

Algeria

Forest & Mountains of Numidia

A Greentours Itinerary

The great desert interior of Algeria, a vast expanse of sand and rock, is separated from the Mediterranean coast by the great Tell Atlas range that stretches across the northern fringe of the entire country. The most spectacular landscapes are found in the Kabyle where the peaks rise to a heady 2300m and deep canyons cut the magnificent Atlas Cedar Forests that still exist in national parks such as Djurdjura. For years Algeria has been rather a closed book but is now gaining a reputation as one of the safest country's to visit in North Africa.

Day 1 To Algiers

Our flight arrives early in the evening and we'll head straight to our hotel in the mountains of the Djurdjura National Park, a journey of a little over two hours.

Days 2 & 3 Djurdjura National Park

We'll spend three nights at a hotel high in the mountains enjoying a veritable treasure trove of fauna in beautiful forests. Though the deep blue Mediterranean separates these mountains from the continent of Europe the fauna and flora has a decidedly European feel, though in many cases the actual species here are unique to the Kabyle, or at least to North Africa. *Cyclamen africanum* is a good example, nestling in rocks under these great trees, and there's Algerian Three-toed Skink and North African Ocellated Lizard, as well as pretty tri-coloured *Viola munbyana* and the very rare *Paeonia algeriensis*. At least thirty-four species of orchid are found within the park boundary. There's both Sword-leaved and Red Helleborines, Monkey Orchids and Mirror Orchids, and a whole bunch of endemics such as *Ophrys battandieri*, *Ophrys marmorata*, *Ophrys numida*, and *Ophrys tenthredinifera* subsp. *ficalhoana*. Throughout the tour we'll marvel at the rich insect life – we'll see the multi-coloured 'eyes' of the Mediterranean Mantis, the brilliant cobalt-blue *Glaphyrus maurus* (a beetle) and the simply weird Elongated Bean Weevil – three words you never thought you'd see together except perhaps in what3words! The intricately patterned and coloured wings of Spanish Festoons will no doubt impress and we'll see Iberian Scarce Swallowtails, Provence Hairstreak, Greenish Blacktip, rare Moroccan High Brown Fritillary, and lovely Spotted Adonis Blue. The highest peaks may still have snow which certainly lies all winter in this area and we can see Alpine Accentor, Red-billed Chough and Seebohm's Wheatear, whilst lower down Wryneck and the lovely Moussier's Redstart are found.

Daphne laureola forms clumps under forests of *Quercus rotundifolia* whilst in the spectacular Atlas Cedar woodlands around our superbly sited hotel we can find

Iris unguicularis and the unusual purple-infused Eryngium triquetrum. Ornithogalum baeticum offers abundant white blooms, and there's pretty blue Convolvulus sabatius, salmon Echium asperrinum and elegant Echinops bovei. Yellow Tulipa sylvestris is one of Africa's only members of this genus. There are some truly lovely 'knapweeds'. We'll see pink Catananche caerulea and yellow Catananche montana, Carthamus pinnatus, and the gorgeous pink Jurinea humilis. There are a number of snake species we can see though of course these are difficult to get close to, however other reptiles will be more obliging - Moorish Gecko, Western Snake-eyed Skink, Andalusian Wall Lizard and the stripey Large Psammmodromus along them. Large Tortoiseshells will have been out of hibernation for a while now. We'll likely encounter Southern Brown Argus, Southern Branded Skipper, Moroccan Marbled White and Aetherie Fritillary and Austaut's Blue might already be on the wing.

We should keep our eyes on the sky. Djurdjura is a particularly good place for raptors with notable numbers of Griffon Vulture, Booted Eagle, Lesser Kestrel and Short-toed Eagle, whilst we might also see Little Swift arcing through the skies too. Of course we won't be able to keep our eyes off the orchids for long for here are also *Himantoglossum robertianum*, *Orchis anthropophora* and a very local species that on this trip we will only see here, the yellow 'spotted orchid' *Dactylorhiza markusii*.

