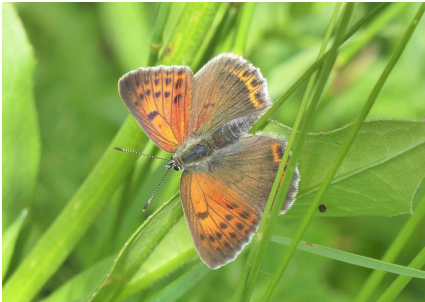


WILDLIFE TRAVEL

all our profits are donated to nature conservation



20th to 27th June 2027 (7 nights)

BULGARIA

mountain butterflies and wild flowers

Exploring the mountains of western Bulgaria, home to endemic plants, abundant butterflies and peaceful monasteries.

We will start our holiday in the western Rhodopes, where the rounded, pine-covered hills are cut periodically by streams and rivers, running through deep gorges. Heading west, the Rhodope mountains reach their highest point with the massifs of Rila and Pirin, cloaked in ancient conifer forests, leading on to alpine meadows that conceal a dazzling array of colourful wild flowers and rock screes higher up.

The mountains are home to many local specialities: with a little searching, flowers such as *Lilium jankae*, Bulgarian Colombine *Aquilegia aurea*, Red Avens *Geum coccineum*, Rila Primrose *Primula deorum*, Balkan Butterwort *Pinguicula balcanica* and the beautiful Orpheus Flower *Haberlea rhodopensis* could all be expected, along with beautiful pine forests including trees as old as 1,000 years.

The butterfly fauna is equally rich, and we will be hoping to find the impressive Apollo, Balkan Copper and Balkan Fritillary, along with a mind-boggling variety of ringlets and graylings, blues and hairstreaks, coppers and skippers, as well as some wonderful day-flying moths.

For the bird enthusiast, the highlight will no doubt be time spent in Trigrad Gorge, looking for the beautiful Wallcreeper that nests in cracks on the rock face here. We will also keep our eyes open for Balkan Chamois high on mountain slopes above us, Common Rosefinch, Sombre Tit, Black Woodpecker and Nutcracker.

We will also visit the famous Rila Monastery, the second biggest monastic complex in the Balkans.

PRICE £2,175
single room supplement £175

Full Board

TOUR LEADERS Phil Saunders
and local guides

PAYMENT
deposit £350
instalment £500
due on confirmation of holiday
balance due 21st March 2027

ITINERARY AT A GLANCE

Day 1 flight to Sofia
Day 2 Trigrad Gorge
Day 3 Trigrad area
Day 4 Trigad area
Day 5 transfer to Pirin
Day 6 Pirin
Day 7 Rila
Day 8 return to UK

Group size min 5, max 12

The Manor House, Broad Street, Great Cambourne, Cambridge CB23 6DH
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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 Sunday 20th June. Our flight takes us to Sofia, from where we travel south-east to the Western Rhodopes.

Days 2-3 Monday 21st to Tuesday 22nd June. We will spend two days exploring the Western Rhodopes, with its colourful meadows and woodlands. More than 2,000 species of plants have been recorded here, of which more than 90 are endemic to the Balkans, including *Viola rhodopaea* and *Geum rhodopaeum*, and a bewildering variety of saxifrages and campanulas, dianthus and astragaluses.

Chief amongst the area's attractions is the fantastic Trigrad Gorge. Here the Trigrad river has carved out 3km of gorge, flowing beneath near-vertical marble cliffs some 300 metres high - in places the two sides of the gorge are just 100 metres apart. For the birders amongst us, Trigrad Gorge is famous as the home to nesting Wallcreeper, and we will pay particular attention to finding this amazing bird as it feeds across the rock faces. The same habitat is home to the equally impressive *Haberlea rhodopensis*, a locally-endemic relative of *ramonda* and the more familiar African violets, which grows on the damp, shaded cliffs, alongside *Saxifraga sempervivum* and *Trachelium rumelianum*.

