

# Butterflies & Moths of the Vercors

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	<u>Fly to Lyon</u>
<b>Day 2/7</b>	<u>Natural history excursions in the Vercors</u>
<b>Day 8</b>	<u>Fly to London</u>

### Departs

July

### Focus

Butterflies & moths

### Grading

Grade A. Easy walks only

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code FRA26)

### Highlights:

- Wonderful wildlife amidst truly magnificent scenery
- Daily moth trapping
- Butterfly hunting in varying habitats to maximize our potential species list
- Friendly, family-run hotel serving good home cooking based on local produce
- In support of Butterfly Conservation - *10% of the proceeds from this tour will be donated to Butterfly Conservation and invested directly in the conservation of British and European butterflies*



Mt. Aiguille from the Pas de l'Essaure



Marsh Fritillary



Our hotel in Vercors



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**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

Vercors Regional Nature Park is a beautiful area of limestone peaks, gorges and high plateaux extending over 186,000 hectares between the Isère valley in the north and the Diois to the south. The park was founded on 16th October 1970 to protect the rich and varied flora and fauna. Seven regions make up this unique and magnificent area: the Quatre Montagnes, the Trièves, the Coulmes, the Vercors Drômois, the Royans, the Diois and the Gervanne. In the north the harsh weather systems of the Alps prevail while in the gentler south, the air has an almost Mediterranean feel.

The landscapes of Vercors are extremely varied, with cliffs, caves, hills, peaks and high plateaus providing a home to a remarkable abundance of wildlife. Nearly 80 protected plant species can be found within the regional natural park - Lady's Slipper Orchids in the wooded areas, large-flowered bellflowers on the screes, primroses on the cliffs and wild tulips on the sub-Alpine pasture. Several sought after bird species breed here including a pleasing variety of raptors, plus grouse, owls and the enigmatic Wallcreeper.

We will be based for the duration of our holiday in a small, charming, family-run hotel in La Chapelle-en-Vercors, on the doorstep of the dramatic Haut Plateaux.



Naturetrek group in the Vercors

## Day 1

## La-Chapelle-En-Vercors

We start our holiday with a flight from London to Lyon. From here we pick up our minibuses and drive south for around two hours until, approaching a rise in the motorway, a jagged area of spectacular limestone looms into view. The deep Isère valley in the foreground and the high snow-capped Alps frame the Vercors beautifully - the area cries out for exploration!



Apollo

At this point, and if time permits, we will make a diversion away from the motorway, to the area around Grenoble Isère Airport. This area of arable fields, pasture, open grassland and shrubby woodland, is a wonderful place to watch birds,

especially raptors. Twelve species have been recorded in the past, including 3 species of Harrier, several Falcons, 2 species of Kite and 2 species of Eagle. If the sun is shining we will also see our first butterflies of the holiday.

Continuing on, we will leave the A48 motorway north of Grenoble, joining the A49 towards Valance, and make our way up onto the Vercors plateau, and on down through Pont en Royans to the quiet town of La Chapelle en Vercors. Here we complete our journey at the family run Hotel Bellier, our base for the week. There may have time for some gentle exploration around the hotel before dinner.

## Day 2

## Font d'Urle

Weather permitting, today will see the first morning inspection of our moth trap, examining the catch before breakfast.

A shorter drive today, will see us arrive at the little winter ski resort of Font d'Urle. En route we may choose to stop to visit a cemetery for members of the wartime resistance at Vassieux en Vercors. There is a nice circular walk at Font D'urle which crosses open, alpine-style habitat before heading back to the village along a spectacular cliff which offers panoramic views across the sprawling Forêt de Quint. The meadows and rock crevices are a veritable garden of flowers and a magnet for butterflies. Berger's Clouded Yellow, various grizzled skippers, High Brown, Dark Green and Niobe Fritillaries and day-flying moths have all been recorded here.

After lunch, in the Forêt Domaniale des Beauvante, we will travel through the spectacular Route Combe Laval, stopping to admire the wonderful views at the Col de la Machine. From here we will travel down to St. Jean en Royans to visit the hypermarket to buy picnic supplies for the week, before returning to La Chapelle.

## Day 3

## Haut Plateaux

One of the highlights of our week will be a day spent on the Haux Plateaux Nature Reserve (we will attempt to coincide this day with the week's best weather!) This wild area, in many respects unique in Europe, consists of a patchwork of meadows, moorlands, forests and high mountain ridges, shaped by savage winters and centuries of forestry and grazing. A small pioneering population of elusive Wolf, presumed recently colonised from the Italian Alps, hides in the vast *Pinus uncinata* (Mountain Pine) forest, their presence belied by tracks left in the extensive winter snows. Golden Eagle, Ring Ouzel, Citril Finch, Crossbill, Firecrest, and Lesser Whitethroat all live here. The alpine flora is amazing, and should be an attraction for Black Mountain Moth, Small Argent and Sable and Small Yellow Underwing as well as Apollo, ringlets, fritillaries and blues.

