

The Reptiles & Amphibians of Georgia

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Outbound flights
Day 2	Tbilisi; Chachuna Managed Reserve
Day 3	Vashlovani National Park
Day 4 – 6	Borjomi
Day 7 – 8	Batumi
Day 9	Tbilisi
Day 10	Inbound flights

Departs

May

Focus

Reptiles & Amphibians

Grading

B. This tour is suitable for participants with a good level of fitness.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GEO04)

Highlights

- 50 species of reptiles and amphibians possible
- Western Palearctic specialities across the taxa
- Fantastic traditional cuisine
- Led by a local expert herpetologist



Levantine Viper, Caucasian Salamander © G. Iankoshvili,
Transcaucasian Nose-horned Viper



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Introduction

Nestled between the Greater Caucasus and Lesser Caucasus Mountains to the north and south, and the Black and Caspian Seas to the east and west, the nation of Georgia is a must-visit for the keen naturalist. The country's unique location results in an ecological, historical and cultural melting pot that, along with the astonishing scenery, makes this one of the world's most fascinating areas to visit. Its value for nature is remarkable: listed as one of 34 global biodiversity hotspots, the region's varied habitats – from semi-deserts to steppes and subtropical forests – support 6,400 species of higher plants (1,600 of which are endemic), around 400 bird species, and iconic mammals such as Persian Leopard, Brown Bear and Wolf.

For those with an interest in reptiles and amphibians, the Caucasus region is a treasure trove of species not found anywhere else in the Western Palearctic. Additionally, these include some of the most beautiful species in the biogeographic realm including Transcaucasian Nose-horned Viper, Caucasian Salamander, Northern Banded Newt and the much-sought-after Caucasian Viper. With over 50 herp species possible on the itinerary, this is certain to be a popular edition to our portfolio of reptile- and amphibian-focused tours.



Chachuna Managed Reserve © Giorgi Natsvlishvili

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

Fly London to Tbilisi

We depart from London on a scheduled service flight direct to Tbilisi. Occasionally we may have to use an indirect route via Istanbul; however, this will be avoided where possible.

Day 2

Dedoplistskaro; Chachuna Managed Reserve

Depending on flight schedules, we should arrive in Tbilisi mid-morning, when we will begin our journey east to the wonderful habitats of eastern Georgia.

Our first exploration will be in Chachuna Managed Reserve, where amongst spectacular landscapes we have a good chance to find such species as Collared Dwarf Snake (*Eirenis collaris*), Eurasian Blind Snake (*Xerotyphlops vermicularis*), Green Toad (*Bufo variabilis*), Long-legged Skink (*Eumeces schneideri*), Caucasian Agama (*Paralaudakia caucasia*) and European Glass Lizard (*Pseudopus apodus*). The



Dedoplistskaro

reserve is also home to a thriving population of Spur-thighed Tortoise (*Testudo graeca*). The other wildlife here includes Black Francolin, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Ménétries's Warbler, Lesser Kestrel, wild Ring-necked Pheasant, Levant Sparrowhawk, and Finsch's Wheatear. Other notable bird species in the area include Rosy Starling, Tawny Pipit, Calandra Lark, Western Rock Nuthatch, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, and Pied Wheatear.

After a wonderful day in Chachuna, we'll return to our hotel in Dedoplistskaro where we are based for two nights.

Day 3

Vashlovani National Park

After breakfast, we will visit one of the country's premier wildlife sites, Vashlovani National Park. Here, we have a good chance to find the majestic Levantine Viper (*Macrovipera lebetinus*), Eastern Four-lined Ratsnake (*Elaphe urartica*), Red-bellied Racer (*Dolichophis schmidtii*), Ring-headed Dwarf Snake (*Eirenis modestus*), Medium Lizard (*Lacerta media*), Striped Lizard (*Lacerta strigata*), Rapid Racerunner (*Eremias velox*) and amphibians including Savigny's Treefrog (*Hyla savignyi*) and Syrian Spadefoot Toad (*Pelobates syriacus*).

The other wildlife here includes Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Little Bustard, Chukar, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, and Saker Falcon. Other raptors in the area include Eastern Imperial Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Lesser-spotted Eagle, Eurasian Griffon, Egyptian Vulture, and Cinereous Vulture. We will also visit the area where Goitered Gazelles have been reintroduced.

Day 4 – 6

Borjomi

After breakfast, we will drive west to Nadarbazevi Lake located on the north slope of the Kvernaki ridge, at 856m above sea level. It is an artificially created reservoir on the site of the former Nadarbazevi Lake. Steppe Viper (*Vipera eriwanensis*), Dahl's Lizard (*Darevskia dahl*), Kura Lizard (*Darevskia portschinskii*), European Marsh Turtle (*Emys orbicularis*), Caspian Turtle (*Mauremys*

caspica), and Southern Crested Newt (*Triturus karelinii*) are all possible here. The bird highlights include White-winged Tern, Armenian Gull, Ruddy Shelduck, Montagu's and Hen Harriers.

