

NATURAL HISTORY TRAVEL 2020

With Dr. Bob Gibbons

April 7 th – 14 th	Lesvos, Greece. <i>Lesvos (or Lesbos) is one of the most beautiful and unspoilt of all the Greek islands, especially in spring, with masses of early flowers, a marvellous range of birds including many migrants, and the scenery at its best, before the majority of visitors have arrived.</i>	£ 1695
April 22 nd – 29 th	Sardinia: the mountains and the south. <i>Sardinia is the second largest Mediterranean island, almost 3 times the size of neighbouring Corsica. It's enormously varied scenically and geologically, with a rich flora and fauna to match. Our week-long trip takes in the warm southern lowlands and hills, followed by a few days in the central mountains. We'll see endemic orchids, wild peonies and many other flowers, together with migrant and resident birds, and some of the endemic reptiles and amphibians.</i>	£ 1595
May 6 th – 14 th	Mainland Greece: Mount Olympus, the Pindos Mountains and the Vikos Gorge. <i>An exciting 9-day tour set amidst the wild and spectacular mountains of north Greece. During the tour, we will visit some of the finest mountains and gorges in mainland Greece, with superb flowers, birds and butterflies in stunning scenery</i>	£ 1695
May 24 th – June 1 st	France: The Cévennes and Vercors. <i>The Cévennes is one of the most attractive and spectacular areas of France. From our base at the point where two gorges meet, we can explore the rich and varied flora and fauna of the wonderful limestone plateaux and valleys. Then we transfer to the extraordinary Vercors mountains, spectacularly flowery, yet rarely visited. The total range of species to be seen on this 9-day trip is huge.</i>	£ 1695
June 17 th – 24 th	The French and Spanish Pyrenees. <i>The Pyrenees are amongst the most beautiful and unspoilt mountains of Europe, with an exceptionally rich flora and fauna. On this week-long tour, we split our time between the French Pyrenees National Park, and the Spanish Ordesa National Park, giving us easy access to a fantastic range of flowery mountain habitats.</i>	£1595
Oct. 7 th – 14 th	Transylvania: a natural history and general tour. <i>Transylvania in autumn is wonderful, with rich autumn colours, late summer flowers and butterflies, and a host of traditional rural activities. This special tour gives us a chance to see lovely landscapes, autumn colours, people at work, crocuses, bears, ancient buildings, misty mornings and much more.</i>	£1495
<hr/> <p><i>e-mail:</i> bobgibbons@btinternet.com <i>Tel:</i> 01202 849142 www.naturalhistorytravel.co.uk</p>		

NATURAL HISTORY TRAVEL was set up over 25 years ago by Bob Gibbons to offer high quality natural history and photography tours at sensible prices, without the high costs associated with glossy brochures, extensive advertising, and plush offices. The aim is to offer tours where we look at all the aspects of natural life that the region has to offer - flowers, birds, butterflies, dragonflies etc. - though we may concentrate on one or other according to the interests of the group and the type of location. Bob has a very wide range of interests within natural history and photography, and all the other leaders are selected for their special knowledge of an area or subject. We set out to make all tours enjoyable, allowing for learning and discovery, whatever your level of interest or expertise, in a relaxed and usually entertaining atmosphere.

Many people enjoy taking photographs on such trips, and advice is always available if required. We also prepare advance guidance sheets on photographic equipment and opportunities if required. Unless specifically described otherwise, tours are normally restricted to a maximum of 12 participants with one leader, and 18-20 when there are two or three leaders. **Ⓜ indicates places limited.** Our website at: www.naturalhistorytravel.co.uk has a selection of photographs of the areas we are visiting, together with some of the plants and animals we expect to see. It also gives details of availability of spaces on the tours, and further information on some of the sites.

HOW DIFFICULT? We are often asked whether the tours are suitable for people who cannot walk far. This is difficult to answer without knowing an individual's capabilities, but in general – unless otherwise indicated – the tours are suitable for most people. We don't rush about, there are few long walks, and we try to be flexible, sometimes hiring an additional vehicle or splitting the group temporarily to allow everyone to enjoy themselves at their own pace. **Tours marked with Δ may include walks of 5 miles or over,** though it is nearly always possible to avoid doing these without missing out on too much. Feel free to get in touch if there are any concerns.

