

Armenia – Butterflies of the Caucasus

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Yerevan
Day 2	Hatsavan & Garni
Day 3	Acharkut
Day 4	Jajour Pass
Day 5	Mount Aragat,
Day 6	Khosrov
Day 7	Noravank & Gnishik
Day 8	Fly London

Departs

June

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ARM03) or brochure

Grading

A/B. Slow-paced day walks, but in this mountainous country some of the walking will inevitably be on paths of varying steepness.

Focus

Butterflies, dragonflies and general natural history

Highlights

- Armenia supports 230+ species of butterfly
- Regional specialties such as Persian Skipper, Dawn Clouded Yellow, Jerusalem, Persian & Caucasian Lesser Spotted Fritillaries
- Look for thousands of 'mud-puddling' blue & white butterflies at water courses



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Introduction

Armenia is a land-locked country in the southern Caucasus with a rich and ancient cultural heritage. Located between the Black and Caspian Seas, bordered by Turkey, Georgia, Iran and Azerbaijan, and with a mountainous terrain rising to over 4,000 metres, it is hardly surprising that Armenia makes a superb holiday destination for the natural history enthusiast in the early summer. Further, it is friendly, warm and dry in summer with almost no biting insects, and offers fabulous food and spectacular scenery. Above all, it is fantastic for butterflies – this small country, the size of Wales, supports more than 230 species, amongst them a highly sought-after selection of Caucasian specialities as well as many European and Asiatic species at their range limits.



We will base ourselves in the historic capital of Yerevan for several days but will also stay in small villages and rural towns, experiencing Armenian life, hospitality and seeing the country's highly varied landscape. We will spend time searching for butterflies in semi-desert areas, flower-rich steppes, ancient forests, steep mountain gorges and alpine meadows grazed by herds of cattle and sheep watched over by tent-living nomadic Kurdish shepherds. Each habitat supports a distinct butterfly community and seeing 80 species or more is possible over the course of a week.

A wealth of other wildlife is also not to be overlooked. Dragonflies, day-flying moths, and such avian specialities as Upcher's and Greenish Warblers, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Radde's Accentor, White-throated Robin and Lammergeier should be among the highlights of this exciting Naturetrek tour.

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Yerevan

Our route to the Armenian capital Yerevan, will involve a flight from London, with a connection, before arriving in Yerevan and transferring a short distance to a comfortable city hotel.

Day 2

Hatsavan, Gaghadir and Gharni



From Yerevan we will first make an excursion into the nearby steppe and semi-desert habitats around Hatsavan and Gaghadir, searching for Persian Skipper, Southern Swallowtail, Dawn Clouded Yellow, Persian Fritillary, the Pontic Blue (*Polyommatus (Neolysandra) coelestina*), and Blue *Polyommatus (Neolysandra) diana* and the hairstreak *Satyrium ledereri*. Water courses in this arid environment can be real magnets for butterflies, where thousands of 'mud puddling' blue and white butterflies may gather. At nearby Gharni we will visit the gorge where spectacular

basalt columns have been carved out by the Goght River. This is another rich butterfly habitat and supports Marbled Skipper, Powdered Brimstone, Esper's Marbled White, Freyer's Fritillary, and the beautiful emperor butterfly *Thaleropsis ionia*.

The whole area is rich in birds with Upcher's Warbler, Isabelline Wheatear, Bimaculated Lark, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Finsch's Wheatear, Lesser Grey Shrike, European Roller, Rosy Starling and Black-headed Bunting characteristic species we may encounter. After what we expect to be an action-packed first field day we return to Yerevan for the night.

Day 3

Acharkut Beech Forest, Dilijan

Leaving Yerevan we will travel north to Dilijan, a spa town in the Tavush Province of Armenia surrounded by lush forests. In one, the Acharkut Beech Forest, which contains a number of flower-rich meadows, we will look for Large Blue, Dryad, Great Banded Grayling, Scotch Argus, Northern Brown Argus and the hairstreak *Satyrium acaciae*, and along the forest's rides and glades we will seek out Southern White Admiral, Eastern Wood White and Hungarian Glider.

The deciduous woodlands around Dilijan are rich in birds, supporting a range of specialties including Green Warbler, Semi-collared Flycatcher and Red-breasted Flycatcher.

After a full day out in the field we will make a short drive to a cosy guesthouse in Dilijan.