After lunch, we'll continue west to Borjomi. For the next few days, we'll explore the wonderful region of the Borjomi-Kharagauli protected areas which are located in the centre of Georgia, situated on



Northern Banded Newt (*Ommatotriton ophryticus*)

the Caucasus isthmus, between the Black and Caspian Seas, on the northern and southern slopes of the eastern Adjara-Imereti mountain range. Protection started in some areas from 1935 with the establishment of Borjomi State Nature Reserve. In 1995, the first Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park was established in Georgia with the support of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the German government. Nowadays, the protected areas here cover

107,649 hectares. Over the next two days, we will make excursions in search of such species as Transcaucasian Long-nosed Viper (*Vipera transcaucasiana*), Caucasian Viper (*Vipera kaznakovi tuniyevi*), Caucasian Salamander (*Mertensiella caucasica*), Meadow Lizard (*Darevskia praticola*), Georgian Lizard (*Darevskia obscura*), Ajarian Lizard (*Darevskia mixta*), Northern Banded Newt (*Ommatotriton ophryticus*), Eastern Treefrog (*Hyla orientalis*), Caucasian Parsley Frog (*Pelodytes caucasicus*), and Caucasian Toad (*Bufo verrucosissimus*).

Day 7 – 8

Batumi

The next morning, we'll continue our journey west to Batumi, nestled on the Black Sea. Here the highlight will be our search for Caucasian Viper (*Vipera kaznakovi*), surely one of the most beautiful snakes in the Western Palearctic!

We shall also make excursions to search for Caucasian Salamander (*Mertensiella caucasica janashvili*), Dahl's Whip Snake (*Platyceps najadum*), Caucasian Brown Frog (*Rana macrocnemis*), Red-bellied Lizard (*Darevskia parvula*), Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), Georgian Lizard (*Darevskia rudis*), Artwin Lizard (*Darevskia derjugini*), Tessellated Water Snake (*Natrix tessellata*), Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*), Slow-worm (*Anguis colchica*), Smooth Snake (*Coronella austriaca*), Clark's Lizard (*Darevskia dryada*), and Aesculapian Snake (*Zamenis longissimus*).

Day 9

Tbilisi

This morning we'll have further time to search for any species we may have missed before making our way back to the capital, Tbilisi. The city has a remarkable mix of culture and it will be wonderful

to spend the evening reflecting on the highlights of our tour amongst its authentically hospitable people and mouthwatering Georgian cuisine.

Day 10

Departure

Sadly, it will be time to leave this fantastic country and return home.

Tour Grading & Focus

On a typical day on our herpetology tours, we'll begin searching in the field after breakfast, when the sun has warmed the substrates and landscapes, often getting into the vehicles at 9am and, after stopping for approximately one hour for lunch (which is often a continental-style picnic eaten in situ), we'll continue into early evening, when we will stop for a rest and dinner. Most evenings, it will be possible to go on excursions in search of nocturnal species, which will on average last for three hours after dinner. With an equal percentage of the target reptile and amphibian species likely to be nocturnal, these night searches are an important part of the tour but are optional, with some participants preferring to rest on some of the days. On average, 5-8 miles are walked per day.

We'll focus our time in the field on building an enviable list of reptile and amphibian species seen. Whilst searching, there is no doubt we'll come across a huge variety of amazing fauna and flora, which we'll also take time to enjoy, but reptiles and amphibians will strongly remain our focus. Sensitively checking under stones, logs and other refugia is an effective way of finding many species. Some of the target reptile or amphibian species may require longer field hours to locate and therefore this tour is suitable, and most enjoyable, for experienced herpetologists or naturalists who, aside from wishing to see the region's rarely-seen reptiles and amphibians, relish being in the field searching for and identifying the vast array of birds, butterflies, invertebrates, orchids and other wildlife which can be found sharing the wonderful habitats that we'll explore on the tour.

In summary, Naturetrek herpetology holidays offer tremendous value and are suitable for those whose main holiday focus is seeing some of the world's superb reptiles and amphibians, whilst spending the majority of their time in wildlife habitats.

On this holiday some occasional steep ascents are required.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Whilst we should hope for warm, sunny conditions, it can be overcast at times with occasional rains. It would be sensible to come prepared for such possibilities.

What's Included

All meals starting with dinner on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 10.

We will enjoy stays in hotels and guesthouses with en suite facilities throughout.

Extending Your Holiday

We would be happy to assist in arranging extensions, should this be of interest. Please contact Dan Lay (Dan@naturetrek.co.uk or 01962 733051) for further information and/or make sure to stipulate any interest in a possible extension upon booking.

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 at the time of booking.

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