As far as **level of knowledge** goes, no-one need feel excluded. Although we aim to identify as much as possible, and take an extensive library, there is no pressure to be involved with anything you are not interested in.

GOING GREEN

We're trying to make the tours as environmentally friendly as possible, by minimising the amount of travel, minimising the number of vehicles, and choosing hotels with a good environmental record, where possible. We're also offering ex-flight prices for those who prefer to travel by other means {**but please let us know at the time of booking**}.

YOUR GUARANTEE

All the foreign tours are run through fully-bonded operators, and meet all current UK and EU regulations.

INSURANCE

Insurance for foreign tours is essential. Sunvil no longer offers insurance, though they recommend Holiday Extras (there is a link through on their website, or see Booking Form) or we need to know that you have made other arrangements. In 2007, we had to cancel a tour because of an airline strike, and discovered as a result that some people's insurers do not cover refunds due to cancellation by strike action, and 2010 was even more complicated with ash clouds and strikes! Please check what your insurer covers, unless you're prepared to take the risk of not having the money refunded.

Thoughts from previous tour participants:

"Your arrangements were - as ever - superb"

"So relaxed, and at the same time giving such attention to detail, and care to each person. And you know the scientific name of every flower! { *Editor's note: 'I wish!'* }"

"Such weather, such plants, and what timing. Many thanks for another wonderful trip."

"Thank you so much for such a lovely holiday ... by the end of the week, I had seen and heard things in the natural world that I hadn't known existed. It was as if my senses were coming alive..."

"I, for one, particularly appreciate the careful reconnaissance you do before we arrive, to make sure you know what is flowering and where; it brings an immediacy and freshness, and of course breadth of knowledge, to your trips, which is exciting for us who are with you as we get the maximum out of the habitats that we are going to see."

"And the lists, which bear witness to all the exciting things we saw..."

COSTS

All our tours are probably best described as mid-range in terms of the facilities and luxuries offered, but towards the lower range in price. We avoid very expensive hotels and costly routes, and pass on the benefits of our low office and administration costs. Our travel arrangements are handled by ***Sunvil Holidays***, though we are not part of Sunvil.

Individual details of what is included in the holiday price are shown under the entry for each tour. All foreign tours include flights or other transport to the destination – unless specified otherwise; transfer and transport within the country of destination; accommodation, meals as described, the services of leaders, airport charges, park entry fees, pre-travel information, and post-trip report. Insurance is not included (see booking form for details). We apologise for having to charge single room supplements in most cases - these are no more than the cost charged to us by the hotels or centres. The tour descriptions try to give an accurate idea of what to expect, but they are not a guarantee that we will see specific things. The weather, state of the season, and the wildlife itself, can all behave unexpectedly.

We would normally expect to absorb the cost of any currency fluctuations, but we have to reserve the right to make a surcharge at no more than the increased cost to us. We would automatically absorb fluctuations up to 5% of the total costs of the holiday.

BOOKING

Early booking is advisable, as the tours can fill up quickly. **The last 5 years' tours were almost all full within 1 week of the brochure being issued.** All bookings should be made on the booking form enclosed with the brochure, or downloaded from the website, directly to *Sunvil* (address on p. 5 and on the form), with the appropriate deposit.

Please note that Sunvil do not accept credit cards - clients can pay by Debit card, cheque, or by bank transfer. Clients from outside the UK can pay by BACS to the following account: Sunvil International, National Westminster Bank, London Road, Isleworth, Middlesex. Sterling account IBAN GB87NWBK60201836560804, SWIFT NWBKGB2L. Could you please pay in sterling and include the bank charges.

Please let us know if you have any special dietary or other requirements, and we will do our best to accommodate them.

POST-TOUR REPORTS

After each trip, we produce detailed reports on all that we saw during the trip, arranged chronologically. These prove very useful as aide-memoires and to help in identifying photographs, or re-learning species. Unless there are several consecutive tours keeping the leader out of the office, these are produced and **sent out within a few days** of the end of the tour, as we realise that they are much more useful if they come while the trip is still fresh in the memory.

