

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

14th -21st June 2024 (1 week)

TRANSYLVANIA

meadows, mountains and bears

"a beautiful place to stay...
Crit was fabulous"

Transylvania 2019

The mountains and meadows of the Carpathians are one of the last remaining areas in Europe where traditional management of hay meadows is still practised on a large scale, where the local wildlife still includes healthy populations of Europe's large predators: iconic species such as Brown Bear, Grey Wolf and Eurasian Lynx.

We have designed this tour based on our previous trips to the Transylvanian Plateau and Carpathians over many years. It has been adapted to combine the hay meadows, pastures and wood pastures around the 'Saxon' villages of Viscri and Crit with the limestone gorge and valleys of Piatra Craiului National Park and the high altitude alpine meadows of the Bucegi Massif in the Carpathians.

Staying in two centres, we will have the chance to explore the natural history in the company of local ecologists who can help us understand the history and culture of the local area and its effects on the management of the habitats, and see some of the characteristic species of the area. The holiday will include time for botanising and birdwatching, as well as the opportunity to look for other animals including butterflies and other insects, amphibians and reptiles.

A highlight of the trip should be an evening visit to a bear hide where Brown Bears can be seen as they emerge from the forest at dusk (and where Wolves are not usually expected but are also possible, as in our visit in 2013).

The area has a rich cultural heritage including Saxon architecture such as fortified buildings reflecting this Germanic influence. The village of Viscri is one of several to be awarded World Heritage status.



Price

£2,095

Single Room Supplement

£250

Full board

Day 1	flight to Bucharest
Day 2	Zarnesti
Day 3	Bucegi
Day 5	Sigisoara area
Day 4	Dumbrovita
Day 6	Marcheasa
Day 7	Viscri and Crit
Day 8	return to UK

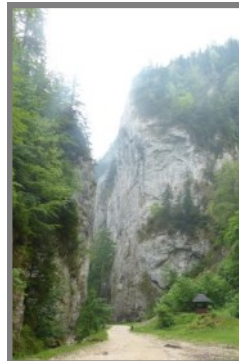
Leader

Philip Precey,
with local guides

Group size

min 4, max 14

wild flowers, Brown Bears,
Saxon history



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, 14th June. After arrival in Bucharest we **transfer to our hotel** in the rustic hamlet of Magura, approximately three hours away. The hamlet is set amongst the majestic Piatra Cariului mountain range, surrounded by valleys full of hay meadows, pastures and woodland.

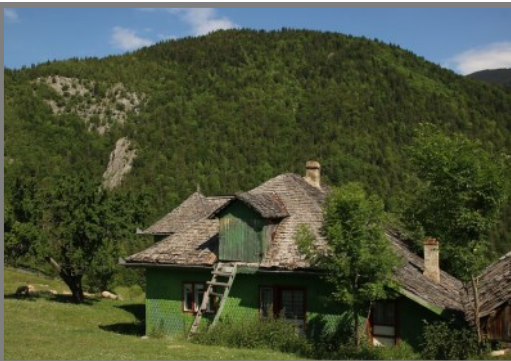
Day 2, 15th June. A morning walk takes us along the limestone gorge near the village in search of local specialities including a bird that is usually hard to find but that nests in the area, the colourful Wallcreeper. We should see many flowers and butterflies as we walk slowly along on an easy track. During the afternoon there will be time to explore the local meadows and pastures around Magura.

Day 3, 16th June. We visit the mountain town of Sinaia from where we travel by cable car to the higher slopes of the **Bucegi Mountains**, up to 2,000m altitude. Among the species we hope to see in the high level alpine meadows will be *Primula halleri*, *Primula minima*, Alpine Pasqueflower *Pulsatilla alpina* and Alpine Snow-bell *Soldanella alpina*. The Carpathian Alpenrose *Rhododendron mytifolium* should be just coming into flower on the slopes around us. Butterflies up at these higher levels should include a variety of fritillaries and blues, with Alpine Accentor and Carpathian Chamois also possible.

Back down in Sinaia, we will visit the grounds of the attractive royal palace, before we head to the western edge of the **Piatra Craiului National Park**, to visit a hide in the forest where we will wait for Europe's largest predator, **Brown Bears** to emerge from the forest to feed. Wild Boar, Roe Deer and even Wolf have also been seen here on our previous visits - fingers crossed!

Day 4, 17th June. Today we bid farewell to Magura and head westwards into **Transylvania** proper, and the village of Crit. Along the way we will stop to visit the **wetlands of Dumbravita** where we will spend some time enjoying the birding, with Squacco Heron, Ferruginous Duck, Whiskered Tern and Penduline Tit all likely. Our home for the next four nights is Casa cu Zorele, set in a traditional Saxon farmhouse in the village of Crit, southeast of Sighisoara.