Higher up, we will explore the flower-rich meadows, home to orchids including Bug Orchid *Anacamptis coriophora*, Heart-flowered Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza cordigera* and Burnt-tip Orchid *Orchis ustulata*. We also hope to find *Sideritis scardica*, more familiar as the key ingredient in 'mountain tea' throughout the Balkans.

Lower down we will spend some time in the pine forests, where we hope to find Crested Tit, Black Woodpecker, Honey Buzzard and Firecrest. Black Redstart nest in the villages, Dipper will be bobbing on the streams while Corncrake will be singing their strange rasping song from nearby meadows, also haunted by Common Rosefinch, Red-backed Shrike, Whinchat and Black-headed Bunting.

Days 4-6 Wednesday 23rd to Friday 25th June. Today we bid farewell to Trigrad and drive west towards the high mountains. We will spend our time here exploring the two massifs of Pirin and Rila, the latter the highest mountain in the Balkans. Amongst wooded areas we will hope to encounter noisy groups of Nutcracker, whilst in open grasslands Soudan keep watch outside their burrow networks.

This is a beautiful landscape of high peaks (over 2,500m), alpine meadows dotted with glacial lakes, spectacular rocky gorges, precipitous cliffs and dense forests. Some of the Macedonian pines here are estimated to be more than 1,000 years old.

The summer flowers should include many local specialities - amongst them bright red Red Aven *Geum coccineum*, dark pink Rila Primrose *Primula deorum*, stunning yellow *Lilium jankae* and the creamy Bulgarian Columbine *Aquilegia aurea*. In the sub-alpine meadows we can hope to find a wonderful array of alpiners including Balkan Butterwort *Pinguicula balcanica*, Pyrenean Gentian *Gentiana pyrenaica*, the endemic Bulgarian Sheep's-bit *Jasione bulgarica* and some of the more diminutive orchids including Small White Orchid *Pseudorchis albida* and Frivald's *Gymnadenia gymmadenia frivaldii*.

The butterfly fauna here features the Apollo, Clouded Apollo, Mountain Small White, Balkan Copper, Higgin's Anomalous Blue, Phalakron Blue, Amanda's Blue, Cynthia's and Balkan Fritillary, Bulgarian Ringlelet and many others. The birds of the mountains include Alpine Chough, Nutcracker, Hazel Grouse and various woodpeckers. Red Squirrels hide amongst the trees, while Balkan Chamois may be picked up as they graze on the mountain slopes.



Day 7 Saturday 26th June. We head towards Kresna Gorge, where Griffon Vultures drift high overhead before visiting the impressive Monastery of Saint Ivan of Rila, the largest monastery in Bulgaria founded by St Ivan in the 10th century and now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Time permitting, we will also visit more mountain meadows, before making our way to our hotel.

Day 8 Sunday 27th June. Today we head back to Sofia airport, stopping along the way to soak up the last of the Bulgarian countryside before our flights home.

TOUR LEADERS

Phil Saunders is a professional ecologist and excellent all-round naturalist with a particular interest in birds and invertebrates. He joined Wildlife Travel in 2018 and has led a number of our holidays from Dorset to Costa Rica.

Our local guides are from Neophron who have guided all of our previous visits to Bulgaria and we are very pleased to be travelling with them again.

ACCOMMODATION, MEALS AND TRANSPORT

We will be staying at three hotels during the holiday: Devin for three nights, Bansko for three nights and Rila for one night. Exact hotels used will depend on the final group size. All rooms will have en-suite facilities.

Meals provided during the stay will have an emphasis on local cuisine. Breakfast and dinner will be taken in the hotels, with lunches a mixture of picnics and café/ restaurants. Requests for special diets can be accommodated.

Transport will be by minibus or smaller 'people carrier'-type vehicles if necessary.

All meals are included in the holiday price from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 8.

