

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



26th June to 3rd July 2017 (1 week)

THE VERCORS

Wild flowers of the Pre-Alps (by train)

"knowledgeable, friendly & efficient leaders"

"cannot think of anything that could be improved on or any additions that could be made"

Vercors 2014

A week in the French Pre-Alps, an attractive landscape of limestone hills and plateaux.

Our trip will be based around the French regional natural park of **Vercors**. This lies in the south-eastern part of the country, near the border with Italy. It incorporates the largest nature reserve in mainland France of around 17,000 ha. The area is part of the Pre-Alps **limestone hills**, which form a peripheral ring around the Alps, and our daily excursions will take us to explore the **warm southern slopes**. It is a superb area for sub-alpine flowers, which are easily accessible. The insects are impressive, with a fine array of butterflies and many of the specialities of southern Europe.

Wildlife Travel has had many enjoyable holidays in this area in the past, and we are delighted to be able to return once again. The holiday will appeal to anyone who wishes to enjoy **wild flowers on pleasant walks** through stunning scenery - plus there is the bonus of **travelling by train** rather than having to fly. Our visit is timed to make the most of the natural history, and especially the wild flowers. June is the period when the best of the flowers bloom, butterflies are flying and many birds are still breeding. Although our main focus is wild flowers, we may see mammals such as ibex, and our itinerary offers the opportunity to gain a flavour of the history and some of the artisan activities of the area.

There are many beautiful, spectacular and species-rich places in France: with its combination of landscape, marvellous diversity of plants and animals, easy accessibility and remarkably unspoilt character, Vercors must rank amongst the best.



Price
£1695

Single Room Supplement
£95

Full board

- Day 1** train to Valence
- Day 2** Les Nonieres
- Day 3** Col de Pennes, Jansac
- Day 4** Vallon de Combeau
- Day 5** R. N Hauts Plateaux
- Day 6** Cirque d'Archiane
- Day 7** Luc & Chatillon
- Day 8** return to London

Leaders
Charlie Rugeroni
and Graham Bellamy

flowers, butterflies,
birds

flight-free holiday

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 Mon 26th June After travelling to Valence by train, our coach takes us to the small hamlet of **Les Nonieres** (c 90 mins), where we will arrive in time for a late dinner.

Day 2 Tue 27th June Today will be a leisurely familiarisation with the area. After a short introduction to the wildlife and landscape of the Vercors we will get to know the hamlet of **Les Nonieres** and its wild flowers, and wind our way up to a local **waterfall**, enjoying the butterflies and other wildlife en route. We hope to see lizard orchid, lady orchid, butterflies like heath fritillary and pearly heath, and birds such as crag martins, with dippers a possibility in the stream. After our picnic by the waterfall, an afternoon walk takes us along an old track into the woods above the hamlet, while Mont Barral looms in the distance.

Day 3 Wed 28th June After a short coach journey to **Le Col de Pennes** (1040m), we explore the upland meadows and woods, with excellent butterflies such as scarce swallowtail, Duke of Burgundy, and almond-eyed ringlet, and many unusual flowers. We walk down a quiet road towards **Jansac**, enjoying the flowers and insects along the way. There are magnificent views of the valley below and the distant, southern slopes of the Vercors. Amongst many plants we hope to see are Martagon lily, violet limodore and pale orchid. We should enjoy good views of griffon vulture and hear singing nightingale and we will also look for the elusive midwife toad and fire salamander.

Day 4 Thu 29th June Le Vallon de Combeau (lower) We stop en route along the valley to see lady's slipper orchid, large-flowered butterwort, gentians and other specialities. The peaks around us here are at 1600m, but we shall start our walk in the sub-alpine meadows, wet flushes and stream banks. After our picnic lunch on the slopes of Combeau, our walk takes us back down the valley between meadows and pastures rich with classical sub-alpine plants, such as globeflower, golden chervil, yellow bellflower and many colourful composites. We enjoy a refreshing break at a local auberge and then drive on to some wooded slopes near Col de Menee in search of coralroot orchid. We may also see butterflies such as clouded Apollo and birds including crossbill and ring ouzel.

Day 5 Fri 30th June Le Vallon de Combeau (upper): R N Hauts Plateaux Our coach takes us up to a higher altitude today, from where our longest (but still relatively gentle) walk will lead up to the alpine meadows at around 1800m. With luck, we should see ibex, alpine chough, short-toed eagle and some super mountain butterflies. The meadows here can be a riot of colour, with showy composites, alpine bartisia, *Antennaria*, *Erinus*, elder-flowered orchid and wild tulip. Short-turf plants will include gentians, moonwort and *Androsace*, while at the end of the walk, at our lunch spot, we will enjoy spectacular views of the Alps stretching over into Italy and marvel at black vanilla orchid.



