country, where several spectacular and diverse mountain ranges are found. This tour is timed to coincide with the peaking summer season, with the low-lying areas already drenched by summer heat but when the mountains should still be fresh and full of the high altitude nectar-rich plants that support the more unusual montane butterflies.

The fine mixture of habitats ensures that you will have a rewarding and easy going holiday: whichever direction we go, there should be a new species for us to see.



Price
£1575

Single Room Supplement
£110

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Skopje
- Day 2** Vitachevo Plateau
- Day 3** Treskavec monastery
- Day 4** Pelister National Park
- Day 5** Galicica National Park
- Day 6** Ohrid, to Mavrovo
- Day 7** Mavrovo National Park
- Day 8** return to UK

Leaders
Laurie Jackson
and Martin Hrouzek

Group size
min 5, max 12
butterflies, mountain
flowers, general wildlife

Wildlife and culture holidays



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



FOCUS OF INTEREST

This holiday has a very general natural history focus including, birds, plants and other wildlife. Other aspects such as landscape and geology, habitats and ecology are also sometimes included – the topics covered are described in this leaflet. Cultural highlights are included as on most of our holidays.



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 25th Our flights take us to Skopje, from where we drive to our hotel, set on the Vardar river and surrounded by grazed limestone hills. o/n Demir Kapija

Day 2 26th The slopes of the **Vitachevo Plateau** are our destination this morning. Around the scattered trees we will look for Niobe Fritillary alongside Twin-spot, Marbled, Spotted and High Brown Fritillaries. Blues and skippers are also plentiful, with Yellow-banded Skipper, Amanda's and Eastern Baton Blue the highlights. Russian Heath will be at the end of its flight period while Woodland Grayling will be just at the beginning. The giant ground cricket *Bradyporus dasypus* may be found blundering about the bushes and Nose-horned Viper and Eastern Green Lizard may be among the reptiles enjoying the warmth.

An afternoon walk in the **Demir Kapija gorge** should reveal plenty of interesting butterflies, including Great Banded Grayling, Ilex Hairstreak and Balkan Marbled White, with dragonflies including Blue-eyed Goldenring and the wonderfully-named Eastern Spectre. Amongst the scattered scrub we will look for Olive-tree Warbler and Masked Shrike, two Balkan specialities that make their home in these sunny hillsides. o/n Demir Kapija

Day 3 27th Today we head south to Pelister. Our first stop will be on the slopes above the Raec river, where Iolas and Osiris Blues fly, while the local gorge is a nesting site for Egyptian Vulture and Black Stork.

Our main goal today will be the limestone Pletvar massif, where the real treat for us will be the country's only endemic butterfly – **Macedonian Grayling**. We will start our exploration at a marble quarry which supports typical limestone flora on pastures with scattered trees, before driving up to 1000 meters. At this altitude we have a chance to see butterfly species like Eastern Greenish Black-tip, a spring species in the lowlands, as well as birds such as Rock Thrush and Ortolan Bunting. Interesting plants could include *Campanula formanekiana*, *Viola allchariensis*, and *Anchusa serpenticola*. Mid-summer butterflies here include Mountain and Krueper's Small Whites, Amanda's and Turquoise Blues, Great Sooty Satyr, The Hermit, Eastern Large Heath and Sandy Grizzled Skippers.

We will also pay a visit to the 12th-century Treskavec Monastery, with views of the Dren Mountains and Pelagonia plains and where only one monk now lives. o/n Pelister



Day 4 28th Pelister National Park is an impressive mountain range that stretches between Macedonia and Greece, with extensive alpine meadows on the Macedonian side and notable for being one of the southernmost ranges in the Balkans with an alpine character. Today should be one of the highlights of the trip, hunting butterflies and alpine flowers up at 2300 meters with views over three countries and Prespa Lake!

Pelister has several butterfly species that are difficult to find elsewhere in Macedonia, such as Balkan Clouded Yellow, Balkan Fritillary and Ottoman Brassy Ringlet. Arran Brown, Mountain and Woodland Ringlet are all on the wing, together with more expected species like Eros Blue, Balkan Copper, Mountain and Blue Argus. Other highlights will be high altitude birds like Alpine Accentor, and Golden Eagle, while mountain flowers include louseworts *Pedicularis orthantha* and *limnogenia*, and violets *Viola orphanidis*, *velutina* and *eximia*. o/n Pelister

Day 5 29th We will drive up to the **Galicica Plateau**, where we should find the high altitude meadows still blossoming with rare plants such as *Astragalus mayeri* and *baldacii*, *Dianthus myrtinervius* and *Sideritis raeseri*. A variety of orchids should include Red and Small-leaved Helleborine, Violet Limodore and Lady Orchid, alongside *Iris sintenisii*, Tall Skullcap *Scutellaria altissima* and Prickly Goldendrop *Onosma echioides*.

