

# Cappadocia

## *Wildlife at Leisure*

### **A Greentours Itinerary**

#### **Day 1**

##### **To Kayseri and the Goreme Inn Hotel**

We'll gain our first insight into the fauna and flora of the Central Anatolian Plateau as drive from Kayseri's Airport into the heart of fabled Cappadocia; Isabelline Wheatears are common whilst Black-headed Buntings, Bee-eaters and Hoopoes are a frequent sight along the roadsides. Several species of Poppy illuminate the roadside verges and there's a rich variety of *Fabaceae* and *Cruciferae*. Large colonies of Silver-studded Blues are noticeable and we'll see several other *Plebejus* blue species. The landscape is initially dominated by the perfect cone of Erciyes Volcano but as its memorable form recedes in the mirror a complex and hauntingly beautiful landscape opens up in front of us.

#### **Day 2**

##### **Cappadocia – Red Valley, Outdoor Museum & Underground City**

Cappadocia's landscapes are some of the most extraordinary in the world and there is also plenty to keep those interested in wildlife busy. Rollers, Golden Orioles, Bee-eaters and Red-backed, Lesser Grey and Woodchat Shrikes are some of the more colourful and common birds, and the area is particularly rich in butterflies. We'll spend time wandering amongst the naturally sculptured pinnacles of rock in which people have hollowed dwellings for thousands of years. We'll also visit the underground city of Derinkuyu. Nearby we'll see immaculate Finsch's Wheatears and Crimson-winged Finches as well as the rather fantastical *Astragalus christianus* with its strange erect branched flowering heads. An afternoon spent in the Red Valley will quite literally illuminate us, for as the sun lowers in the sky the soils glow crimson in a magical landscape.

#### **Day 3**

##### **The Sultan Marshes**

Sitting at the foot of the volcano are the 100,000 hectares of the Sultan Marshes which, after years of neglect and drainage, are now been restored to something like their former glory. Both Black Storks and White Storks feed amongst groups of Avocets and Black-winged Stilts amongst wet tamarisk-steppe, the bushes providing lookouts for many Red-backed Shrikes and Lesser Grey Shrikes. In the reedbeds and freshwater lakes and marshes are Red-crested Pochard, Ferruginous Duck and Marbled Duck. Along narrow winding channels we shall be able to get very close to water birds such as Little Bittern, Moustached Warbler and Bearded Tit, as well as the ubiquitous Dice

Snake. Huge Marsh Frogs and abundant dragonflies are disturbed as our boats glide through the White Water Lilies and a sea of white Water Crowfoot. Squacco Herons are numerous and we shall also see Great White Egret, Little Egret, Purple Heron, flocks of White Pelicans circling above us, Glossy Ibis, Slender-billed Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Collared Pratincoles and a host of other waders, gulls and terns.

#### **Day 4**

##### **Cappadocia - Melendiz Volcano**

The impressive snow-capped 3268m Hasan Dağı and its twin Melendiz Dağı, which is almost as high, are two of several large volcanoes that fringe the Central Plateau. We'll take a country road over the saddle that divides the two peaks where we'll find lovely displays of crocuses and *Muscari aucheri*. Nearby is open steppe where we'll come across one of the tour's highlights, the gorgeous *Iris sprengeri*, a superb oncocyclus iris whose narrowly triangular falls and rounder standards are all lined with purple. Long-legged Buzzards often nest in a quarry where we'll also find lots of Rock Sparrows and feeding Crimson-winged Finches.

#### **Day 5**

##### **Cappadocia - Bağıldere Valley & Steppes**

Cappadocia's white marly hillsides host many exceptionally pretty flowers. Prime amongst these are the thickset club-headed inflorescences of *Arnebia densiflora*, beset with large lemon blooms. The borage family has many fine species here; there are mats of brilliant dark blue (set off with pink) *Moltkia coerulea*, a creamy form of *Alkanna orientalis*, blue and cerise *Alkanna pseudotinctoria*, deep red-purple *Nonea stenostiphon*, sky-blue *Lappulas* and *Cerinthe minor*. There are red and orange poppies, some truly gorgeous *Onobrychis* species, *Bellevalia longipes*, brilliant blue cornflowers, blue fenugreeks, and the very fine *Erysimum thrysoides*. Calandra Larks sing loudly almost everywhere and we'll see White Storks and Black Storks and Egyptian Vultures which are particularly common in the area. On more open steppe Isabelline Wheatears are ever-present along with townships of Asia Minor Ground Squirrels (sousliks). These whistle warnings of our approach as we photograph swathes of pink and red *Wiedemannia orientalis* amid myriad colourful and unusual *Astragaluses*.

#### **Day 6**

##### **The Aladağ**

The Aladağ is the highest of all the great Taurean ranges with Demirkazik, the highest peak, reaching 3756m above sea level. In mid-May there is a lot of snow on the higher reaches, though so white are the turreted limestones of this range that at times it is difficult to tell crags from snow. The high valleys and alpine benches are the summer home to nomadic herders who we shall see and meet around their tented encampments. We have a good chance of finding the stately Ibex and the king of

vultures, the Lammergeier. Other typical birds of these alpine slopes are Snowfinches, which are very common, Shore Larks, Red-fronted Serins, Griffon Vultures and Golden Eagles. The flora is superb. Apricot and plum coloured *Iris sari* blooms along the roadside along with a spectacular show of the birthwort *Aristolochia maurorum*, the almost black flowers more prolific than the leaves! With these beauties are tulips, milkworts, *Alkannas*, very many strange and beautiful *Astragalus*es and lots of yellow *Iris schachtii*. Closer to the snows are showers of bright blue *Scilla sibirica taurica*, a very fine form of this variable plant. Buttercups include *Ranunculus isthmicus* and *Ranunculus brachylobus* and variable *Corydalis erdelii* produces a fine display against the white rocks and blue skies. We'll find gorgeous bright sky-blue *Muscari azureum*, and the pretty little *Muscari anatolicum*, with dark violet flowers tipped with a wide white band. We'll explore gorges inhabited by Radde's Accentors and Wallcreepers where the strange smelly geranium relative *Biebersteiniana orphanidea* has its deep ruby blooms. *Lamium garganicum* looks pretty on the cliffs, and we'll look for the beautiful golden bells of *Fritillaria aurea*.

## **Day 7**

### **Erciyes Volcano**

On the very edge of the Central Anatolian Plateau, the huge Mount Erciyes, a dormant volcano reaching almost 4000m, looms high above the Sultan Marshes. Several ski hotels perch by a road that passes over 2000m along the side of the volcano, and this gives us great access to the snow-streaked slopes. Massed displays of *Colchicum szovitsii* shower the slopes with various shades of pink below the snow patches, there are many thousands of blooms. On dry bluffs are *Draba bruniifolia* and purple *Pulsatilla albana (armena)*. Shore Larks are everywhere and around the snow-melt ponds and small lakes a loud chorus emanates from abundant Green Toads. The wettest valleys are coloured yellow by *Gageas* and thousands of the distinctively waisted flowers of *Crocus sieheanus*.

## **Day 8**

### **Departure from Kayseri**

We've a midday departure from Kayseri Airport, just forty-five minutes from our hotel.

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(0)1298 83563. After booking your place you'll receive a confirmation letter and a detailed information pack will be dispatched twelve weeks prior to departure. Flower, bird and butterfly checklists are available.