

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

3rd to 10th June 2024 (1 week)

THE VERCORS

natural history of the Pre-Alps (by train)

"met all my expectations"
"the scenery was fantastic,
and the wildlife varied and
interesting "

Vercors 2023

We travel by train for this holiday, a wonderful week in the French Pre-Alps, an attractive landscape of limestone hills and plateaux.

Our trip will be based around the French regional natural park of **Vercors**. This lies in the south-eastern part of the country, near the border with Italy. It incorporates the largest nature reserve in mainland France: around 17,000 ha. The area is part of the Pre-Alps **limestone hills**, which form a peripheral ring around the Alps, and our daily excursions will take us to explore the **warm southern slopes**. It is a superb area for sub-alpine flowers, which are easily accessible. The insects are impressive, with a fine array of butterflies and many of the specialities of southern Europe.

Wildlife Travel has had many enjoyable holidays in this area in the past, and we are delighted to be able to return once again. The holiday will appeal to anyone who wishes to enjoy **wild flowers on pleasant walks** through stunning scenery - plus there is the bonus of **travelling by train** rather than having to fly.

Our visit is timed to make the most of the natural history: June is the period when the best of the flowers bloom, butterflies are flying and many birds are still breeding. Along the way, we will keep our eyes peeled for the typical mammals of the high mountains: Alpine Ibex, Alpine Marmot and Chamois, while high altitude birdlife may include Golden Eagle, Citril Finch and Alpine Chough.

There are many beautiful, spectacular and species-rich places in France: with its combination of landscape, marvellous diversity of plants and animals, easy accessibility and remarkably unspoilt character, Vercors must rank amongst the best.



Price
£2,190

Single Room Supplement
£125

Full board

Day 1 train to Valence
Day 2 Les Nonières
Day 3 Col de Pennes, Jansac
Day 4 Vallon de Combeau
Day 5 R N Hauts Plateaux
Day 6 Luc and Châtillon
Day 7 Cirque d'Archiane
Day 8 return to London

Leaders

Phil Saunders and Sarah Lambert

Group size
min 6, max 14

butterflies, flowers, birds,
flight-free holiday



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, 3rd June. After travelling to Valence by train, our coach takes us to the village of **Les Nonières** (c 90 mins), where we will arrive in time for a late dinner.

Day 2, 4th June. Today will be a leisurely familiarisation with the area: we get to know **Les Nonières** and its wildlife as we wind our way up to a local waterfall. We hope to see many orchids, butterflies including Black-veined White, Heath Fritillary and Pearly Heath, and birds such as Crested Tit and Serin. After our picnic, an afternoon walk takes us into the woods above the village, while Mont Barral looms in the distance.

Day 3, 5th June. After a short journey to **Le Col de Pennes** (1,040m), we explore the upland meadows and woods, with butterflies such as Scarce Swallowtail, Duke of Burgundy, Almond-eyed Ringlet, and perhaps even Apollo, and many wild flowers. We walk down a quiet road towards Jansac, enjoying the flowers and insects along the way. There are magnificent views of the valley below and the distant, southern slopes of the Vercors. Amongst many plants we hope to see are Martagon Lily and Lizard Orchid. We should enjoy good views of Griffon Vulture, hear singing Nightingale and maybe even a passing Black Woodpecker.

Day 4, 6th June. Le Vallon de Combeau (lower) We stop along the valley to look for Lady's Slipper Orchid, Large-flowered Butterwort, gentians and other specialities. The peaks around us here are at 1,600m, but we shall start our walk in the sub-alpine meadows, wet flushes and stream banks. After our picnic lunch on the slopes of Combeau, our walk takes us back down the valley between meadows and pastures rich with typical sub-alpine plants, such as Limestone Woundwort, Yellow Bellflower and many colourful Asteraceae. We should also see butterflies such as Clouded Apollo and birds including Crossbill and Firecrest, and we will keep watch for Golden Eagle drifting overhead. Depending on time we will visit Col de Menée with its views east to the high French Alps.

Day 5, 7th June. Le Vallon de Combeau (upper) Our longest walk of the week (approximately 5 miles) will lead us up to the alpine meadows at around 1,800m. The meadows here can be a riot of colour, with Elder-flowered Orchid, Globeflower, Wild Tulip and gentians. There should be some super mountain butterflies, and with luck, we could see Alpine Chamois, Alpine Ibex, Alpine Marmot, or a passing Lammergeier, while we may enjoy spectacular views (weather permitting) of the Alps stretching over into Italy.

Day 6, 8th June. Today we will visit Le Claps, site of a historic rock fall on the River Drôme, before continuing onwards to the reserve of **Marais de Rochebriane**, a wetland good for dragonflies and butterflies with an orchid-rich limestone outcrop. Depending on time we will stop in the town of Châtillon-en-Diois this afternoon to explore its cobbled streets and botanical trail, or simply to enjoy an ice cream, coffee or panaché.