THE TOUR LEADERS AND ORGANISERS

Dr. Bob Gibbons (main tour leader, and proprietor of Natural History Travel) has been described as ‘one of Britain’s best naturalists’. He has written about 40 books to date, on many aspects of natural history and photography, including several floras, an acclaimed field guide to dragonflies, several field guides to insects, a guide to the National Parks and wild places of Europe, guides to the wildlife sites of France, Greece, and many more. He took most of the photographs for the widely-publicised *Flora Britannica* project, worked with **Plantlife** on a book showing British flowers at their best (***Flowers at my Feet*, HarperCollins**) and wrote regular articles for British Wildlife magazine, and other publications. His recent book on “the most flowery places in the world”, was published as **Wildflower Wonders of the World**, simultaneously in the UK and USA, and has recently been re-issued in paperback.

After working for many years in nature conservation, he is now a freelance author, photographer, lecturer, and, until recently, a Visiting Fellow at Southampton University. He has led numerous tours to many European destinations, as well as to more exotic destinations such as the Himalayas, Costa Rica, Namibia, Ecuador, and the Galapagos. He can be contacted directly for any queries about the tours at 24 Newborough Road, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 1RD, ☎ 01202 849142; or bobgibbons@btinternet.com

Dr. Martin Warren (Cevennes and Vercors) was Director of the charity Butterfly Conservation until last year, and has been involved with butterfly ecology for over 25 years. He is co-author of the Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland, the first Red Data book of European butterflies, and, together with colleagues in Holland, a book on Prime Butterfly Areas in Europe. He has studied the ecology of a wide range of butterflies, and has co-led several previous tours.

John Stobart & Imogen Davenport (Romania) work in nature conservation in Dorset. Both are excellent and enthusiastic all-round naturalists. John’s particular interests are mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and Imogen has a special interest in plants, and they are both closely involved with the conservation of bats.

Dr. Dick Hornby (Any tour) is a highly accomplished naturalist and ecologist, with a wide range of interests. He now lives in the UK after many years in Abu Dhabi, working mainly as an ecological consultant, founder of Nautica Environmental Associates. Prior to this, he was a Deputy Regional Officer with the Nature Conservancy Council in southern England. He has co-led many previous tours, and is an accomplished all-round naturalist.

Dominic Couzens (Lesvos and North Greece) is a professional writer and field trip leader, and noted birder. He has written numerous books and hundreds of articles for such publications as Bird Watching, BBC Wildlife and BBC Countryfile. His particular passion is birds, but mammals are not far behind. He has led, or co-led many tours.

Dr. Eric Lamont (Lesvos, Pyrenees) is a highly accomplished american botanist, based in New York State. His most recent book is on the orchids of north-eastern USA. He has travelled widely in Europe, and been on numerous NHT tours both as participant and leader.

Andrew Branson (Sardinia) founded the magazine *British Wildlife*, and edited it for its first 25 years. He is an excellent all-round naturalist, and has previously co-led tours to the Burren and the Vercors.

Sunvil Travel are long-established tour operators with particular expertise in the Greek-speaking world. Their chairman, Noel Josephides, is well known in the travel business, and is a past president of AITO (Association of Independent Travel Operators). He is widely respected as a committed supporter of the environmental movement in tourism, which he has done a great deal to promote. Sunvil run package tours for the discerning traveller to many parts of Europe, and elsewhere world-wide, as well as making arrangements for independent travellers. Their brochures can be obtained from Sunvil House, Upper Square, Old Isleworth, TW7 7BJ. Our contact here is **Jane Naylor**: jane.naylor@sunvil.co.uk ☎: 0208-758-4712 direct line for Jane, or 0208-568-4499 for general office; Fax: 0208-568-8330. Website: www.sunvil.co.uk

April 7th - 14th, 2020

Lesvos, Greece

Price: £ 1695 inc. flights, ex flights £ 1345

Leaders: Bob Gibbons, Eric Lamont and Dominic Couzens.

