

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

26th May to 2nd June 2025 (1 week)

"so much to see!
kind, helpful leaders with
excellent knowledge"

Cevennes 2022

CEVENNES & GRANDS CAUSSES

wildlife and flowers in southern France (by train)

A relaxed week of wild flowers and country walks, exploring the Cevennes National Park and Parc Naturel des Grands Causses, in southern France.

From the rolling limestone plateaux of the Grands Causses, with their deep-cut gorges to the more rugged granite landscape of the Cevennes, the area has much to offer the naturalist. Butterflies include a variety of blues and fritillaries, coppers and heaths, with Nightingales serenading from every bush, Eurasian Griffon vultures and various other raptors circling overhead and Western Green Lizards scuttling off through the undergrowth.

The twin parks of the Cevennes and Grands Causses are particularly rich botanically, and our visit is timed to make the most of the wonderful spring flowers. Most notable is the area's **orchid diversity**, with 30 or more orchids possible during our visit. The two endemics, Aymonin's Orchid *Ophrys insectifera subsp aymoninii* and Aveyron Orchid *Ophrys sphegodes subsp aveyronensis*, which will no doubt feature high on our list of finds during the week, along with Lizard Orchid, Military Orchid and Burnt-tip Orchid in large numbers. The steppe-like grasslands of the Grands Causses are full of wild flowers, with White and Hoary Rock-rose, Pasque Flowers, Alpine Aster, Poet's Narcissus and Wild Tulip all adding splashes of colour.

We will take daily excursions to explore the various habitats and hidden corners of the area, from the limestone grasslands to the deep river gorges. We will visit one of the area's spectacular caves, enjoy a relaxing boat trip along the River Tarn beneath towering cliffs, visit a restored Templar village, and learn about **local conservation projects** for all four European vulture species and the endangered Przewalski's Horse, a Mongolian species being 'rewilded' on the Causse Mejean.



Price

£2170

Single Room Supplement

£185

Full board

Day 1	train to Avignon
Day 2/3	Cevennes NP
Day 4	Jonte & Tarn Gorges
Day 5	Causse Mejean
Day 6	Mont Aiguoual
Day 7	Causse du Larzac
Day 8	return to UK

Leaders

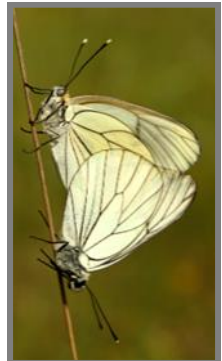
Kieron Huston and
2nd leader tbc

Group size

min 4, max 14

orchids & wild flowers,
country walks

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 Mon 26th May After travelling via Eurostar to Paris and then on to Nimes by TGV, we head west into the Cevennes National Park, (c 2hrs), where we will arrive at our hotel in time for a late dinner. Overnight near Florac (five nights).

Day 2 Tue 27th May A gentle start, after yesterday's travel day, will see us heading a little way north from our hotel for our first introduction to the landscapes of the **Cevennes** and Grand Causses, as we explore the pine woodlands, grassy steppe and gentle hills. Western Bonelli's Warblers sing from the trees, with our first Small Blue and Heath Fritillaries on the wing. Our introduction to the wild flowers of the Cevennes should include *Aster alpinus*, *Carthamus mitissimus* and orchids including Elder-flowered, Burnt-tip and Fragrant Orchid, and we will find intriguing, prehistoric *menhirs* on the hilltops.

Day 3 Wed 28th May On the edge of the Causse Mejean, we will spend today amongst the limestone karst of the **Nimes le Vieux**. Rock Thrush and Rock Sparrow nest amongst the rocks, Early Purple Orchid and Woodcock Orchids can be found in the shaded corners, with the endemic Cevennes Saxifrage growing on the limestone pillars.

In the afternoon we will have some time to spend in the small town of **Florac**, where Dipper nest on the river and we can visit the National Park visitor centre.

Day 4 Thu 29th May We head into the heart of the **Causse Mejean**, where our walk will take us across the wide expanses of the steppe-like grasslands on the plateau, dominated by the beautiful *Stipa pennata*. Amongst the many flowers, the endemic Aymonin's Orchid *Ophrys insectifera subsp aymoninii* can be found in good numbers.

