

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

2nd to 9th June 2025 (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
£2,295

Single Room Supplement
£195

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 Châtilion
Day 7 Cirque d'Archiane
Day 8 return to London

Leaders

Sarah Lambert
with second leader tbc

Group size
min 5, 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, 2nd 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, 3rd 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, 4th 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, 5th 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, 6th 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, 7th 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, 8th June. Today we travel to **Le Cirque d'Archiane** a natural amphitheatre of cliffs, 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, 9th 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.

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. 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

Our leader for this trip is Sarah Lambert, an expert botanist and keen photographer with a good knowledge of other wildlife. Sarah works as a freelance ecologist based in Peterborough, undertaking habitat and botanical surveys throughout England. Since 2012 she has been the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland recorder for South Lincolnshire. Sarah joined Wildlife Travel in 2019 and has led several trips for us, including our 2024 visit to the Vercors.

Dependent on final group size, Sarah will be joined by a second Wildlife Travel leader.



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.

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:

2nd June: depart London St Pancras 11.04, arrive Lille Europe 13.26
depart Lille Flanders 15.20, arrive Valence TGV 19.01
9th June: depart Valence TGV 10.14, arrive Lille Europe 14.24
depart Lille Europe 18.35, arrive London St Pancras 18.57

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**, 26th May to 2nd 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 03/03/2025

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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Photos: front (clockwise from top): Apollo, La Valle de Combeau, Citril Finch, Lady's Slipper Orchid.
Page 2 (from left): Wild Tulip, Spitzel's Orchid, Southern White Admiral. **Page 3** (from top): Mountain Avens, Vallon de Combeau, Narrow-leaved Gentian, Alpine Ibex.

Trip reports from our most recent Vercors holidays can be found on our website, with galleries of photos from our most recent visits on our Flickr pages.