Lesvos (or Lesbos) is one of the most beautiful and unspoilt of all the Greek islands, especially in spring, with masses of early flowers, a marvellous range of birds including many migrants, and the scenery at its best, before the majority of visitors have arrived.

Lesvos is one of the largest yet least spoilt of the Greek islands. It lies in the eastern Aegean sea, just a few miles from Turkey, and its natural history owes a good deal to the closeness of the Asian land-mass. It is a rugged mountainous island, with peaks in both the north and south rising to almost 1000 metres, and with many wild unspoilt areas.

We fly from Heathrow to Athens, transferring to a short flight to Lesvos. Here, we are based at the attractive coastal town of Mithymna (Molyvos) in the north of the island for the whole week. At this time of year, it is pleasantly quiet, apart from the Scops owls and Nightingales at night and the Alpine Swifts during the day. The hotel grounds and nearby coastal habitats have resident Persian Squirrels, False Apollos and other attractive species just on the doorstep. From here, we can reach most parts of the island easily. Apart from local walks, we will visit the beautiful woods, grassy clearings and old olive groves of mount Olympus, the superb wetlands and coastal habitats around the gulf of Kalloni, the central pine woods, the rugged volcanic hills of the west, and various other sites of interest, all rich in flowers. We'll also visit Europe's best fossil forest, and an extraordinary ancient monastery or two.

Lesvos is particularly good for birds, which are often unusually easy to see. In spring, there is a wonderful mixture of resident birds, large numbers of passage migrants, and the first of the summer visitors. We can reasonably expect to see such specialities as Krüper's nuthatch, Masked shrike and Cinereous bunting, as well as more widespread species such as harriers, Black-winged stilts, Blue rock thrushes, Mediterranean shearwaters, Long-legged buzzard, Orphean warbler and many waders, terns and other birds. Lesvos is also the only place in Europe where you are likely to see Persian squirrels, and there are good populations of the striking

‘Rhodes dragon’, an agama lizard. Early butterflies, such as the pretty Eastern festoon and the False Apollo should be on the wing.

Although Lesvos does not have quite the range of flowers of Crete, its unspoilt nature means that the displays can be quite breathtaking, and most species occur in vast quantities. There are carpets of irises, Peacock and Crown anemones, poppies, Crown daisies and campions in many habitats, and the photographic opportunities are outstanding. Orchids include drifts of the pretty Few-flowered orchids in the woods, Yellow bee, Lax-flowered, Violet Limodore, Mirror, tongue orchids, Horseshoe orchid, the endemic *Ophrys lesbis* and many others. Other flowers of interest include a green-flowered fritillary, the attractive snowdrop *Galanthus elwesii*, dragon arums, and many more. There are wild tulips, too, though they will probably not be in flower.

NB It’s a beautiful, quiet and relaxing place to start the spring. Although it’s a popular arrival place for (human) migrants from Turkey, they are not normally in evidence where we’re staying or visiting.

The tour price includes return flights from Heathrow to Lesvos via Athens, transport throughout, accommodation with private facilities on a **half-board basis**, services of leaders throughout, plus pre-tour information and post-tour species lists. **Tour Code:** NHT/20/01. **Price:** £ 1695, (Single room suppt £ 195); **Deposit:** £ 400.

April 22nd - 29th, 2020

Sardinia: the mountains and the south

Price: £ 1595 inc. flights, £ 1295 ex flights

Leaders: Bob Gibbons & Andrew Branson

Sardinia is the second largest Mediterranean island, almost 3 times the size of neighbouring Corsica. It’s enormously varied scenically and geologically, with a rich flora and fauna to match. Our week-long trip takes in the warm southern lowlands and hills, followed by a few days in the central mountains. We’ll see endemic orchids, wild peonies and many other flowers, together with migrant and resident birds, and some of the endemic reptiles and amphibians.