Day 5 Fri 30th May Today we will visit the Causse Mejean. At our first stop, we will visit the TAKH project, where a population of free-roaming endangered **Przewalski's Horse** is being prepared for reintroduction to their wild Mongolian homeland.

We will visit the spectacular cave at **Aven Armand**, and then travel to the **Jonte Gorge** where we will look for all four European species of vulture, and learn about the local reintroduction projects that have restored these magnificent birds to the area.

We will end the day with a leisurely boat trip along the **River Tarn**, travelling through the most spectacular part of the gorge.

Day 6 Sat 31st May We set off southwards today. We will head up to **Mont Aigoual**, the highest point in the Cevennes with (weather permitting) views all the way down to the Mediterranean, and Wild Tulips flowering along the roadsides. From here we carry on south to our next hotel, on the Causse du Larzac, where Nightingales sing in the garden. After settling in to our rooms, we will have some time to visit the nearby restored **Templar village** of La Couvertoirade. o/n near Sauclieres (two nights).



Day 7 Sun 1st June A short journey north of our hotel, we will explore a quiet valley on the edge of the **Causse Larzac**. The grassland on the limestone is notably rich in orchids, with the locally endemic Aveyron Orchid *Ophrys sphegodes subsp aveyronensis* present in good numbers, alongside some ten or more other species.

Day 8 Mon 2nd June After breakfast, we head to Montpellier and our train home.

Health and fitness

On several days, we are **walking for much of the day**, albeit at a relatively slow pace. The day walks are mostly circular walks, between 3 and 6 miles, with some rougher ground and some 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 enjoy the wildlife along the way. If you are a slow walker, please contact us to discuss whether any of the walks will be a problem for you. You must be able to lift your own luggage on and off of the trains.

Accommodation, meals and transport

We will be staying at two comfortable, family-run local hotels. All rooms are en-suite. Our evening meals will be taken in the hotel restaurant. We will take picnic lunches out with us every day.

For our daily excursions, we will travel by small coach or minibus.

Leaders

Our leader for this trip will be **Kieron Huston**, a professional ecologist and all-round naturalist based in Derbyshire. Kieron has led several previous Wildlife Travel holidays, including our previous three visits to the Cevennes.

Depending on final group size, Kieron will be joined by a second Wildlife Travel leader.



Weather

At this time of year the weather should hopefully be 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 cooler or hotter weather and some rain. We will do our best to adapt our walks and excursions accordingly.

Group Travel

Train schedules for summer 2025 are not yet released, but should be similar to 2024, as follows. France is one hour ahead of UK:

26th May: depart London St Pancras 09.01, arrive Lille Europe 11.27
depart Lille Flanders 12.59, arrive Avignon TGV 17.12
2nd June: depart Montpellier Sud de France 13.59, arrive Lille Flandres 18.48
depart Lille Europe 20.30, arrive London St Pancras 20.57

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 Vercors holiday**, 2nd to 9th June 2025, with a direct train from Montpellier to Valence and a connecting local train on to Die, a 30 minute taxi ride from the hotel. Contact us to discuss options.

Passport and Entry Requirements

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.

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.

From 'mid 2025' (exact date yet to be confirmed), UK passport holders will need to apply for the ETIAS European Travel Authorisation to visit Schengen countries. This must be applied for online prior to travel. Once granted, your ETIAS will be valid for 3 years.

For up-to-date information, check www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/france

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 24/02/2025

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. ETIAS and associated costs.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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

Photos: front (clockwise from top): La Malene, Black-veined White, Burnt-tip Orchid, Pasque Flower, Aymonin's Orchid. **Page 2** (from left): Wild Tulip, Aveyron Orchid, Causse Mejean. **Page 3** (from top): Marbled Fritillary, Western Green Lizard, Przewalski's Horses, Eurasian Griffon, Gorge du Tarn, Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth

A trip report from our recent Cevennes holidays can be found on our website, with galleries of photos from our previous visits on our Flickr pages.