GROUP TRAVEL

The group flights will be with British Airways from London Heathrow to Sofia:

20 th June	depart London Heathrow 14.55, arrive Sofia 20.10
27 th June	depart Sofia 21.05, arrive London Heathrow 22.25

It may also be possible to fly from London Luton. Contact us for details and any extra costs.

WEATHER

The weather should be spring like, between 15 and 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, or even snow at higher elevations. Where possible, we will adapt our excursions accordingly.

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. We will spending our time out in the mountains, while the walking is generally easy to moderate, at a 'naturalists' pace, there will obviously be hilly areas and uneven ground. Walking boots are essential, and walking poles are recommended if you find them useful.

The highest altitude we go to is about 2,200-2,400 metres. Please ask for advice from your doctor if you think you will have any problems with being at these altitudes. There are likely to be steps at our hotels, with no lift, as well as up/down into the vehicle.



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 Bulgaria) for up to 90 days in total in any 180-day period without a visa.

From 2027 (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/bulgaria where you can also sign up for email alerts for your destination.

PRICE

£2,175 per person, £175 single room supplement, full board

INCLUDED: Return flight from London Heathrow, local transport and entry fees on excursions as specified in the itinerary. Seven nights' accommodation, all meals from breakfast Day 2 to dinner Day 8. Services of leaders and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Travel insurance. ETIAS costs.

PAYMENTS

Deposit amounts are shown on page 1 of the holiday information pack. **Payments should be made by bank transfer to Sunvil**, using the details given on the booking form, or by posting a cheque made payable to Sunvil Holidays, to the address given on the booking form. Please **DO NOT post any payments to our Cambourne address**.

BOOKING YOUR HOLIDAY

If you have any queries about your holiday or need to talk to someone about your booking, please contact us here at Wildlife Travel. We can make sure that you are given the correct the information and get your questions answered more quickly. We would ask that you **please DO NOT contact Sunvil direct**, to avoid confusion.

COMPLETING THE BOOKING FORM

We do sometimes have more than one set of dates for the same destination, so please make sure you fill in the 'destination' and 'dates' for the holiday you wish to book on.

Please also make sure you complete the section concerning health and fitness: write 'none' if this is the case, but please don't leave that section blank.

If possible, **please fill in the booking form electronically**, by typing directly into the pdf form, save your changes, and then **email the form back to us at wildlifetravel@wildlifebcn.org**. Alternatively, you can post a paper copy to Sunvil Holidays, using the address given on the booking form. Please **DO NOT post bookings to our Cambourne address**.

SUNVIL HOLIDAYS

This holiday is booked through our tour operator, Sunvil Holidays, CAA-ATOL Licence 808, a member of ABTA (V6218), IATA and AITO. All payments are made to them, and your money and booking are protected accordingly.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Please ensure you have read all the information given in the holiday leaflet and booking pack, paying particular attention to the entry requirements, health and fitness information, and details of what is and isn't included in the holiday price.

In order to ensure that this holiday suits you, it is imperative that you read the information on health and fitness in the holiday leaflet, and in the 'general information' section of the booking pack, and **let us know of any issues that may affect your participation in the holiday PRIOR TO BOOKING.**

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is compulsory for our trips outside the UK. You should ensure that any pre-existing medical conditions are covered. We recommend having insurance in place as soon as your booking is confirmed, in the event of your cancellation.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Your booking should be acknowledged with a week, usually sooner. **If you have not heard back from us within a week of sending your booking form, please let us know:** emails and post both go astray, and we wouldn't want you to lose your place on a trip.

You will receive a welcome letter from us, which will tell you if the holiday has already reached minimum numbers or not. Please **DO NOT arrange any additional travel or accommodation that you may need** until the holiday has been confirmed as going ahead.

When the holiday reaches the minimum numbers to be confirmed, we will send you a confirmation letter, including a confirmation invoice from Sunvil, with details of payments due, flights or trains included in your booking, and an ATOL certificate where appropriate.



thank you for travelling with us

www.wildlife-travel.co.uk

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