We arrive at Cagliari, where the airport lies next to flamingo-covered lagoons, and travel about an hour north-west to our first base, on the slopes of Monte Linas, with good flowery habitats nearby. From here, we are within easy reach of the extraordinary basalt uplands of the Giara di Gesturi – a wild land of marshes, pools and ancient cork oak, with a fascinating flora and fauna; the limestone hills and mountains of the south-west corner of the island, filled with endemic orchids and other flowers; the southern parts of the Gennargentu mountains, the southern coast, and the wonderfully unspoilt west coast Sinis peninsula with its exceptionally rich flora and fauna. After 3 nights here, we drive north through the lovely Gennargentu mountains to our second hotel at Dorgali, from where we can explore the higher mountains, limestone hills, the amazing hilltop settlement of Tiscali, and the unspoilt central-east coast.

The native flora of Sardinia encompasses over 2500 species, of which about 350 are endemic. We won’t see all of these, of course, but we do expect to see an excellent range of orchids,

including a number of endemics such as the striking *Ophrys morisii* or *O. chestermannii* and many others, an endemic peony, endemic crocuses, endemic saxifrages, masses of Cyclamen, blue irises, and the extraordinary spikes of the parasitic *Cynomorium coccineum*, which has been shown by DNA analysis to have no close relatives anywhere else in the world. And of course, there is an abundance of that general colourful spring Mediterranean flora made up of poppies, crown daisies, vetches, asphodels and much else besides.

Sardinia is home to some fine historic and archaeological remains, particularly the impressive megalithic prehistoric settlements known as nuraghi; some are spectacular well-visited sites, while others are barely-visited and full of interesting flowers and birds – we'll expect to visit several of each during the week. The bird-life is good, especially in the wetlands, and there should be good numbers of migrants coming through, and it's always a pleasure to be hearing or seeing hoopoes, turtle doves, cuckoos, hawfinches and others almost anywhere we go.

Depending on the season, it may be a bit early for large numbers of butterflies, though we'll certainly see a good range of spring Mediterranean species. There are also plenty of interesting reptiles and amphibians, such as Tyrrhenian tree frog, Hermann's Tortoise, Sardinian Brook Newt, three species of geckoes, and Bedriaga's Rock Lizard, to name but a few.

After 4 days around Dorgali, we'll drive straight back to the airport for our direct flight home.

The tour price includes return flights from London Gatwick to Cagliari, transport throughout, accommodation with private facilities on a **half-board basis**, services of leaders throughout, plus pre-tour information and post-tour species lists. Picnics should cost no more than about £4 per day. **Tour Code:** NHT/20/02. **Price:** £ 1595; Single room suppt £ 150; **Deposit** £ 400

May 6th – 14th, 2020

MAINLAND GREECE: Mount Olympus, the Pindos Mountains and the Vikos Gorge

Price: £ 1695 inc flights, £1325 ex flights

Leaders: Bob Gibbons & Dominic Couzens

An exciting 9-day tour set amidst the wild and spectacular mountains of north Greece. During the tour, we will visit some of the finest mountains and gorges in mainland Greece, with superb flowers, birds and butterflies in stunning scenery

We leave Gatwick in the morning, arriving in Thessaloniki by lunchtime, from where we drive to Litochori, our base for the first two nights, nestled below the great bulk of Mount Olympus. Olympus is the highest mountain in Greece, with an extraordinarily rich flora. At this time of year, it's not possible to climb high on the mountain, but we'll concentrate instead on seeing some of the wonderful flowers of the easily-accessible lower slopes, including some of the special endemics such as the gorgeous *Jankaea heldreichii*.

On the third day, we travel westwards, with various stops *en route*, to the mountain village of Metsovo, perfectly placed for exploring the Pindos National Park area. We are within easy reach of the meadows and forests of this unspoilt area, where we should see two species of Fritillary (flowers), Wild Tulips, the rare *Daphne blagayana*, some unusual orchids, birds such as Rock

Thrush and a number of different woodpeckers, and maybe even Brown Bear which are quite common here.

After two nights in Metsovo, we move on to our hotel in the beautiful mountain village of Mikro Papingo, squeezed between high peaks and the spectacular Vikos gorge in the lovely Zagoria area. During the next few days, we will explore the gorges, peaks and grasslands of this magnificent area. The Vikos gorge lies close by, and we can walk into it both from the Papingo end and the Monodendri end, where there is a fine cliff-top monastery. There is a rich flora with many endemics or rarities, such as *Ramonda serbica*, several species of saxifrages, abundant orchids including, paeonies, fritillaries and many others. The extensive woods and cliffs are home to a fine range of birds including choughs, and a variety of falcons and eagles. After three nights here, we head back to Thessaloniki airport for our flight home.

