

# Central Italian Alps

## Stelvio National Park

### A Greentours Itinerary

#### Day 1 to Borno

A scenic route along the shores of Lake Iseo takes us into the Bergamasche Alps, where we'll stop in a gorge and start our holiday with some choice wildlife. Black Woodpecker is often seen here and there'll be plenty of butterflies visiting the roadside flowers, notably Purple Emperor, Blue-spot Hairstreak and Pearly Heath. Dark Red Helleborines grow along the lanes here and we'll see *Telekia speciosissima* and *Corydalis lutea*, both local endemics. Then we'll continue up into the mountains and settle into our lovely little hotel in Borno.

#### Day 2 Brescian Prealps

Though only in the 'Prealps' the Brescian Prealps are marvellously wild. We'll visit the impressively flowery southern parts of the Adamello Natural Park. The stately *Molopospermum peloponessiacum* is an impressive sight and we'll see fine *Gentiana punctata*, and abundant blooms of *Phyteuma hedraianthifolium*, *Phyteuma betonicifolium* and *Pedicularis ascendens*. We'll also see *Stemmacantha rhapontica* in perfect flower. Mountain Clouded Yellows are noticeable here and we can expect to see Alpine Blue, Common Brassy Ringlets, and Alpine Heath. Orchids were quite a feature. The Short-spurred Fragrant Orchid is numerous, with Pink Globe Orchids, Mountain White Orchids, Frog Orchids and abundant *Nigritella rhellicani*, and there's even a few *Nigritella rubra* for company.

In the morning we'll have seen much *Rhododendron ferrugineum* flowering on the acidic rocks, with *Pedicularis recutita*, Alpine Rose, and Mountain Avens too. In the afternoon it'll be the turn of *Rhododendron hirsutum* as we'll now find ourselves on calcareous rocks. The superb *Saxifraga hostii rhaetica* cascades superbly from cliff faces. We'll find the beautiful Dark Columbine in the woodland alongside Nodding Wintergreen and *Pyrola minor*. Purple-edged Copper and Woodland Ringlelet fly above damp meadows full of lovely plants such as Globeflower and Wolfsbane, Yellow Gentian and the endemic *Centaurea rhaetica* whose fine feathery bracts make this a particularly attractive knapweed.

## Day 3

### Bergamasche Orobieenne Alps

Today we'll visit the Pizzo Arera, and the 'path of flowers', set in the impressively vertical looking Orobieenne Alps. Here we'll find *Linaria tonzigii*, a very rare endemic toadflax, and the beautiful endemic *Viola dubyana*. That symbol of alpine flowers, Edelweiss, blooms here, and *Pedicularis gyroflexa* is common. Both *Globularia nudicaulis* and *Globularia cordifolia* will be in flower alongside Alpine Poppies. Almond-eyed Ringlet, Mnestra's Ringlet, and Dewy Ringlets fly together on flowery alpine turf populated with such species as *Silene pusilla*, *Valeriana saxatilis*, *Linum alpinum*, *Pedicularis ascendens*, *Athamanta cretensis*, *Achillea clavennae*, and *Crepis kernerii*. Some of the Alps' more beautiful but widespread flowers put on a marvellous show up here notably *Saxifraga caesia*, Golden Cinquefoil, *Gentiana clusii*, *Pulsatilla alpina*, *Dryas octopetala*, *Cyclamen purpurascens* and *Linaria alpina*. Silky Ringlet of the distinctive *triopes* form, with three forewing ocelli, is found here too. Alpine Newt and Crested Newt are found in a large pond where the muddy shores attract various blues and whites. Water Pipit, Black Redstart, Northern Wheatear, and Alpine Chough are typical of these higher slopes.

Walking down the road we'll find fine *Saxifraga hostii rhaetica* and the stately *Stemmacantha rhapontica*, abundant in lower pastures. Honey Buzzards soar over forest where the tracks are alive with butterflies such as Chalk-hill Blue, Duke of Burgundy Fritillary, White Admiral, Dark Green Fritillary, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Large Wall Brown, and Tufted Marbled Skipper. Martagon and Orange Lilies bloom prolifically while widespread subalpine meadow species such as Great Masterwort, *Laserpitium peucedanoides*, *Digitalis grandiflora*, *Digitalis lutea*, *Phyteuma scheuchzeri* and *Anthericum ramosum* make a startling sight.

## Day 4

### the Gavia Pass

An exciting and tremendously scenic road with fine views of waterfalls, scree slopes and snow covered peaks leads us up to the Gavia Pass. On the way up we'll stop for beautiful *Phyteuma globulariifolium*, as well as *Pedicularis kernerii* and *Pinguicula leptoceras*. The meadows are particularly good for butterflies and we can expect Lesser Mountain Ringlet, Almond-eyed Ringlet, Silky Ringlet, and Swiss Brassy Ringlet which is not uncommon. We'll look for the pretty burnet moth *Zygaena purpuralis* and a new flower will be *Primula glutinosa*.

