

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



31st May to 7th June 2017 (1 week)

TRANSYLVANIA

Meadows, mountains and bears



Exploration of one of the last remaining areas in Europe where traditional management of hay meadows is still practiced on a large scale and the local wildlife includes iconic species such as bear, wolf and lynx.

We have designed this tour based on our previous trips to the **Transylvanian Plateau** and **Carpathians** over many years. It has been adapted to combine the hay meadows, pastures and wood pastures around the 'Saxon' villages of Viscri and Crit with the **limestone gorge and valleys of Pietra Crailui National Park** and the high altitude **alpine meadows** of the **Bucegi Massif** in the Carpathians.

Staying in two centres you will have the chance to explore the natural history in the company of **local ecologists** who can help you understand history and culture of the local area and its effects on the **management of the habitats** and see some of the characteristic species of the area. The holiday will include time for **botanising and birdwatching**, as well as the opportunity to look for other animals including **butterflies and other insects, amphibians and reptiles.**

A highlight of the trip should be an evening visit to a **bear hide** where Brown Bears can be seen as they emerge from the forest at dusk (and where wolves are not usually expected but are also possible, as in our visit in 2013).

The area has a rich cultural heritage including **Saxon architecture** such as fortified buildings reflecting this Germanic influence. The village of Viscri is one of several to be awarded **World Heritage status.**



Price
£1595

Single Room Supplement
£150

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Bucharest
- Day 2** Sigisoara area
- Day 3** Marcheasa
- Day 4** Viscri and Crit
- Day 5** Dumbrovita
- Day 6** Zarnesti
- Day 7** Bucegi
- Day 8** return to UK

Leaders
Laurie Jackson
and local guides

Wild flowers
bear-watching
Saxon culture

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to the **Wildlife Trusts**



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 31st May Our flights take us to Bucharest, from where we transfer (about 4 hours) to the comfortable Pension Casa cu Zorele, set in a traditional Saxon farmhouse in the village of **Crit**, southeast of **Sighisoara**, for 4 nights.

Day 2 1st June The landscape of Transylvania is rich in meadows, forest and wood pasture, with outcrops of drier steppe-like vegetation. The mosaic of habitats is a result of the history of the local peoples, with centuries of traditional management by the local Saxon population. We will start our exploration of the local area by visiting an area of **steppe vegetation** near the village of Apold, home to some special plants including the impressive Siberian Bellflower *Campanula sibirica*, thistle-like *Jurinea mollis* and Nodding Sage *Salvia nutans*. Whinchat from the bushes, while we should keep our eyes peeled for soaring Lesser Spotted Eagles.

In the afternoon, we move to the nearby **wood pasture** at Breite, where the ancient trees are home to stag beetles and longhorn beetles. o/n Crit.

Day 3 2nd June Transylvania is home to some of the finest ancient wood pastures and veteran trees in Europe, second only to the deer parks of southern Britain. Today we will visit one of the finest of the finest, at **Marcheasa**. Ancient oaks stand sentinel on the grassy hillside, Great Grey and Red-backed Shrikes hunt from the lower bushes, with grazing water buffalo wallowing in pools that are home to Yellow-bellied Toads and the rare Tadpole Shrimp. We will spend the day exploring the area and learning about the history of these important habitats. o/n Crit.

Day 4 3rd June Today we will travel the short distance east to the well-preserved Saxon village of **Viscri**, famous for its **fortified church**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and also for its links with Prince Charles and the focus of The Prince of Wales Foundation in Romania. White Stork nest in the village, while Black Redstarts sing from the rooftops as we explore the village and learn more about the cultural history of the Saxon region. Nearby we will visit species rich meadows, including another outcrop of steppe vegetation where we will look for *Clematis integrifolia*, the Burning Bush *Dictamnus albus* and the tumbleweed-like Tatar Kale *Crambe tataria*.

Back at Crit, we will have some time to explore the village itself and the flowery hay meadows on the hillside behind the village. o/n Crit

Day 5 4th June Today we bid farewell to the wonderful Casa Zorele and head eastwards into the Carpathians, where we will stay in Zarnesti for three nights. Along the way we will stop to visit the wetlands of **Dumbravita** where we will spend some time enjoying the birding, with Squacco Heron, Ferruginous Duck, Whiskered Tern and Penduline Tit all likely.



After settling in at the Pension Elena in Zarnesti, we will have an afternoon visit to the nearby city of Brasov. o/n Zarnesti.