At this time of the year, the flora of these mid-altitude areas is at its best, butterflies are becoming more abundant, whilst the breeding birds are at their peak. The whole area has a rich and varied flora and fauna, with a fascinating blend of Balkan, Alpine and Mediterranean species, many of which are found nowhere else.

The tour price includes return flights from Gatwick to Thessaloniki, all transport during the week, accommodation in good hotels with en-suite facilities, plus all breakfasts and evening meals; services of leaders throughout, including pre-tour information and post-tour lists. We will usually buy picnics locally at about £4 per day. ▲ tour grade, but mostly easy. **Tour code:** NHT/20/03. **Tour price:** £ 1695 inc flights. Single room supplement: £ 195. **Deposit:** £ 400.

May 24th – June 1st, 2020

FRANCE: The Cévennes and Vercors

Price: £ 1695 inc flights, £ 1395 ex flights

Leaders: Bob Gibbons & Martin Warren

The Cévennes is one of the most attractive and spectacular areas of France. From our base at the point where two gorges meet, we can explore the rich and varied flora and fauna of the wonderful limestone plateaux and valleys. Then we transfer to the extraordinary Vercors mountains, spectacularly flowery, yet rarely visited.

The total range of species to be seen on this 9-day trip is huge.

We leave Heathrow in the morning, arriving in Toulouse by late morning, to travel to our first base at Le Rozier, with stops on the way. The attractive village of Le Rozier lies at the junction of the Gorges du Tarn and Gorges de la Jonte, amongst outstanding scenery. From here, we can walk straight out into the surrounding gorges and hills, and travel further afield onto the high *causses* (limestone plateaux) and mountain areas in the Cévennes National Park, visiting places with evocative names like the Causse Noir and the Chaos de Montpellier-le-vieux. We are only a mile from a large Griffon vulture breeding colony, and we should get good views of the birds on most days.

After 4 nights at Le Rozier, we move eastwards to our base in the Vercors mountains, in a lovely old chateau with the most spectacular views of the mountains. A swim in the pool, with birds of prey overhead, swallows dipping in for a drink, and the mountains in the background, is a magical experience! The Vercors mountains have a superb and easily-accessible flora and fauna,

amongst the lovely flowery meadows, ancient beech-woods, high pastures and spectacular cliffs. On our previous trips, we have always seen huge clumps of **Lady's slipper orchids** within half mile of the hotel, and another day ended with seeing a golden eagle flying over carrying a young marmot – it's that sort of place!

The Cévennes has a wonderful flora and fauna, thanks to its diverse geology and unspoilt nature, bathed by the warm sun of southern France. There are orchids in abundance, including endemic specialities like the lovely *Ophrys aveyronensis*. We should also see at least two species of daffodils, several wintergreens including the delightful little one-flowered wintergreen, Alpine asters, Cornflowers and Corn cockles, globularias, Venus' looking-glass, Pasque flowers, May-lilies and many others too numerous to mention. The bird-life is rich and varied, from vultures and Short-toed eagles, to Nightingales, Red-backed and Woodchat shrikes, and Ortolan buntings. The butterflies are also outstanding, and there are some interesting dragonflies along the river valleys. There is always something of interest to see.

If the Vercors mountains were not quite so close to the alps, they would have far more visitors and admirers. As it is, they remain wonderfully unspoilt and undiscovered. The flora and fauna of our area, on the east side, is magnificent – a glorious mixture of southern, northern and alpine, in spectacular mountain scenery. In addition to seeing many of the species that you might expect in a limestone area of southern France, the presence of mountain species such as Globe-flowered orchids, *Orchis spitzelii* and *O. pallens* as well as Apollo butterflies and marmots is a marvellous bonus. After 4 nights here, we drive to Lyon for a late afternoon flight home.

