

Cappadocia & Lake Van

Eastern Turkey

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 we 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 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 *Astragaluses* 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 4

Cappadocia - Bağlıdere 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 5

To Van & Van Kalesi

After breakfast we'll leave Cappadocia's unique landscape and head across the great salt steppes that surround Turkey's largest lake, Tuz Gölü, whose name literally means just 'Salt Lake'. From Ankara Airport our flight takes us to the eastern borders of Anatolia. As we near Van we'll fly over the ash-covered slopes of Nemrut Dağı, an extinct volcano, in whose crater floor sits an impossibly blue lake before descending as we cross the vast lake, the mighty volcanic cone of Suphan Dağı, Turkey's third highest mountain at 4058m, reflecting in the waters to the north. The scenery around Van is quite breath-taking - the immense lake is encircled by range after range of

beautiful snow-capped peaks and the lake's waters turn turquoise, blue, white or even reddish depending on wind and weather.

After landing we'll head towards Van's 'Rock' and the ancient Urartian Citadel there-on where cuneiform inscriptions date from the 8th century BC. Below it sits the marvellous new Van Museum with an exceptionally curated display of the region's rich history. And then to our hotel, sublimely situated on the lake's shore a few miles south of town.

Day 6

Muradiye Waterfall & Erçek Gölü

Heading north across the rolling steppes that reach down to Van's turquoise waters we'll soon be enjoying the wonder purple-blue *Iris barnumae* and fields covered in a pastiche of pink and purple from a combination of *Dactylorhiza osmanica*, *Orchis pseudolaxiflora*, *Polygala anatolica* and swathes of *Primula auriculata*. All decorated with the shiny golden yellow of Black-headed Yellow Wagtails.

A river descends from Tendurek's black lava flows cutting a gorge and dropping over an impressive waterfall. Here we'll enjoy a fine lunch overlooking the sublime scenery. Here blooms many Iris enthusiasts' Holy Grail - *Iris iberica*. The large falls are heavily veined deep maroon, the centres almost black. These are crowned by extraordinary snowy white standards lightly touched with purple. Growing with this beauty are *Gladiolus atroviolaceus* and blue lily-like *Ixiolirion tataricum* as well as the velvety scarlet flowers of *Phelypaea tournefortii*. Saker Falcons hunt along the ridge behind and Egyptian Vultures nest nearby. Rock Sparrows, and in some years, Pale Rock Sparrows, are abundant and it won't take long to locate Great Rock Nuthatches as their strident calls echo from the cliff-faces. Butterflies congregate by a tiny stream - Pontic Blue, Southern Comma and the local *Polyommatus fatima* are just some we should see.

The impressive pompoms of *Klasea serratuloides* bloom with both *Bellevallias longistyla* and *fominii* on dry rocky slopes inhabited by Grey-necked Buntings and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Shallow Lake Erçek has a fantastically rich birdlife with perhaps a thousand Greater Flamingoes on show and with them White Storks and large numbers of ducks including Ruddy Shelducks, Red-crested Pochard and Garganey. Citrine Wagtails and Moustached Warblers occupy bulrush marshes. Male White-headed Ducks point their swollen blue bills skyward as they display in reedy roadside ponds. Damp steppe beyond the lake stretches in the distance covered in a pink haze from literally millions of *Orchis pseudolaxiflora*, yet another extraordinary botanical sight in a region thick with them!

Day 7

Hoşap Castle and Güzeldere Pass

The 'Tolkienesque' 17th century Kurdish fortress at Hoşap sits upon a rocky pinnacle guarding the upper entrance to the Zerneke Valley. A dry valley here regularly has all three of the rare Eastern Turkish seedeaters, so Grey-necked Bunting, Mongolian Trumpeter Finch and even Trumpeter Finch itself. Beyond lies the snowy Güzeldere Pass and fantastic *Iris paradoxa*, with falls covered in a thick layer of velvet and topped by large white standards veined a deep inky blue - truly a spectacular plant! Radde's Accentors and the local 'unspotted' race (*magna*) of Bluethroat feed amongst the pink crocus-like flowers of *Colchicum szovitsii*. *Iris pseudocaucasica* mixes with both white and the more common yellow form of recently named *Tulipa koyuncii* and with them blue *Bellevallia pycnantha* and the extremely rare *Bellevallia rixii*, found only here. Lemon-flowered stemless *Centaurea vanensis* grows on screes also inhabited by squat patches of yellow and red-eyed *Androsace villosa*. Queen of Spain and Glanville Fritillaries are common and here we shall see *Callophrys paulae* (a type of Green Hairstreak) and Dalmatian Ringlet flying amongst beautiful *Gentiana verna* and *Corydalis nariniana*. Some miles over the pass we'll leave time to visit a site for the exquisite yellow *urumiensis* – our fifth *Oncocyclus* Iris species of the tour!