Great Banded Grayling

Day 4

The mountain pass near Janjour and Gyumri



Heath Fritillary © William Furse

We will leave Dilijan in the morning travelling west through stunning mountain scenery, passing several unique and little-changed wooden Russian villages, established from the late 18th century onwards when sectarian 'Molokan' Christians left Russia. At a mountain pass near Janjour we will search the rocky slopes and sheltered grassy woodland edges for Mountain Alcon Blue, Turquoise Blue, Purple-shot Copper, Blues *Polyommatus turcicus* and *Polyommatus firdussi*, Gavarnie Blue, Azerbaijan Brown

Argus Aricia agestis azerbaidzhana, the Brown Argus *Aricia allous*, Kurdish Copper, the fritillary *Mellicta caucasogenita*, Heath Fritillary, Yellow-banded Skipper, Olive Skipper and the Grayling *Pseudochazara beroe*.

We will then travel to Gyumri, the capital city of Shirak Province in Northern Armenia which is famed for its old Armenian architecture, where we will make an overnight stay in a comfy, centrally located tourist hotel.

Day 5

Mount Aragats

From Dilijan, we will head southeast in the general direction of Yerevan. Montane butterflies will be our focus today, as we visit Armenia's highest mountain, Mount Aragats. Here, amongst its sub-alpine meadows and rocky slopes, we will look for the skipper *Pyrgus jupei*, Mountain Apollo, the



Blues mud puddling © Tom Brereton

clouded yellow *Colias chlorocoma*, the Scarce Copper subspecies *armeniaca*, the high altitude white *Pieris bowdeni* and Nickerl's Fritillary amongst many other species.

We should see an interesting variety of specialist birds whilst visiting the different altitudinal zones from White-throated Robins and Red-fronted Serine's just below the tree line, to Radde's Accentors and Bluethroats in the Juniper zone, and in the snowfields Horned Larks, White-winged Snowfinches, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes and Alpine Accentors.

On leaving Mount Aragats we will drive for about an hour to Yerevan to make a further stay in a city hotel.

Day 6

Khosrov Forest State Reserve and Yeghegnadzor



Lesser Grey Shrike

This morning we will visit the Khosrov Forest State Reserve located in the Ararat Province in south-western Armenia, to the south-east of the capital of Armenia. Here we will explore the semi-desert, moist meadows, rocky slopes and extensive Juniper and oak forests of the reserve in search of such species as the Skipper *Muschampia tersa*, the skipper *Eogenes alcides*, the green hairstreak *Callophrys suaveola*, the blues *Lysandra corydonius* and *Polyommatus surakovi*, Oriental Meadow Brown and Amasian Satyr.

Lesser Grey Shrikes, European Bee-eaters and Rollers are common in surrounding farmland, as are Blue Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting in the reserve, whilst overhead possibilities include Lammergeier and Lanner Falcon.

After visiting the reserve we will head further east to make an overnight stay in a guesthouse the pretty village of Yeghegnadzor.

Day 7

Gnishik and Noravank

Our final full day out in the field will first involve a visit to the colourful montane hay meadows around Gnishik where Chelmos Blue, Agri Blue, the Damon Blue and blue *Callophrys paulae* and the Grayling *Pseudochazara pelopea* occur, alongside Siberian Stonechats, Lesser Grey Shrikes and Bimaculated Larks.

We will finish the day visiting the beautiful gorge at Noravank, known for its towering brick-red cliffs and spectacularly situated 13th century monastery. Here, blue and white butterflies may gather in large numbers to mud puddle in damp areas along the stream, whilst the beautiful emperor butterfly *Thaleropsis ionia* occurs.

After what should be a fabulous day, we will return to spend our last night in the capital city Yerevan.

Day 8

Yerevan

There should be time to make final searches for butterflies and other wildlife in and around Yerevan, before our afternoon flight from Yerevan, with a scheduled arrival in London in the evening.

Grading

The tour is graded A with day walks only.

Climate

June is an early-summer month in Armenia, and conditions can vary considerably across the country. In the lowlands and valleys the days are generally warm, and at times even hot, while the higher mountains can still feel cool, especially in the early mornings and evenings. Snow is unlikely at this time of year, but patches may persist on the highest passes, and temperatures can fall to low levels at altitude. Rain is possible, particularly in the form of short, sharp showers or afternoon thunderstorms.

Food & accommodation

All food is included in the tour from breakfast on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 9. Any meals eaten in transit at the airports are not included. Accommodation will be in a mixture of standard tourist hotels where each room will have private facilities. A limited number of single rooms will be available.

Extra expenses

The cost of the holiday does not include items of personal expenditure such as drinks or laundry, nor does it include cost of optional tipping for local drivers and guide.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.