The tour price includes return flights, all transport, half-board accommodation; services of leaders, including pre-tour information and post-tour lists. All rooms have private facilities. We will buy picnic materials locally for lunch, or take a packed lunch from the hotel. **Δ Tour grade.** **Tour code:** NHT/20/04. **Price:** £ 1695; Single room supplement £ 175; **Deposit:** £ 400.

June 17th – 24th, 2020

The French and Spanish Pyrenees

Price: £ 1595 inc. flights, £ 1345 ex-flights

Leaders: Bob Gibbons & Eric Lamont.

The Pyrenees are amongst the most beautiful and unspoilt mountains of Europe, with an exceptionally rich flora and fauna. On this week-long tour, we split our time between the French Pyrenees National Park, and the Spanish Ordesa National Park, giving us easy access to a fantastic range of flowery mountain habitats.

We depart from Heathrow in the morning for the short flight to Toulouse, before setting off southwards to cross the Pyrenees and head up to the attractive old village of Torla, our base for the first 4 nights. Torla is the gateway to the fabulous Ordesa National Park, where there is an abundance of flora and fauna in spectacular scenery. We can walk up the beautiful Ordesa canyon towards the high pastures full of alpine flowers, drive up to Bujaruelo, or just potter about near the hotel looking for glow-worms and orchids – everywhere in this area is rich and unspoilt. On one day, we'll head for the extraordinary Añisclo Gorge, full of exciting species.

After 4 nights at Torla, we cross over the Pyrenees into France via the Col du Pourtalet and other smaller cols, stopping whenever we feel like it, to reach Gèdre. This is a superbly-placed village, with views up to the high peaks around Gavarnie and the Brèche de Roland, and lovely woods and flowery pastures all around it. From here, we have easy access to a wonderful array of mountain habitats in the beautiful central Pyrenees. On some days we can walk direct from the hotel, while on other days we will travel a short way by road to reach the spectacular cirque de Gavarnie, the impressive cirque de Troumouse, or some lovely high grassy flower-filled plateaux.

The flora and fauna of the high Pyrenees is quite exceptional, and these are two of the best places in which to sample it. The range of flowers is huge, and we should see hundreds of species, often in considerable abundance. Some of the special flowers include the striking spikes of Pyrenean saxifrage, Large-flowered and Long-leaved butterworts, several species of rock-rose in many colour forms, Dusky cranesbill, Horned pansy, 'English' iris, Pyrenean Ramonda, Pyrenean Squill, Pyrenean Fritillary, Pyrenean Speedwell, Tall Marsh Orchid, several trumpet gentians and many more, of which quite a few are endemic. Higher mountain species include Spring Gentian, several *Primula* species such as *P. integrifolia*, *Vitaliana*, *Androsace* species, purple and orange saxifrages, snow-bells, *Potentilla* spp., and many others. Although not a mecca for orchid-lovers, we should see a number of species including Burnt-tip, Red and Sword-leaved helleborine and plenty of others. The birds are marvellous with opportunities for good views of unusual species such as Lammergeier, Griffon vulture, Wall-creeper, Common and Alpine choughs, Citril finches, Golden and Booted eagles and many of the more common species. It is also an exceptionally rich area for butterflies, and there should be plenty of blues, fritillaries, coppers, apollo and others. We should also see a few mammals, such as the Pyrenean chamois and Alpine marmots.

Although not specifically a photographic trip, the opportunities for photography are extremely good, with abundant species in a spectacular landscape. There will be fair amount of walking in the programme, though none of this will be difficult, and the longer walks are optional. We will have our own transport throughout.

The tour price includes return flights from Heathrow to Toulouse, all transport during the week, accommodation in good hotels on a half-board basis; and services of leaders throughout, including pre-tour information and post-tour lists. ▲ tour grade. **Tour code:** NHT/20/05. **Price:** £ 1595 inc flights; Single room supplement £ 200; **Deposit:** £ 400.