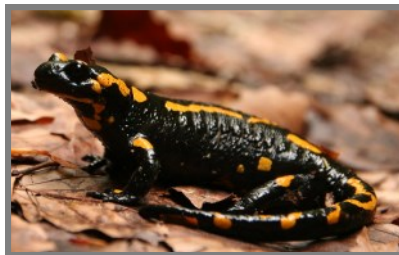
Day 5, 18th June. The landscape of Transylvania is rich in meadows, forest and wood pasture, with outcrops of drier steppe-like vegetation. The mosaic of habitats is a result of the history of the local peoples, with centuries of traditional management by the local Saxon population. We will start our exploration of the local area by visiting an area of **steppe vegetation** near the village of Apold, home to some special plants including the impressive Siberian Bellflower *Campanula sibirica*, thistle-like *Jurinea mollis* and Nodding Sage *Salvia nutans*. Whinchat sing from the bushes, while we should keep our eyes peeled for soaring Lesser Spotted Eagles. In the afternoon, we move to the nearby wood pasture at Breite, where the ancient trees are home to Stag Beetles and longhorn beetles!



Day 6, 19th June. Transylvania is home to some of the finest **ancient wood pastures** and veteran trees in Europe, second only to the deer parks of southern Britain. Today we will visit one of the finest of the finest, at Marcheasa. Ancient oaks stand sentinel on the grassy hillside, Great Grey and Red-backed Shrikes hunt from the lower bushes, with grazing Water Buffalo wallowing in pools that are home to Yellow-bellied Toads and the rare Tadpole Shrimp. We will spend the day exploring the area and learning about the history of these important habitats.



Day 7, 20th June. Today we will travel the short distance east to the well-preserved Saxon village of **Viscri**, famous for its **fortified church**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and also for its links with King Charles and the focus of The Prince of Wales Foundation in Romania. White Stork nest in the village, while Black Redstarts sing from the rooftops as we explore the village and learn more about the cultural history of the Saxon region.



Nearby we will visit species rich meadows, including another outcrop of steppe vegetation where we will look for *Clematis integrifolia*, the Burning Bush *Dictamnus albus* and the tumbleweed-like Tatar Kale *Crambe tataria*. Back at Crit, we will have some time to explore the village itself and the flowery hay meadows on the hillside behind the village.



Day 8, 21st June. After breakfast it will be time to travel southwards once more, making a couple of stops along the way before we finally end up back at Bucharest airport and our flights home.

Accommodation, meals and transport

For the first three nights the group will stay at Pension Mosorel in Magura. The last four nights will be in the Pension Casa cu Zorele in Crit. This village has many of the medieval buildings preserved and the accommodation is in restored Transylvanian houses. All rooms have private bathrooms.



Meals during the trip will include Romanian dishes, with an emphasis on local food. Picnics will be taken for lunch.

Transport during the trip will be by small coach/minibus.

Weather

The weather should be pleasant, mostly warm, even hot, although rain is always possible, as is cooler weather, especially when we spend time up in the mountains. There can be strong sun especially on higher slopes and sun protection is needed.

Leader

Philip Precey is a Director of Wildlife Travel, birder and all round naturalist, who has led almost 90 previous trips for Wildlife Travel, including six previous visits to Romania.

Philip will be joined by local guides, and between them, our guides and leader will ensure you have a relaxing, enjoyable holiday.

Health and fitness

On most days, we are out and about for much of the day, albeit walking a relatively slow pace and making several stops each day. It is necessary to walk on rougher ground and up some **slopes**, although **none of the walking is strenuous**. Access to the bear hides can involve steps and walking up small (steepish) banks and, therefore, may not be suitable for people with limited mobility.

Flights

Group flights are with British Airways from London Heathrow to Bucharest.

14th June depart London Heathrow 09.05, arrive Bucharest Otopeni 14.30
21st June depart Bucharest Otopeni 15.40, arrive London Heathrow 17.10

Romania is two hours ahead of UK time.

Passport and Entry Requirements

Please note that travel rules may be changed by either the UK or Romanian government at any time. For up-to-date information, check www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/romania

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

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 £550 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 15/03/2024

INCLUDED: Return flights from London (Heathrow) to Bucharest, as above. Local transport on excursions as specified in the itinerary. Seven nights accommodation, all meals from dinner day 1 to lunch day 8. Services of leaders and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Gratuities. Travel insurance.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Wildlife Travel Ltd. Reg. No 2237697; (for Registered Charity numbers, please contact us)

Photos: front (clockwise from top): Brown Bear, *Melampyrum cristatum*, Zarnesti gorge, Red-backed Shrike, Viscri fortified church.

Page 2 (from left): Magura, *Rhododendron myrtifolium*. **Page 3** (from top): Map, Fire Salamander, *Soldanella hungarica*, flower-rich meadows around Crit.

Trip reports from our previous Romanian holidays can be found on our website.