The scenery is breath-taking, with stunning views of both Lake Ohrid and the Prespa lakes. The butterfly list here should be impressive, with a great variety of blues and browns, fritillaries and skippers alongside Apollo and Clouded Apollo, Eastern Festoon, Powdered Brimstone and Balkan Copper. o/n Pelister

Day 6 30th We leave Pelister and head for Ohrid town, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** set on the shores of Lake Ohrid, with the impressive backdrop of Jablanica and Galicica Mountains. Its architectural heritage is superb, with a fortress, amphitheatre, orthodox churches and mosques all contained within one small area.

Not far away are the northern slopes of the **Galicica Mountains**: Lesser Fiery Copper, Turquoise Blue, Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper or Lattice Brown should be found here alongside wildflowers like *Acanthus mollis* or *Centaurea solstitialis*.

From here we drive through the wooded hills and past high mountains of Jablanica and Debar along the Albanian border. Our hotel in Lazaropole is set at 1350m, giving us the opportunity to reach higher slopes of Bistra Mountains with little effort. o/n Lazaropole

Day 7 1st This morning we will visit **Mavrovo National Park**, another gem of the Macedonian mountains. Along with mountain butterflies and alpine birds, we are visiting at just the right season to see some of the best wild flowers: local specialities include Albanian Lily *Lilium albanicum*, the asphodel *Narthecium scardicum*, Elegant Catchfly *Silene ciliata*, *Dianthus scardicus*, and *Sideritis scardica*, famous as 'Balkan mountain tea'.

Closer to the hotel, we will explore the grassy slopes around the village, where Freyer's Fritillary, Oriental Meadow Brown, Safflower Skipper and many commoner species will abound and we will enjoy our last day in this remote corner of the Balkans. o/n Lazaropole

Day 8 2nd An early start will see us heading back to Skopje and our morning flight home.

Health and fitness

Please see the General Information leaflet for health and fitness requirements. On most days, we are out and about for much of the day, albeit walking a relatively slow pace. It is necessary to walk on rougher ground and up some **slopes**, although **none of the walking is strenuous**. The pace will generally be relaxed with time to enjoy the surroundings and take photos as well as watching the wildlife we find.

Leaders and guides

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 Norfolk, to Svalbard and Chile. Laurie has previously visited the Balkans several times, and is looking forward to introducing this fascinating part of the world to our travellers.

Martin Hrouzek has been our guide for Wildlife Travel's previous trips to Macedonia and central Europe. An experienced natural history guide as well as an excellent wildlife photographer, Martin is keen to share one of the lesser known corners of Europe with us. We will be joined by **Dime Melovski**, an enthusiastic Macedonian conservationist and butterfly expert.

Accommodation, meals and transport

We will be staying at good, local hotels, all with en-suite accommodation. The holiday is full board, meals being a mixture of **Balkan and International dishes**, with an emphasis on local cuisine. Requests for special diets can be accommodated. Evening meals will be at the hotels. We will have picnic lunches on most days. We will travel by minibus. Our excursion to Pelister NP will be in several four-wheel drive vehicles.

Passports and Visas

Macedonia is NOT in the EU. You must have a passport for this trip, valid for at least 90 days from your arrival date. Visas are not required by holders of British Passports. Holders of other passports should check with the relevant embassies or consulates and obtain the necessary documents prior to travel.

Flights

Group flights are with Wizz Air from London Luton to Skopje.

25th June depart Luton 08.55, arrive Skopje 13.05
2nd July depart Skopje 06.05, arrive Luton 08.25

Macedonia is 1 hour ahead of UK time.



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 £500 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 26/03/2020
SEE GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET ON HOW TO BOOK

INCLUDED: Return flight from UK to Skopje. Local transport as specified in itinerary. 7 nights' accommodation, full board. Services of leaders.

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

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Photos: Wildlife Travel and courtesy Martin Hrouzek.

Front (clockwise): *Ascalaphus libelluloides*, *Scutellaria altissima*, Apollo, Balkan Marbled White, *Bradyporus dasytus* **Back:** Lattice Brown.

Inside: *Nemoptera sinuata*, *Centaurea salonitana*, Black-veined White, Russian Heath