Day 4

Akfadouh Forest

Black Pine and endemic *Abies numidica* join the Cedar's of Lebanon in the wonderful Akfadou Forest where we'll encounter troupes of Barbary Macaques and hopefully newly arrived Atlas Flycatcher. Orchids are abundant and include *Androrchis olbiensis*, *Androrchis patens*, *Androrchis pauciflora* subsp. *laeta*, *Dactylorhiza elata* subsp. *elongata*, *Dactylorhiza maculata* subsp. *battandieri*, and the gorgeous *Ophrys atlantica*. Both *fragrans* and *coriophora* forms of Bug Orchid occur. We'll encounter orchids familiar to us North Europeans such as Pyramidal Orchid and Bee Orchid and others less so – there's the lovely *Anacamptis morio* subsp. *longicornu*, *Neotinea tridentata* subsp. *conica*, *Neotinea maculata*, *Ophrys bombyliflora*, *Ophrys numida*, and the pretty pastel-shaded nominate form of *Ophrys tenthredinifera*. Amongst the birds we'll seek here are the *mauritanica* race of Tawny Owl, African Blue Tit, African Chaffinch, and of course Levaillant's Woodpecker.

Day 5

Babor National Park

There's no question which bird most birdwatchers would want to see on a visit to Algeria, the country's own endemic bird, the Algerian Nuthatch, and we'll go to Babor National Park where these cute little nuthatches were first found only fifty years ago. Levaillant's Woodpecker is also common. The nuthatch prefers the lovely open woodlands of Canary Oak, a delightful habitat, especially where it interfaces with Atlas Cedars. We've another chance of finding the Algerian Peony

here and Grape Hyacinths are dotted throughout. Rocky ledges have the bright yellow wands of *Asphodeline lutea*. Higher we may find *Romulea bulbocodium* and *Gagea foliosa* still in flowers and the local North African races of both Great Spotted Woodpecker (*numidus*) and Coal Tit (*ledouci*). Wild Boar are not uncommon and we'll certainly see their 'work' and amongst the reptiles we hope to see are Olivier's Sand Lizards. In the lower valley we'll look for two rather special odonata - Large Pincertail and Copper Demoiselle.

Days 6 & 7

Borj Zemmoura

Heading into the interior we'll find the green hills around the picturesque town of Borj Zemmoura to be a rich hunting ground. African Golden Wolf and Barbary Partridges are typical of this habitat alongside Tristram's Warbler and Black Wheatear. Butterflies are particularly numerous with Moroccan Hairstreak, Black-eyed Blue, Green-striped White and the gorgeous Little Tiger Blue amongst the choicer species. Spanish Gatekeeper and Desert Orange Tip also fly here and we should keep an eye out for Seeborn's Wheatear and the local *mauritanica* form of Eurasian Magpie with its rather fetching blue eye-patch. Lizard Orchid should already be in flower and we'll find the local *expansa* form of Pink Butterfly Orchid as well as *Ophrys murbeckii*, *Orchis purpurea* and the Tongue Orchids *Serapias strictiflora*, *Serapias lingua* and *Serapias parviflora*. We'll see the local form of Early Purple Orchid, *Androrchis mascula* subsp. *maghrebiana*, as well as *Ophrys lutea* subsp. *lutea* and *Ophrys scolopax* subsp. *apiformis*. There's also more of the lovely *Ophrys atlantica*. Both Naked Man Orchid and Monkey Orchid are frequent while Violet Limodores and Lizard Orchid might already be in flower.

The Giant Thistle, *Carduus macrocephalus*, is an arresting sight and there's all sorts of unusual flora such as *Dipcadi serotinum*, Shrubby Globularia, *Gladiolus dubius*, *Linaria triphylla*, *Lathyrus clymenum*, the little yellow star of Bethlehem *Gagea lacaitae*, delicate pink *Ajuga iva*, stunning *Sulla coronaria* with heads of brightest crimson, and the spectacular deep-red spikes of *Orobancha foetida*.

Day 8

Departure from Algiers

After the beautiful and tranquil towns of villages of the Kabyle we'll find the Kasbah in Algiers an altogether different but very worthwhile experience. And we'll have time too to visit the Jardin d'Essai, the city's fine botanical garden, before heading to the airport and our flights home.

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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