Day 6 5th June Zarnesti is a small town at the foot of the majestic Piatra Craiului mountain range surrounded by beautiful valleys full of hay meadows, pastures and woodland. A morning walk takes us along the limestone gorge near the village in search of more of the local specialities including a bird that is usually hard to find but that nests in the area, the colourful **Wallcreeper**. We should see many more flowers and butterflies as we walk slowly along on an easy track. After an early dinner, tonight we will head to the western edge of the Piatra Craiului National Park, to visit a hide in the forest where we will wait for Brown Bears to emerge from the forest to feed. Wild Boar, Roe Deer and even Wolf have also been seen here on our previous visits: fingers crossed! o/n Zarnesti

Day 7 6th June Visit to the mountain town of **Sinaia** from where we will travel by **cable car** to the higher slopes of the Bucegi Mountains, up to 2000m altitude. Among the species we hope to see amongst the **high level alpine meadows** will be *Primula halleri*, *P. minima*, Alpine Pasqueflower *Pulsatilla alpina* and Alpine Snow-bell *Soldanella alpina*. The Carpathian Alpenrose *Rhododendron mytifolium* should be just coming into flower on the slopes around us. Butterflies up at these higher levels should include a variety of fritillaries and blues, with Alpine Accentor and Carpathian Chamois also possible.

Back down at Sinaia, we will visit the grounds of the attractive royal palace, before returning to our accommodation. o/n Zarnesti

Day 8 7th June After breakfast it will be time to travel southwards once more, making a couple of stops along the way before we finally end up back at Bucharest airport and our flights home.

Accommodation, meals, transport and weather

The first 4 nights will be in the Pension Casa cu Zorele in Crit. This village has many of the medieval buildings preserved and the accommodation is in restored Transylvanian houses. For the last 3 nights the group will stay at Pension Elena in Zarnesti. All rooms have private bathrooms. Meals during the trip will include **Romanian dishes**, with an emphasis on local food. Picnics will be taken for lunch. Transport will be by small coach/bus with a driver (in addition to the guide). It should be pleasant, mostly warm, even hot, although rain and cooler weather are possible. There can be strong sun especially on higher slopes and sun protection is needed.

Photos: (front clockwise) haystacks, Brown Bears; Viscri Fortified Church; *Jurinea mollis* near Apold; Zarnesti Gorge (centre, left to right) Casa Zorele, Crit; *Salvia nemorosa*; Viscri; Piatra Craiului; veteran oak at Marcheasa; *Rhododendron myrtifolium* on the Bucegi; meadows at Viscri (back clockwise) Red-backed Shrike; Stag Beetle at Breite; *Clematis integrifolia* near Viscri.



Leader and Guides

Our leader for this trip is **Laurie Jackson**. Laurie is an all round naturalist who has led several Wildlife Travel holidays, including Bulgaria, Crete and the Vercors. Laurie has also made several visits to Transylvania studying the local wildlife. Local guides will accompany us throughout. **Tibor Hartel** will be our guide in the Viscri area. Originally from Sighisoara, Tibor has been involved in many conservation projects in the region.



Flights

The group flights are with British Airways, from London Heathrow

31st May Depart Heathrow 10.55, arrive Bucharest 16.10

7th June Depart Bucharest 17.10, arrive Heathrow 18.45

Romania is 2 hours behind UK time



Passport and visas

If you hold a British passport, you do not currently need a visa to travel to Romania. If you do not have a UK passport, please check with your local consulate.

Fitness

None of the itinerary is planned to be strenuous. Walk length will be agreed between the guides and the group as appropriate. There is some flexibility with options for walking subject to safety requirements in any particular area. Most people will have no fitness problems for the planned activities of this holiday but please see the notes in the **General Information Leaflet**. You will be out for much of the day on most days. Please note that facilities for disabled travellers in Romania are not to the same standard as those provided in the UK. Access to the bear hides can involve steps and walking up small (steepish) banks and, therefore, may not be suitable for people with limited mobility.



TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

**DEPOSIT £500 PER PERSON,
BALANCE DUE BY 1/03/2017**

INCLUDED: Return flight UK to Bucharest. Local transport for transfers and excursions as specified in the itinerary. 7 nights accommodation, full board basis. Services of guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Drinks with evening meals. Entrance fees for optional sightseeing (eg castles). Gratuities. Travel insurance.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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