

Armenia – Butterflies of the Caucasus

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Yerevan
Day 2	Dashtakar and the Khosrov Forest
Day 3	Noravank Canyon and Arpa River Valley
Day 4	Yeghegis Valley
Day 5	Vardenyats Pass and Lake Sevan
Day 6	Lake Sevan and Marmarik River Valley
Day 7	Mount Ara
Day 8	Fly London

Departs

June

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ARM03)

Grading

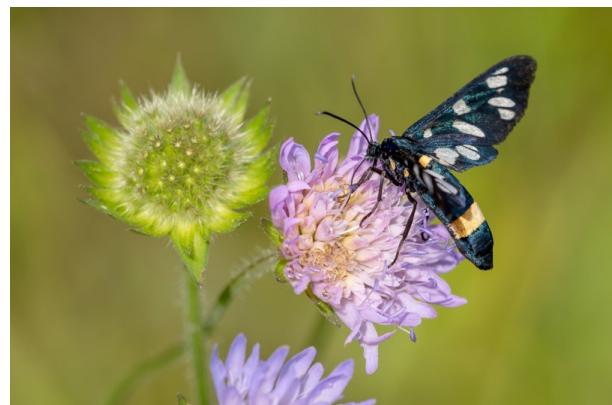
A/B. Slow-paced day walks, but in this mountainous country some of the walking will inevitably be on paths of varying steepness.

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
- Witness spectacular gatherings of 'mud-puddling' butterflies, with thousands of blues and whites often concentrated along streams and watercourses.



From Top: Knapweed Fritillary, Vicrama Blue, Nine-spotted Moth



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Introduction

Armenia is a land-locked country in the southern Caucasus with a rich cultural heritage stretching back thousands of years. Situated between the Black and Caspian Seas and bordered by Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, its varied landscapes range from semi-desert and flower-rich steppe to ancient forests and mountains rising above 4,000 metres. Combined with a warm, dry summer climate, excellent food and spectacular scenery, these diverse habitats make Armenia an outstanding destination for the naturalist.

Perhaps above all, Armenia is a superb destination for butterflies. Despite being little larger than Wales, the country supports more than 230 species, including a remarkable selection of Caucasian specialities alongside many European and Asiatic species occurring close to the limits of their ranges. Throughout the tour we will explore a wide variety of habitats, from semi-desert slopes and rocky mountain gorges to alpine meadows grazed by cattle and sheep, each supporting its own distinctive butterfly fauna.

Based in small villages and rural towns, we will experience Armenian hospitality while exploring the country's diverse landscapes in search of its rich insect life. Seeing 80 or more butterfly species during the course of the week is entirely possible, and every day offers opportunities to encounter new and exciting species.

The country's wildlife extends well beyond butterflies. Dragonflies and day-flying moths add further interest, while the birdlife includes such specialities as Upcher's Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Radde's Accentor, White-throated Robin and Lammergeier. Combined with Armenia's fascinating history, dramatic scenery and welcoming people, these natural riches make for a highly rewarding and memorable Naturetrek holiday.



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.

Itinerary

Day 1

Yerevan

Today we will depart London on a connecting flight to the Armenian capital, Yerevan. Upon our arrival we will meet our local guide and transfer a short distance to a comfortable city hotel.

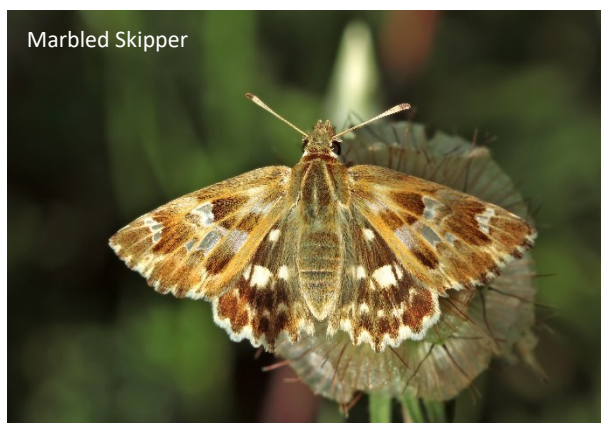
Overnight: Yerevan

Day 2

Dashtakar and the Khosrov Forest

Our butterfly exploration begins in Ararat Province with a visit to the village of Dashtakar. Here, along the banks of a mineral stream flowing through a small gorge, we will explore arid semi-desert and clay steppe habitats in search of a wide variety of butterflies. The watercourses can be particularly productive, often attracting large concentrations of butterflies gathering to 'mud-puddle'. Among the species we may encounter are Krueper's Small White, Eastern Dappled White, Sooty Orange Tip and Saadi's Heath, with a chance of the localised Southern Swallowtail.

