

Northern Greece – Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 & 2

Bourazani & the Aaos River

It is just a couple of hours journey from Preveza Airport up to the lovely Bourazani where we'll be based for the entire week. Backed by meadows and mixed woodland and set above the pretty Aaos River this fine hotel has mountain views all about. There are plenty of local walks to enjoy and we'll spend some time in riverine woodlands where we can look for Southern White Admiral, Comma and Freyer's Purple Emperor. Indeed butterflies are numerous and even on a short walk we'll clock up thirty or more species, these including such delights as Twin-spot Fritillary, Large Tortoiseshell and Lulworth Skipper. Biodiversity is high, particularly amongst the insects and we can soon find stag beetles, longhorn beetles and an amazing variety of Orthoptera amongst aromatic labiates and some fine groups of Lizard Orchids. The large and local Sombre Goldenring dragonfly is joined along the rivers deep waters by the Eastern Spectre, Small Pincertail, the local anceps form of the Keeled Skimmer and stunningly coloured Broad Scarlet. There are damselflies too with White-legged Damselfly and the Banded Demoiselle prominent. Whip Snakes disappear quickly as we marvel at the handsome Clematis viticella and beautiful Iris sintenisii. European Bee-eaters hawk back and forth as Sombre Tits and both Lesser Spotted and Syrian Woodpeckers inspect the riverside trees. From time to time Black Storks and White Storks drift overhead.

Days 3 & 6

Mount Smolikas

Brown Bears are still quite common on Mount Smolikas, though at the time of day we'll be there, we won't see them. Nevertheless this is some of the most impressive wild mountain scenery in Greece. Woodland Ringlet and the shy Northern Wall Brown sun themselves in flower-filled gullies. The local endemic marsh orchid, Dacylorhiza smolikana is in good orchid company with Lax-flowered Orchids and Lesser Butterfly Orchids. Permanent pools host Great Crested and Alpine Newts, the males of the latter a picture in their bright orange and blue breeding dress. An even more striking amphibian occurs in pools lined with the butterwort, Pinguicula crystallina. When disturbed these Yellow-bellied Toads curl up their feet and expose their belly exhibiting the brilliant yellow-orange pattern there-on - enough to make anyone take a step backwards! The lower valleys offer a delightful picture of Greece's rural tranquillity. Pyramidal Orchids, flaxes, Aristolochia clematidis and Campanula spathulata flower in the sparsely cultivated terraces where we'll encounter the brilliant citrus colours of Greek Clouded Yellow. The intricately-marked Eastern Festoon should still be flying and with a variety of blues and fritillaries we'll find Southern Small White. We'll enjoy a picnic at around five thousand feet with marvellous views of the strongly contoured mountainsides and here we'll look for Geranium asphodeloides, Onobrychus arenaria, and Veronica

teucrium, whilst Amanda's Blue and the gorgeous Blue Argus fly amongst them. These upper slopes host fine shows of the ovalis form of *Orchis mascula* whilst on the edges of the woodlands we'll find glorious stands of the more familiar but still very beautiful Lady Orchid. The stony river bed of Sarantaporos is a good place to look for Yellow-banded Skippers and nearby we'll find *Ophrys grammica*, *Ophrys epirotica*, *Orchis coriophora*, *Orchis laxiflora*, and the regional endemic, *Dactylorhiza pindica*.

Days 4 & 5

Timfi National Park, Monodendri & the Voidomatis Gorge

The magnificent limestone Towers of Papingo and the thousand metre deep Vikos Gorge are part of scenery as magnificent as anywhere in Europe. High walled gardens and deep-eaved gateways allow us a glimpse into the tranquil old mansions typical of the Zagorahori, the distinctive villages that give such atmosphere to this region. Balkan Rock Lizards and blue-headed Dalmatian *Algyroides* sun themselves on the garden walls. *Ramonda serbica* should still offer up a few of its perfect mauve flowers in a truly remarkable limestone 'karst', often growing with *Geranium macrorrhizum*, *Pteroccephalus perennis* and *Centaurea pawlowskii*. Zephyr Blue is common here though there's a rich variety of other blues and fritillaries to keep us occupied and Clouded Apollos can be abundant. The stunning Southern Festoon should still be on the wing and among a number of confusing skippers is the uncommon Olive Skipper. Rusty *Digitalis lanata* blooms amid the white limestone and deep green Acer woodlands. Grey-headed Woodpeckers inhabit the woodlands whilst overhead fly Honey Buzzards and other raptors. In the more open areas handsome Subalpine Warblers sing as we encounter Southern Swallowtail, Chequered Blue and Krüper's Small White. We'll walk along a cobbled street or 'kalderimi' to a monastery perched on the precipitous walls of the Vikos Gorge. The views are sensational! Cliffs are home to two yellow asphodels, *Asphodeline liburnica* and *Asphodeline lutea*. Alpine Swifts and Red-rumped Swallows course back and forth in the band of blue sky visible through native Horse Chestnuts and Hop Hornbeams. Southern Swallowtails, Woodland Grayling and the Cardinal enjoy the sheltered situation. Purple, Sloe, Ilex and Purple-spot Hairstreaks are all found amid the blackthorns and oaks that form part of a varied tree flora.

Day 7

Exochi & Eptachori

Small ponds near Exochi draw in a rich variety of wildlife. Green Hairstreaks, Niobe Fritillaries and Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper may distract us from some fine orchids such as *Ophrys cornuta*. Balkan Green Lizards scuttle past and we'll encounter occasional Hermann's Tortoises, whilst in the bird line we can expect to see Red-backed Shrike, Western Rock Nuthatch and Cirl Bunting as well as the lovely Subalpine Warbler. Red Helleborine is quite common and we'll come across some beautifully marked *Orchis coriophora* and the diminutive local tongue orchid *Serapias politisii*. Handsome Tree Frogs are quite common. A well-situated picnic

area near Eptachori overlooks a fast flowing river with Dippers, Grey Wagtails and some fine Odonata. Here we can look for the uncommon Freyer's Fritillary as well as Osiris Blue, Eastern Baton Blue and the Nettle Tree Butterfly. Formerly a subspecies of Russian Heath, the west Balkan endemic *Coenonympha orientalis* occurs here. As a finale we'll visit one of the famous monasteries on the Albanian border near Pogoniskos.

Day 8

Return to the UK

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