

# French Pyrenees

## Naturetrek Tour Dossier

### Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Lourdes and then drive to Gedre
- Day 2/7** Walking excursions in the Parc National des Pyrenees
- Day 8** Return London

### Departs

July

### Focus

Butterflies and other natural history

### Grading

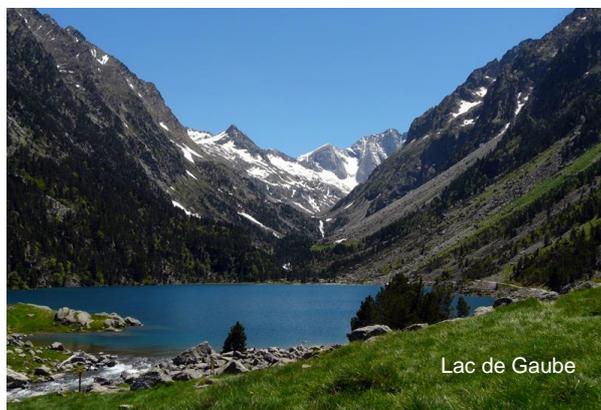
A. Day walks only

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code FRA03) or brochure

### Highlights

- A wealth of butterfly species (70-100) including Pyrenean specialities
- Apollo, Clouded Apollo, alpine ringlets & whites at high altitudes
- Scarce, Purple-shot & Purple-edged Coppers
- The very rare Gavarnie Blue plus a host of other blues & fritillaries
- Golden Eagle, Lammergeier & Griffon Vulture



Lac de Gaube



Apollo



Scarce Copper



In support of Butterfly Conservation 10% of the proceeds from this tour will be donated to Butterfly and invested directly in the conservation of British and European butterflies



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

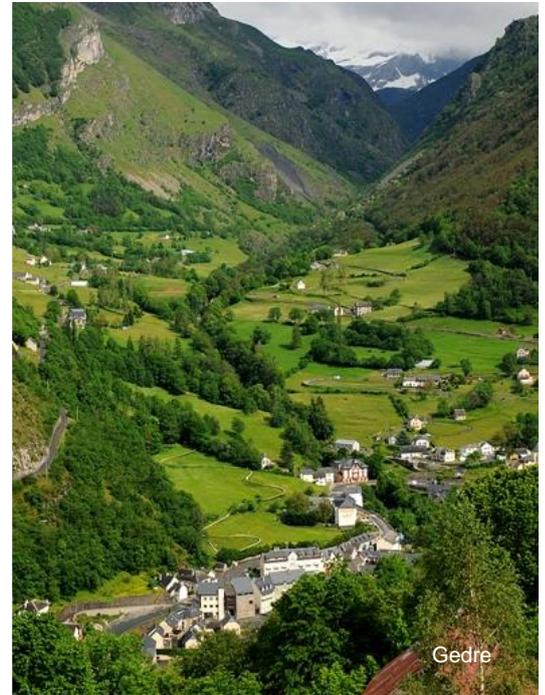
W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)



**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.**

## Introduction

Throughout this holiday we will be based at the same delightful hotel in the quiet village of Gèdre, some six kilometres north of the popular road head village of Gavarnie, in the heart of the Parc National des Pyrenees. Villages in the high Pyrenees can seem rather grey and drab, but the scenery around them is, in stark contrast, quite stunning – especially, of course, when the sun is out. We will use our hotel as a base from which to explore the trails of the national park, and to enjoy the exceptional variety of butterflies, moths, birds, plants and other natural history of the region. The outlined programme below must be used only as a rough guide, as so much will depend on the weather, and how we feel each day – there is such a choice of things to do in this area, and having two vehicles will further extend our options.



## Day 1

## Gèdre

We depart from Stansted airport to Lourdes at the foot of the Pyrenees, arriving one hour forty minutes later. There we transfer to our privately hired minibus for the drive to Gèdre, ascending rapidly on winding roads only during the last 45 minutes of the journey. It will be well worth keeping your eyes open during the final stages of this journey as a wide variety of birds of prey may be seen overhead and some interesting plants are found on the valley walls.



On arrival in Gèdre we will settle into our hotel, leaving you at leisure for what little is left of the day!

## Day 2

## Gèdre

Not far above Gèdre is the Barrage des Gloriettes. The body of water behind the dam is surrounded by delightful meadows of flowers that attract a good variety of alpine butterflies. Apollos, Clouded Apollos, Escher's and Mazarine Blues, and a wide range of fritillaries, ringlets and skippers may all be seen. Leaving our minibuses beneath the dam we will spend the day walking in the Estaubé Valley, enjoying these

butterflies and day-flying moths, and hopefully getting as far as the spectacular Cirque d'Estaube, where we may take our picnic lunch before we have to return down the valley in the afternoon. This valley offers a good introduction to the natural history of the region, and amongst other things we can expect to see our first groups of soaring Griffon Vultures, one of the ornithological highlights of the Pyrenees. We should also see our first Lammergeiers (Bearded Vultures), and even have a chance of seeing breeding Wallcreepers on the high cliffs above the Barrage.

## Day 3

Gedre

This morning we will drive to Gavarnie, escaping from the tourist bustle of this busy roadhead by completing a circular route to the south of, and high above, the village. This is a delightful circuit, much of it through a most attractive, and vertiginous deciduous forest. The forest plants are interesting, and on the open slopes we should find a good display of flowering *Rhododendron ferrugineum*. The variety of butterflies on this walk is excellent, especially when we reach the meadows above the forest where Piedmont and other Ringlets abound, and blues, fritillaries and skippers bask briefly beside footpaths to test our identification skills. The birdwatching is also good.