At the pass itself, at 2650m, lovely *Primula daonensis* will be in flower and we'll see *Gentiana verna*, *Gentiana brachyphylla*, and *Gentiana nivalis* too. Damp hollows are home to colonies of Shepherd's Fritillaries, and we've a good chance of Small Apollo and Glandon Blue. *Eriophorum scheuchzeri* fleck these boggy flushes with miniature fluffy white clouds, tiny pools of blue are *Gentiana bavarica*. *Saxifraga seguieri* was in fine flower and cushions of *Minuartia sedoides* were covered in green flowers.

*Soldanella pusilla* is found on this pass in impressive numbers by the large snow patches alongside *Ranunculus glacialis*, *Trifolium alpinum*, and *Antennaria carpatica*. Snow Finches fly about the ridgetops where Alpine Ibex pose in classic fashion. In the afternoon we'll descend to our small family run hotel which has beautiful rooms, and superb food served in a dining room with a great atmosphere and good service.

## **Days 5 - 8**

### **Stelvio National Park**

A road takes us up to the 2758m Stelvio Pass and offers access to an amazing alpine wonderland! Amongst rocks and gravels close to the road we can find fine *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, endemic *Saxifraga aphylla*, *Saxifraga exarata*, Alpine Poppies, the pale blue *Arabis caerulea*, *Arabis alpina*, and *Pritzelago alpina*. Below the pass a slope covered in *Ranunculus glacialis* makes a stunning display with *Gentiana bavarica* and *Geum montanum*. Here Mountain Clouded Yellows, Marsh Fritillary, and Mountain Fritillary are the typical butterflies of the grassy slopes. We'll also see Purple-edged Copper, Mountain Alcon Blue, Swiss Brassy Ringlet and both Large Grizzled Skipper and Silver-spotted Skipper. There's a good chance of finding Cynthia's Fritillary and Grisons Fritillary as well as Alpine Grayling. High calcareous rocks on the way to a beautiful and wild alpine lake host *Saxifraga vandellii* (may be over but will still be impressive), *Saxifraga adscendens*, *Oxytropis lapponica*, *Viola calcarata*, *Primula farinosa* and *Gentiana clusii*. Silky Ringlets fly over screes where we'll find *Ranunculus alpestris*, *Papaver aurantiacum* and lots of *Saxifraga caesia*.

We'll explore the Val Viola which has a toll road that leads up to the border with Switzerland. We think of eyebrights as little white flowers but here is the beautiful yellow *Euphrasia minima*, and other fine plants in this valley include *Sempervivum wulfenii*, the distinctive *Hieracium intybaceum*, both *Gentiana utriculosa* and *Gentiana bavarica*. Shimmering orange Scarce Coppers are an arresting sight and among the blues is the uncommon Cranberry Blue as well as a whole swathe of species such as Large, Idas, Silver-studded, Mazarine, and Chalkhill Blues. Arran Browns and Large Ringlets will be numerous, and we've a good chance of Asian Fritillary here.

For something a little different we'll take a look at the acidic bog flora of Oja Bog. *Parnassia palustris*, *Sanguisorba officinalis* and *Drosera rotundifolia* rise above the sphagnum. Purple Emperors visit this spot, settling on the track and we'll see both Heath and Dark Green Fritillaries nectaring on thistles. The spotted orchids *Dactylorhiza cruenta* and *Dactylorhiza lapponica* will both be in flower.

*Saxifraga bryoides*, *Saxifraga seguieri* and Mountain Crowberry are characteristic plants of acidic slopes on the passes of Livigno. The *glaceigenita* form of Marsh Fritillary and the burnet *Zygaena exulans* will be flying. *Primula latifolia*, *Primula integrifolia* and *Primula hirsuta*, and all three hybrids between these species occur here, though they may not all be in flower.

An option during one of these days will be a lengthy excursion in search of the very local endemic Little Fritillary. We'll head over the border into Switzerland and to a pass above the Inn Valley, where scree slopes and snow-capped peaks tower over fine alpine pasture. Last year we found at least eight Little Fritillaries here and another great species in Small Apollo. The rare orchid *Chamorchis alpina* is also found here and other highlights of the day will be *Dactylorhiza majalis*, *Pinguicula alpina*, and *Gagea fragifera*, as well as great displays of *Primula integrifolia*.

## **Day 9 Departure**

Today we'll descend from the delights of the High Alps and follow the valleys down to Milan's airport for lunchtime departures.

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