Later, we continue to Khosrov Forest State Nature Reserve, Armenia's largest protected area. This remarkable reserve supports a rich mosaic of habitats, ranging from open scrub and rocky slopes to juniper and oak woodland, and is home to an impressive variety of plants and animals. Here we will search for a host of Caucasian specialities, including Marbled Skipper, Greek Clouded Butterfly, Christoph's Clouded Yellow, Nahcevan, Romanoff's and Hyrcanian Hairstreaks, Anatolian Fiery Copper, Eastern Baton Blue, Erivan Anomalous Blue, Diana, Hubert's, Surakov's and Nina's Blues, Shahrud Grayling, Dalmatian Ringlet, the Hermit and Turkmen Fritillary.



The reserve and surrounding countryside also support a rich birdlife. Lesser Grey Shrikes, European Bee-eaters and European Rollers are common in nearby farmland, while Blue Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting may be found within the reserve itself. Overhead, we may be fortunate enough to see Lammergeier or Lanner Falcon patrolling the skies. After what promises to be a rewarding and action-packed first day in the field, we continue to our overnight accommodation.

Overnight: Chiva

Day 3

Noravank Canyon and Arpa River Valley

This morning we visit the spectacular Noravank Canyon, a dramatic gorge famed for its striking red cliffs and the beautifully situated 13th-century Noravank Monastery. We will make frequent stops along the canyon, exploring the rich phrygana habitats in search of butterflies. Species we may encounter include Common and Southern Swallowtails, Sooty Orange Tip, Romanoff's Hairstreak, Eastern Baton Blue, Erivan Anomalous Blue, Surakov's, Firdussi's, Van and Bavius Blues.

We then continue into the Arpa River Valley, where juniper woodland and open slopes provide further excellent butterfly habitat. Here we will look for Marbled Skipper, Greek Clouded Butterfly, Christoph's Clouded Yellow, Blue Argus, Shahrud Grayling, Tree Grayling, the Hermit, Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Nickerl's Fritillary, Sandy Grizzled Skipper, Eastern Orange Tip and Pfeiffer's Green Hairstreak. Among the many blues that become familiar during the tour, we may also find Large, Alcon, Turquoise, Damon, Turkish and Chelmos Blues.



Pfeiffer's Green Hairstreak

The Arpa Valley is rewarding for birds as well as butterflies, and there may be opportunities to see species associated with the region's rocky slopes and open woodland. Throughout the day the combination of beautiful scenery, rich wildlife and varied habitats ensures there is always something of interest to observe.

After another rewarding day in the field, we drive to the Yeghegis Valley, where we spend the next two nights, allowing ample time to explore this fascinating and productive region.

Overnight: Yeghegis Valley

Day 4

Yeghegis Valley

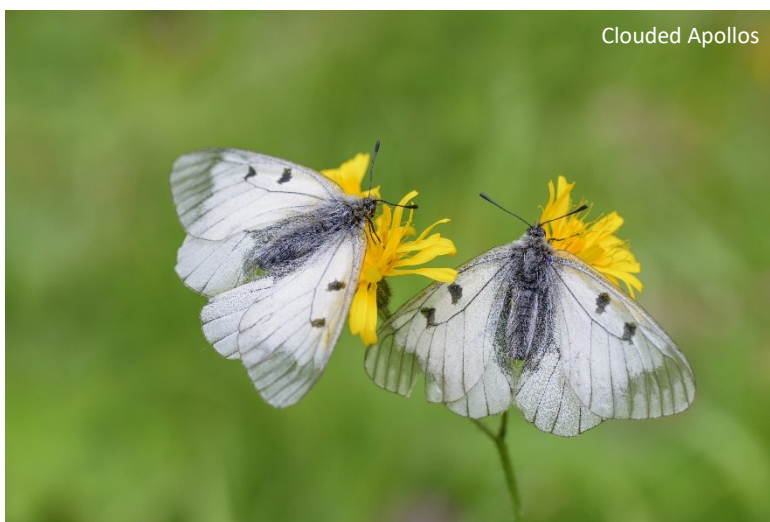
Today we explore the beautiful Yeghegis Valley, one of Armenia's richest areas for butterflies and wildflowers. Our route takes us through a varied landscape of mountain meadows, river valleys, woodland clearings and dry rocky slopes, each supporting its own distinctive butterfly fauna. With several stops throughout the day, there will be ample opportunity to observe and photograph a wide variety of species while enjoying the spectacular scenery of this historic valley.