Firecrests, Coal Tits, Serins, Citril Finches and, with luck, Bonelli's Warblers may all be found in the forest, whilst overhead Choughs, Alpine Choughs, Griffon Vultures, Lammergeiers, Golden Eagles and other birds of prey may all be seen. Wheatears, Ring Ouzels and Water Pipits are amongst the birds of the high open slopes. The mountain views on this walk, particularly towards the spectacular Cirque de Gavarnie, are wonderful – providing of course, that the weather is clear!

## Day 4

Gedre

If the weather is clear, we will make an early start for the Port de Gavarnie, at 2,270 metres one of the highest points we can drive to by road, and magnificently situated right on the high spine of the Pyrenees. From this airy point we can look down precipitous slopes into the much drier landscape of Spain's Ordesa



National Park. If it is quiet, Chamois can be seen from this spot, feeding on the high surrounding slopes. A much rarer mammal, the Ibex, is also reputedly seen here occasionally. A short walk towards the snowy slopes of the Brèche de Roland, perhaps the most spectacular of all Pyrenean passes, will give us a good chance of seeing Snowfinches, and perhaps even an Alpine Accentor, as well as any butterflies and moths on the wing at these higher altitudes. After our walk, we will

descend to the Ossoue Valley for a picnic lunch in a warm and sheltered place, and for a leisurely afternoon exploring the flower-filled riverside meadows and St. Savin Wood. This site can be amongst the most rewarding for butterflies on a hot sunny day, with fritillaries and blues particularly abundant. Little, Green-underside, Large, Silver-studded, Mazarine, Escher's, Adonis and Eros are just some of the Blues we are likely to see! Day-flying moths can also be abundant, with Hummingbird Hawk-moth, Six-spot Burnet, Forester and Chimney Sweeper amongst the commoner species. We must also keep a good lookout above for the birds of prey that inhabit this valley, in particular Lammergeier and Peregrine Falcon.

## Day 5

## Gedre



Lesser Marbled Fritillary

Today, depending on the weather, we will either return to one of the wonderful nearby valleys or cirques to spend further time getting to grips with their rich variety of butterflies, or we will drive to Pont d'Espagne. Here, in the extensive forest of the Val de Jeret, we may encounter the large but elusive Black Woodpecker, and we will spend much of the day walking in the Gaube Valley. For the first two kilometres or so we will be walking through mature conifer forest for the first time, and will hope to see a slightly different range of birds, plants and butterflies. Above the forest and the large Lac de Gaube we ascend gently into a high and beautiful valley where we spend the afternoon.

## Day 6

## Gedre

The Cirque de Troumouse is a peaceful place in comparison with the popular Cirque de Gavarnie, yet it is just as beautiful, and being fairly undisturbed it is a haven for wildlife. Mammals in particular may be seen here, especially Marmots and Chamois; an interesting array of alpine plants should also be on display, both in the bogs beneath the Cirque and in the boulders at the foot of its high cliffs. The more energetic might also like to tackle the walk back down into the Heas Valley: a steep descent is involved but it is a most scenic walk, with plenty to interest the naturalist along the way.

This afternoon we will spend time in the lower part of the Heas Valley, beneath the Barrage des Gloriettes. This sheltered spot is particularly good for a wide range of hay meadow and woodland species, and the area is best explored on a gentle downhill walk back to Gèdre. At the start of the walk the ragged roadside verges can be alive with Apollos, and some Clouded Apollos, whilst sheltered banks attract Large, Northern and Common Wall Browns, Pearly Heaths, Small and Sooty Coppers, Duke of Burgundy Fritillaries, and Large Grizzled, Grizzled,



Pyrenean Squill

Red-underwing, Dingy and Chequered Skippers. Swallowtails, Black-veined Whites, Bath Whites, Marbled Whites, and Dark Green, Queen of Spain, Heath and Meadow Fritillaries may all be found in the meadows which, on a hot summer's day are simply heaving with butterflies; numbers that are sadly no longer encountered in England. Further species may be seen as we enter the oak woodlands; they include Wood White, a variety of hairstreaks, Southern White Admiral and Pearl-bordered Fritillary amongst others.

## Day 7

## Gedre

Today we will return to the Ossoue Valley. This is such a long and extensive valley that the opportunities for both walking and butterfly observation are aplenty. It is, after all, perhaps one of the best areas not only for butterflies and day-flying moths, but also for both birds and plants. By now, we will have had some valuable experience in the tricky identification of the many blues and fritillaries that occur here, and we may be able to find some of those species missed on our previous visit.

We will also use this last day to soak in as much as possible of the other wildlife of the area; the Griffon Vultures, Lammergeiers, Golden Eagles and other birds of prey that may be seen overhead; the Ring Ouzels, Wheatears, Dippers, Black Redstarts, Rock Buntings, Serins and Citril Finches that are abundant in the meadows and along the streams.

## Day 8

## Gedre

Depending on flight times, we may have time for a final early morning walk before we must reluctantly leave the mountains and drive back to Lourdes for our return flight to London.



## Tour grading

On this holiday we will be based at one hotel throughout. We will explore the mountains of this spectacular region, and enjoy their butterflies, moths and other natural history, by means of day walks of between four and eight kilometres in length. Our pace will be gentle, and we will frequently be merely pottering as we take a closer look at the butterflies, moths, birds and plants.

## Weather

We have chosen early July as being the best time for butterflies and moths, but it is also a good time for flowers and birds in this region of the Pyrenees. However, as we will be high in the mountains throughout this holiday you must be prepared for the very variable weather associated with all mountain ranges, and particularly the western Pyrenees. Whilst we can expect some clear, sunny and hot (c 75°F) weather, we should also expect some wet, cloudy and cooler weather; the changes can be dramatic, so bring a good range of clothing!

## Food and accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

## 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](http://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.



Lunch in the Pyrenees



Our hotel in Gedre