® Alternative travel: It is possible to travel to Toulouse by train quite easily. For more information, see the website:

<http://www.seat61.com/France.htm#London%20to%20Toulouse%20by%20train>

October 7th – 14th 2020

Transylvania: a natural history and general tour

Price: £1495 inc flights; £1195 ex flights ®

Leaders: Bob Gibbons, John Stobart and Imogen Davenport

Transylvania in autumn is wonderful, with rich autumn colours, late summer flowers and butterflies, and a host of traditional rural activities. This special tour gives us a chance to see lovely landscapes, autumn colours, people at work, flora and fauna, ancient buildings, misty mornings and much more.

We leave Heathrow mid-morning for the 3-hour flight to Bucharest, from where we transfer to our first base in the centre of the tiny medieval city of Sigisheara, with easy walking access to some lovely old buildings. From here, we can go out to nearby wood pastures with ancient pollards looming out of the mist, along unspoilt river valleys, or into the neighbouring Saxon village area. These villages are a fascinating fragment of medieval history, little changed in many ways since they developed in the 11th and 12th centuries: they are surrounded by huge unspoilt grazing lands and woodlands, the cows go out from their courtyards each day, returning at dusk, and ducks, geese, chickens and many other animals wander the streets. The fortified churches are extraordinary (some are world heritage sites) and everywhere there are the colours and activities of autumn. We'll eat at a traditional Saxon house in one village so we can be there when the cows return, and we'll spend time looking for flowers and butterflies in the extensive grasslands.

After 4 nights here, we move southwards to our second base, high in the limestone mountains of the Craiulu National Park. This is a beautiful area, and we are within easy reach of a spectacular flowery gorge, as well as intensely flowery traditional hay meadows and extensive montane beechwoods. Our hotel is run by a fascinating couple, with strong interests in the nature of the area, and how to protect it. The mountains in autumn should have developed their rich mantle of autumn colours, and the first snow may be lying on the tops. The views are breathtakingly beautiful, with red or golden trees, tall hay stooks or wood-framed cottages in the foreground. Smoke rises from wood fires, shepherds are moving their flocks, and there is an atmosphere of serenity and history.

The flora and fauna will still be in evidence; late species such as Meadow Saffron should be out in abundance, and in one or two places we hope to find the beautiful iris-like *Crocus banaticus*, with other autumn species such as Fringed Gentian, Yellow Scabious, late bellflowers and Salvias will still be in flower. Clouded yellows and other butterflies will still be about, often posing lazily in the autumn sun. While in the mountains, we will have the opportunity to see brown bears in the wild, and possibly wolves. A visit to this area is like taking a leap back into medieval times. But it's a fragile area, with many changes going on as Romania hurtles into the 21st century, and we are privileged to see it before it changes.

<p>The tour price includes all transport during the week, full board and lodging, and services of leaders throughout, including pre-tour information and post-tour lists. Tour Code: NHT/20/06. Price: £1495 inc. flights, £1195 ex. flights. Single supplement £70. Deposit: £ 400.</p>

® Alternative travel: It is possible to travel to Bucharest by train, via Brussels, Cologne and Vienna, though it takes a while. See the website: www.seat61.com/Romania.htm

PLEASE READ

Notes on completing the booking form

Please could everyone make sure that the booking form has the following in addition to the holiday and address details:

1. Full names, as shown on the passport, of everyone booking
2. Passport number, date of issue, date of expiry, place of issue and where citizen of – all now required by the airlines
3. A mobile phone number if you have one, and an e-mail address if available.
4. If booking for more than one tour, could you please pay for each separately.
5. E-mail address if available

Please note that Sunvil do not accept credit cards - clients can pay by Debit card, cheque, or by bank transfer. Clients from outside the UK can pay by BACS to the following account: Sunvil International, National Westminster Bank, London Road, Isleworth, Middlesex. Sterling account : IBAN GB87NWBK60201836560804, SWIFT NWBKGB2L. Could you please pay in sterling and include the bank charges.

Re: booking conditions on the booking form

Please note that the general booking terms, conditions and information are from Sunvil's general holiday conditions, and the page numbers given refer to further information in their brochure. They can also be viewed at: <https://www.sunvil.co.uk/terms>. These conditions apply except that occasionally NHT standards exceed Sunvil's, such as in the question of absorbing currency fluctuations.