## Day 4

## Gervannes

Leaving La Chapelle this morning, we drive towards the Col de la Machine and then turn up to the Col de la Bataille, where it is possible to find Clouded Apollo if the season is late.

Moving on, we make our way south to Plan de Baix, via Leoncel, La Vacherie and the botanically famous Col de Bacchus, where we will spend time looking for blues and skippers. From here, we head on down to

Beaufort sur Gervanne, where we will turn west, parking in some scrubby fields and pine woods at Gigors. Here we will take lunch in a woodland clearing. After lunch we will explore the area in search of more butterflies and moths which nectar on the *Thymus vulgaris* (Wild Thyme). A short drive up the road will bring us to some arable Lavender and Sage fields.

We will now begin our journey back to La Chapelle, stopping, if time permits, in Leoncel for refreshments on the way.

## Day 5

## Pas de l'Ouille, Villard de Lans

Leaving La Chapelle, we will make our way to the ski resort to the south east of Villard de Lans, where we will take the cable car up the mountain. Our plan is to take an excursion in the direction of the Pas de l'Ouille and the Grande Combe. We will walk around six kilometers during the day and, on this occasion, will carry a packed lunch. Here we will get an opportunity to see a high Alpine species such as Mountain and Moorland Clouded Yellow, Mountain Ringlet, Geranium Argus, Damon Blue and Tufted Marbled Skipper.

Provided the route is open, we will pass through the spectacular Gorges de la Bourne on the outward and return journeys; an experience not to be missed.

## Day 6

## Molieres near Autrans

A drive north today towards Lans en Vercors and Meaudre, before continuing onto the Forest road through the Foret de Guiney.

We will make numerous stops along this route, exploring woodland, forest clearings, wet meadows and vegetated verges. Our picnic can be eaten on the edge of a clearing among the tall spikes of *Gentiana lutea* (Great Yellow Gentian). Large and Scarce Coppers, Large and Chalkhill Blues as well as Silver-washed, Dark Green, Niobe and Meadow Fritillaries may be found here.

After lunch we will move to the Cretes de la Moliere, with stunning views of the snow-capped Alps south-



east of Grenoble. From here we will take a short, easy walk towards the Pas de Bellecombe. As the name "Cretes" suggests, this is a north-south facing ridge, giving us splendid views to the east, across St.Nizier du Moucherotte and Grenoble.

We stand a good chance of Scotch Argus, Dewy, Common Brassy, Almond-eyed Ringlets, Idas and Silver-studded Blue and Arran Brown.

## Day 7

## Presles and Pont en Royans

We will drive north today from La Chapelle along the beautiful lane that connects St. Julien en Vercors with Les Barraques en Vercors. From here we turn south to Choranche, and then up to the spectacular Route de Presles. We will check the grassy verges for species such as Lulworth Skipper, Chequered Skipper, Marbled White, Pearly Heath and Large Blue.

At this point we will make a short drive into the Forêt Domaniale des Coulmes and the Fontaine Petruze, where we will take our picnic. Exploration of the woodland and open glades should produce species such as Silver Washed, Niobe and Titania's Fritillaries. We will now drive down to the beautiful and unique town of Pont de Royans, where we will be able to spend time exploring, before meeting for ice creams, prior to our journey back to our hotel. Along the way we will pause on the banks of the River Bourne, where a number of *Buddleja davidii* (Buddleja) bushes are naturalized, and attract good numbers of butterflies in the early afternoon sunshine. Great Banded Grayling, Dryad, Southern White Admiral, Hummingbird Hawkmoth and Cream Spot Tiger moth have all been recorded here.

## Day 8

## London

We must now leave our base in the Vercors to drive back to Lyon for our flight back to England.

## Trek grading

On this holiday we are based at one hotel throughout. We will explore the mountains, plateaux and gorges of this attractive region with its varied natural history by means of regular stops in our minibus followed by short walks or simply pottering in the richer areas of which there are many. Our pace will be gentle to allow us to examine the plants, insects and birds. The only longer walks will be on Hauts Plateaux and Pas de l'Ouille up to a maximum of six kilometers

## Weather

The second-half of July is the peak time for insects over the range of habitats and altitudes we will visit. Butterflies, moths and other insects will be active and birds will be busy on territory. The weather should be settled, but we need to be prepared for some wet and cool days, so bring a range of clothing. A long range weather forecast for Grenoble can be obtained from [www.bbc.co.uk/weather](http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather) shortly before departure.



## Food and accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. The hotel has a small outdoor, environmentally friendly, swimming pool.

## 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.