Among the butterflies we may encounter are Eastern Wood White, Greek Clouded Butterfly, Russian and Pearly Heaths, the Hermit, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, High Brown Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary and Marsh Fritillary, together with Balkan Copper, Pfeiffer's Green Hairstreak, Eastern Baton Blue, Van Blue and Eastern Brown Argus. With luck, further highlights may include Clouded Apollo, Dalmatian Ringlet, Orange Hermit, Firdussi's Blue and the sought-after Zarathustra Blue.

The valley is also rich in birdlife. Characteristic species include Upcher's Warbler, Isabelline Wheatear, Bimaculated Lark, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Finsch's Wheatear, Lesser Grey Shrike, European Roller, Rosy Starling and Black-headed Bunting, providing plenty of interest between our butterfly observations. After another rewarding day in the field, we return to our accommodation in the Yeghegis Valley.



Pearly Heath



Clouded Apollos

Overnight: Yeghegis Valley

Day 5

Vardenyats Pass and Lake Sevan

This morning we ascend to the spectacular Vardenyats Pass before descending towards Lake Sevan, the largest lake in Armenia and one of the world's largest high-altitude freshwater lakes. The lake is also globally important for wildlife and supports the largest breeding population of the endemic Armenian Gull. Along the way we pass through a remarkable succession of habitats, including alpine grassland, subalpine meadows, rocky slopes and open woodland. This dramatic change in elevation creates a rich diversity of habitats and makes for one of the most rewarding butterfly days of the tour.

Throughout the day we will have further opportunities to observe many of the species encountered during the previous days, including Clouded Apollo, Common Swallowtail, Eastern Wood White, Greek Clouded Butterfly, Eastern Orange Tip, Dalmatian Ringlet, Pearly Heath, the Hermit, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, High Brown Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary and Marsh Fritillary. Other highlights may include Nakhchivan and Pfeiffer's Green Hairstreaks, Sooty Copper and Caucasian Vernal Copper. With luck, we may also find the eastern subspecies of Southern Swallowtail, *Papilio alexanor orientalis*, together with Christoph's Clouded Yellow, Eastern Dappled White, Scarce Copper and Eriwan Brown.

The varied habitats also provide opportunities to search for several localised blues. Among the species we hope to encounter are the mountain subspecies of Alcon Blue, *Maculinea alcon monticola*, Large Blue, *M. arion zara*, and Chelmos Blue, *Agrodiaetus iphigenia araratensis*. These may be accompanied by a colourful supporting cast of more widespread species, including Eastern Baton, Van, Hubert's, Nina's, Surakov's and Turkish Blues.

As we approach Lake Sevan, the combination of dramatic mountain scenery, rich butterfly fauna and the possibility of observing Armenian Gulls creates a fitting finale to another rewarding day in the field.

Overnight: Eastern Lake Sevan

Day 6

Lake Sevan and Marmarik River Valley

We begin the day on the eastern side of Lake Sevan, where mountain slopes, woodland edges and flower-rich grasslands provide excellent butterfly habitat. Several carefully chosen sites will offer opportunities to observe and photograph a wide variety of species against the dramatic backdrop of Armenia's largest lake. Our main focus will be the relict oak-juniper woodland and surrounding mountain steppe, where we may encounter Marbled Skipper, Tufted Skipper, Clouded Apollo, Greek Clouded Butterfly, Caucasian Vernal Copper, Orange-banded Hairstreak, Anatolian Blue Argus, Shahrud, Tree and Anatolian Mountain Graylings, Lesser Marbled Fritillary, and a variety of blues and other butterflies.

After exploring these productive mountain slopes, we travel to the lush Marmarik River Valley at the foot of the Tsaghkunyats Mountains. One of Armenia's most attractive mountain valleys, Marmarik combines forests, streams, wet meadows and flower-filled clearings, creating ideal conditions for butterflies. This rich habitat offers opportunities to find a range of new species, including Large and Scarce Tortoiseshells, Brown and Purple Hairstreaks, and an impressive variety of fritillaries. Possible highlights include Caucasian, Lapland, Marsh, False Heath, False Knapweed and Bog Fritillaries, together with the localised subspecies *Proclissiana eunomia tenera*. Skippers are also well represented, with Dingy, Oberthür's Grizzled, Mallow, Tufted and Large Skippers all possible, while the scarce Chequered Skipper remains a sought-after prize. The valley also supports a rich selection of blues, including Dusky, Zephyr, Adonis, Ripart's Anomalous and False Chalk-hill Blues. With luck, we may also encounter such species as Lofty Bath White and the striking Camberwell Beauty.

