WILDLIFE TRAVEL

4th to 11th June 2027 (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

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.

A day's train journey takes us away from the noise and hustle of London St Pancras to the Vercors massif, our favourite quiet corner of the French pre-Alps, and a warm welcome from our gracious host Sylvie, in the sleepy village of Les Nonnieres. We have had so many enjoyable visits to the Vercors, more than 20 since our first, in 1998, and we look forward to returning again this year.

The regional natural park of **Vercors** incorporates the largest nature reserve in mainland France: around 17,000 ha of the limestone Pre-Alps, close to the Italian border.

Our early summer visit is timed to make the most of the natural history of the area. June is the period when the best of the flowers bloom, most notably the staggeringly beautiful Lady's Slipper Orchids: in a good year, we can find them just a short walk from the front door. An abundance of butterflies are on the wing, including Apollo and Clouded Apollo, up on the higher meadows, and many birds are still in full voice, setting up their breeding territories. 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 Citril Finch, Lammergeier and Alpine Chough.

This trip will appeal to anyone who enjoys stretching their legs through wildlife-rich countryside and stunning scenery, all without having to go near an airport.



Price
£2,470

Single Room Supplement
£210

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
Laurie Jackson
and Dominic Price

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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 **Laurie Jackson**, an expert all round naturalist and professional ecologist, based in Sussex. A Director of Wildlife Travel, Laurie will be familiar to many of our travellers, having led almost 50 of our holidays since 2013, including four previous visits to the Vercors.

Dependent on final group size, Laurie will be joined by **Dominic Price**, an experienced botanist and Director of the Species Recovery Trust.









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 everywhere, the weather is less predictable now than it used to be, and there may be considerably cooler or hotter weather and some rain.

Group Travel

Train schedules for summer 2027 are not yet released, but we expect them to be similar to 2026.

4th June: **depart London St Pancras 11.04**, arrive Lille Europe 13.26
depart Lille Flanders 15.17, arrive Valence TGV 18.59
11th June: depart Valence TGV 10.15, arrive Lille Europe 14.24
depart Lille Europe 18.35, **arrive London St Pancras 18.57**

It is also possible to meet the group in France. Contact us to discuss options and price implications.

France is one hour ahead of UK

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.

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 £350 PER PERSON, SECOND INSTALLMENT ON CONFIRMATION OF HOLIDAY £500 (to cover committed costs)
BALANCE DUE BY 05/03/2027

INCLUDED: Return train travel from London St Pancras, local transport and entry fees 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.

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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.

A trip report and gallery of photos from our recent holidays to the Vercors can be found on our website.