Day 8

Karabet Pass

The road to Bahçesaray takes us up the 9500 foot Karabet Pass into a land covered in snow and rock and millions of *Puschkinia scilloides*, their blooms ranging from white to icy blue. Kurdish herders attend their flocks and we'll see groups of men and women, the latter in their colourful traditional costumes, all lending a helping hand with the sheep shearing. Golden Eagles and Chough soar against the great cliffs that rise from the road and by snow are Snow Finches and Shorelarks. Radde's Accentors are common! Butterflies include the pretty green and orange *Tomares romanovii*. The flowers are quite incredible. Amongst acres of the *Puschkinia* grow the pale pink to cerise goblets of *Merendera kurdica*; some are four inches across! Rare *Fritillaria minima* decorates screes with golden-yellow bells and by streams grow swathes of *Primula auriculata* and the pretty mauve-pink *Tulipa humilis*. By snow patches are *Corydalis oppositifolia* and two more species of fritillary, the butterscotch-maroon flowers of the in-aptnly named *Fritillaria minuta*, and the green and purple striped bells of *Fritillaria crassifolia*. High cliffs top 12,000 feet above the pass and careful searching amongst yellow *Saxifraga kotschyi* might reveal Wallcreeper.

Day 9

Akdamar Island and the The Çatak Road

Snow-capped mountains descend steeply into the lake near Gevas. There's no need for a washing machine here, the lake's soda content is so high it cleans clothes in an instant. It has rather the same effect on the waterbirds - the Coots have white

wingbars! A boat takes us to Akdamar Island and its tenth century church, built by the kings of Vaspurkan. Well-preserved frescoes show various biblical stories including David and Goliath and Jonah and the Whale, and are considered among the great masterpieces of Armenian art. Needless to say there's plenty of masterpieces in the natural world too – some ancient *Pistachia vera* and some highly active colonies of Armenian Gulls and Night Herons among them! Back on the 'mainland' open slopes harbour dark purple *Gladiolus atroviolaceus* and the pink umbels of *Allium akaka* perched above pretty rounded leaves. Stunning *Iris sari*, a variably plum-coloured iris, blooms among a bewildering array of colourful pea flowers and the lovely blue pendent bells of *Moltkia caerulea*.

Steppe in this part of the world often harbours almost miraculous quantities of flowers but still a small area of this amazing habitat on the road to Catak is beyond special. Here is an exquisite display of blooms. Massed *Linaria kurdica* with impressively large yellow blooms (think snapdragon..) mix with mounds of *Convolvulus linearis*, bright red *Roemeria refracta*, orange-red *Glaucium grandiflorum* and lots of colourful *Astragaluses*.

A dry rocky gorge provides a warm sunny spot for butterflies such as Chapman's Blue, Lesser Fiery Copper and the lovely Turkish Golden Copper. Crimson-winged Finches, Western Rock Nuthatch and Grey-necked Bunting feed on slopes covered in a memorable display of pink *Aethionema grandiflorum* and *Aethionema membranaceum* as well as the impressive *Muscari longipes*. Further towards Çatak we'll see *Potentilla lignosa* flowering in cascades over some rocky outcrops, Ring Ouzels and some Red-fronted Serins, the lovely Romanov's Copper, and two beautiful *Salvias*, the reddish *Salvia trichoclada* and the very large-flowered *Salvia macrochlamys* with bright cerise and white blooms.

Day 10

Return to the UK

This morning Rollers 'roll' around us as we look out over the reeds and open water of the Dönemeç Delta where a variety of ducks include Marbled Duck and Ferruginous Duck as well as Garganey. Eurasian Bitterns, rare in Turkey, boom as we watch all three marsh terns, various egrets and herons, Spur-winged Plovers, and a rich assortment of waders. A small colony (perhaps the only one in Turkey) of breeding White-tailed Plovers will be a highlight. *Orchis pseudolaxiflora* (and a few *Orchis palustris*) in places colour the marshes pink as we enjoy beautiful Citrine Wagtail and tease out the Paddyfield Warblers from the various other *Acrocephalus* warblers present!

We'll head back to Van Airport early lunch time for our departing flights.

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the latest trip report from our tours to Cappadocia and to Lake Van. 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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