Day 7, 9th June. Today we travel to **Le Cirque d'Archiane** a natural amphitheatre of cliffs that rise to 1,800m, where we hope to find a rich variety of butterflies including Knapweed Fritillary, Marbled Fritillary, Swallowtail and a range of blues and grizzled skippers. The cliffs here are a nesting place for Golden Eagles and Griffon Vultures, with Lammergeier and Black Vulture also straying into these skies.

Day 8, 10th June. After breakfast, we set off back to Valence, travelling west along the Drôme valley, passing vineyards and lavender fields until we reach Valence and our train home.

Weather

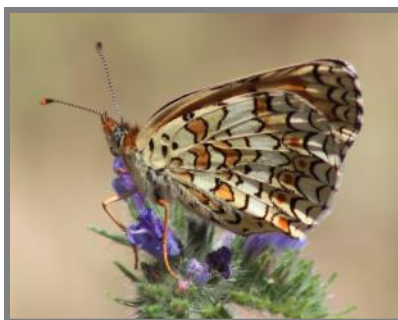
At this time of year the weather in the Pre-Alps should be pleasantly warm and sunny, with average temperatures around 20° C. As with everywhere, the weather is less predictable now than it used to be, and there may be considerably cooler or hotter weather and some rain. We will do our best to adapt our walks and excursions accordingly.

Health and Fitness

On most days, we are **walking for much of the day**, albeit at a relatively slow pace. The day walks are mostly between 2 and 3.5 miles, with some rougher rocky ground, unstable terrain and some moderate slopes, both up and down. Walking boots (e.g. lightweight) are essential. The pace will be relaxed, with plenty of time to enjoy the surroundings and take photos as well as stopping to enjoy the wildlife along the way. You must be able to carry your own luggage between, on and off of the trains. All the rooms at the hotel are upstairs, with no lift. If you are a slow walker, please contact us to discuss whether any of the walks will be a problem for you.

Accommodation, meals and transport

We stay at the excellent Le Mont Barral, situated in the small hamlet of Les Nonières, at 850m altitude, near the Parc du Vercors. The hotel is very comfortable, and **all rooms have en-suite facilities** with bath and/or shower. We will be having breakfast and evening meals at the hotel restaurant. Picnic lunches will be provided by the hotel. The hotel has an indoor pool that should be open at this time. We will ensure that our travelling is as comfortable as possible, using a small coach that will enable us to travel on the smaller country roads for our excursions.



Leaders

Dr Phil Saunders is a professional ecologist with a particular interest in birds and invertebrates. Phil has led several trips for Wildlife Travel, including two previous visits to the Vercors. Phil will be joined by **Sarah Lambert**, an expert botanist and keen photographer, with a good knowledge of other wildlife, who joined Wildlife Travel in 2019.

Group Travel

Train schedules for summer 2024 are not yet released, but should be similar to 2023, as follows. France is one hour ahead of UK:

3rd June: depart London St Pancras 13.04, arrive Lille Europe 15.26
depart Lille Europe 17.03, arrive Valence TGV 20.46
10th June: depart Valence TGV 10.15, arrive Lille Europe 14.31
depart Lille Europe 16.38, arrive London St Pancras 16.57

If you prefer to make your own travel arrangements, you can book the holiday without the travel. It is also possible to **combine this trip with our Cevennes holiday**, 27th May to 3rd June 2024, with a direct train from Montpellier to Valence. Contact us to discuss options.

Passport and Entry Requirements

These rules are correct as of 18th October 2023. **Please note that travel rules may be changed by either the UK or French government at any time.** For up to date information, check www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/france

If you hold a British passport, you are able to travel to the Schengen area (including France) for up to 90 days in total in any 180-day period without a visa. Your passport must be issued less than 10 years before the date you enter the country and valid for at least 3 months after the day you plan to leave.

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 04/03/2024

INCLUDED: Return train travel from London St Pancras, local transport and entry fees on excursions as specified in the itinerary. Seven nights' accommodation, all meals from dinner day 1 to picnic lunch day 8. Services of leaders and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Gratuities. Travel insurance. Covid tests and associated costs.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Photos: front (clockwise from top): Apollo, La Valle de Combeau, Citril Finch, Lady's Slipper Orchid.
Page 2 (from left): Wild Tulip, Green-underside Blue, Le Cirque d'Archiane. **Page 3** (from top):
Gentiana acaulis, Knapweed Fritillary, Crepuscul;ar Burnet Moth, Alpine Marmot.

A trip report from our 2023 Vercors holiday can be found on our website, with galleries of photos from our most recent visits on our Flickr pages.