Combined with the valley's beautiful scenery and rich birdlife, this promises to be another rewarding day in the field as we continue our exploration of Armenia's remarkable butterfly fauna.

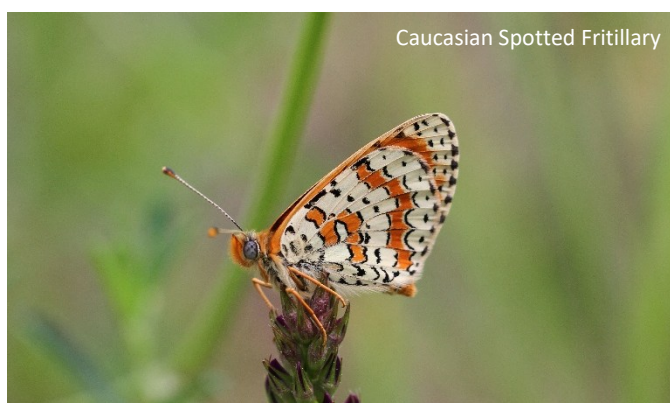
Overnight: Hankavan



Day 7

Mount Ara

Our final full day is spent exploring the slopes of Mount Ara, an isolated volcanic massif renowned for its rich alpine flora and outstanding butterfly diversity. Here we will search a variety of habitats, including flower-rich meadows, open grassland and rocky slopes, each supporting a distinctive butterfly community. With fine views across the surrounding landscape and a wealth of wildlife to discover, this provides a fitting climax to our exploration of Armenia's butterflies.



Among the species we may encounter are Clouded Apollo, Common Swallowtail and the eastern subspecies of Southern Swallowtail, *Papilio alexanor orientalis*, together with Eastern Orange Tip, Dalmatian Ringlet, High Brown and Dark Green Fritillaries, Nakhchivan Hairstreak and Caucasian Vernal Copper. We will also have another opportunity to search for the mountain subspecies of Alcon Blue, *Maculinea alcon monticola*, and Large Blue, *M. arion zara*, both characteristic species of these upland habitats.

The birdlife is equally rewarding. White-throated Robin, Siberian Stonechat and Woodlark may all be encountered, while the area's open landscapes make it an excellent location for birds of prey. Possibilities include European Honey Buzzard, Common Buzzard of the distinctive Caucasian subspecies *menetriesi*, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Booted Eagle and Short-toed Eagle.

After what should be a rewarding final day in the field, we return to Yerevan for our last night, providing an opportunity to reflect on a memorable week spent exploring Armenia.

Overnight: Yerevan

Day 8

Yerevan

Depending on flight timings, we can enjoy a relaxed morning before transferring to the airport for our afternoon flight home. We depart Yerevan in the afternoon, arriving in London later the same evening, bringing to a close a memorable exploration of Armenia's butterflies, birds and spectacular landscapes.

Grading

The tour is graded A with day walks only.

Climate

June is an excellent time to visit Armenia, although conditions can vary considerably according to altitude and location. In the lowlands and valleys, days are generally warm and sunny, and can occasionally become hot. In contrast, higher mountain areas are typically cooler, particularly during the early mornings and evenings, when an extra layer may be required.

Although snow is unlikely at this time of year, small patches may persist on the highest mountains and passes. Rain is possible throughout the tour, most often in the form of brief showers or localised afternoon thunderstorms, especially in upland areas. However, prolonged periods of poor weather are uncommon, and June is generally a favourable month for observing butterflies, wildflowers and other wildlife across Armenia's diverse range of habitats.

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.

Species protection

Butterfly, plant and bird location data collection and submission to any data sharing internet platform (eBird, iNaturalist, Observation.org, etc, photo sharing sites via geotagged photos) during and after the tour is not allowed. This practice exposes the range-restricted wildlife of Armenia to risk of poaching, especially threatened and Nationally Red-listed species. All participants will be asked kindly to sign a relevant agreement before the tour.

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.