Day 6 Sat 1st July The **Cirque d'Archiane** is a massive natural amphitheatre surrounded by a semi-circle of cliffs that rise to 1800m, and are a nesting place for golden eagles. We walk through the idyllic hamlet of Archiane, taking in its local character, its chapel and a most typical auberge, replete with local cheeses, wines of the region and refreshments. We then walk to a nearby limestone stream where we have our lunch on the flat rocky banks surrounded by plants such as broomrape. Here, we search for other orchids, which may include late spider, bee and fragrant. The area is also good for fritillary butterflies.



Day 7 Sun 2nd July Short drive to the Roman town of **Luc**, an old centre of the French Resistance. We continue to an interesting landform known as Les Claps and then drive a little further to the contrasting marsh reserve of **Marais de Rochebriane**. The wetland is good for dragonflies and there is an orchid-rich limestone outcrop. Finally, we visit the medieval town of **Chatillon**, a delightful 'botanical village' with beautiful old buildings and a dispersed arboretum—a lovely place to explore. Raptors and crag martins may be seen today.



Day 8 Mon 3rd July After breakfast, we set off back to Valence, travelling west along the Drome valley, passing vineyards, walnut groves and lavender fields until we reach Valence and our train home.

Weather

The weather in the pre-Alps should be pleasantly hot at this time of year, although rain is always a possibility, as is cooler weather, particularly in the mountains and in the evenings.



Fitness

Most people will have no fitness problems for the planned activities of this holiday but please see the notes in the General Information in relation to health & fitness. You should be able to lift your own luggage on and off of the trains. On some days, we will not be walking very far, but on others we will be walking for most of the day, although at a slow pace, taking plenty of stops to enjoy the wildlife. If you are a slow walker, please ring us to discuss whether any of the walks will be a problem for you. To see the best of the flowers, it is necessary to walk on rougher ground and up slopes. We do not do any strenuous hikes but some of the walking is uphill (relatively gentle slopes) and on uneven ground. All excursions are optional.



Passport and visas

You must have a valid passport for this trip (recommended valid for at least 6 months after the holiday). Visas are not required by holders of UK or EU passports. It is essential for holders of other passports that you check with the French embassy or consulate and obtain the necessary documents prior to travel.



Leader and Guides

Our leader for this trip is **Charlie Rugeroni**. A landscape and garden designer, Charlie's knowledge and interest in wildlife stems from his previous work with English Nature, Butterfly Conservation and Marinelife. Charlie has led several Wildlife Travel trips including those to Costa Rica, the Burren, Morocco, Gibraltar and Andalucia, and **four previous holidays to the Vercors**. Charlie will be joined on this holiday by **Graham Bellamy**. Graham is an all round naturalist, with a particular fondness for orchids. Formerly Reserve Manager for the Wildlife Trust in Bedfordshire, Graham has led previous holidays for Wildlife Travel to France and The Burren.



Accommodation, meals and transport

We stay at the excellent Hotel du Mont Barral, situated in the small hamlet of Les Nonières, at 850 m altitude, near the Parc du Vercors. The hotel is very comfortable, and **all rooms have en-suite facilities** with bath and/or shower. We will be on a half board basis having breakfast and evening meals at the hotel restaurant. Picnic lunches will be provided by the hotel. The hotel has an indoor pool that should be open at this time. We will ensure that our travelling is as comfortable as possible, using a small coach that will enable us to travel on the smaller country roads for our excursions.

Group travel

We will travel by train on this holiday. Timings for 2017 are not yet released, but are likely to be similar to 2016 (although there may be an earlier outward departure):

Provisional times (France is one hour ahead of UK):

26th June	Depart London St Pancras 12.58, arrive Lille Europe 15.30
	Depart Lille Europe 15.54, arrive Valence TGV 19.45
3rd July	Depart Valence 10.15, arrive Lille Europe 14.27
	Depart Lille Europe 15.36, arrive London St Pancras 16.05

This may be the only combination of trains providing a transfer at Lille (which is easier than Paris). If possible, we will book a combination with a longer transfer at Lille on the way out. (there are later trains to Valence, if the connection is missed. If you prefer to make your own travel arrangements, you can book the holiday without the travel. You would need to meet the group at Valence station or at the hotel in Les Nonieres. If you would like to extend your stay please ask us for details prior to booking.

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 27/03/2017

INCLUDED: Return train travel from London St Pancras to Valence. Local transport on excursions as specified in the itinerary. 7 nights accommodation, full board basis. Services of leaders and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Entrance fees for optional sightseeing (eg museums). Gratuities. Travel insurance.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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