

# The Apennines: Italy's Abruzzo National Park

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	<u>Fly Rome and transfer to Pescasseroli</u>
<b>Day 2/7</b>	<u>Wildlife walks in the Abruzzo National Park from Pescasseroli</u>
<b>Day 8</b>	<u>Transfer to Rome and fly London</u>

### Departs

May - June

### Focus

Mammals, plants, birds, and butterflies

### Grading

Grade B. All walks are optional day walks. One is particularly long and steep over rocky terrain

### Prices

See website (tour code ITA06) or brochure

### Highlights

- Look for Marsican Brown Bear and Wolf (both regularly seen on this tour).
- Enjoy a myriad of plants, butterflies and birds in the Apennines.
- Enjoy daily walks in this stunning National Park.
- Look for Great Sooty Satyr, Blue-spot Hairstreak and numerous other butterflies.



Abruzzo Chamois, Lady Slipper Orchid, and Marsican Brown Bear. (Lee Morgan and Bear by Paolo Iannicca)



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)



**N.B.** Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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.

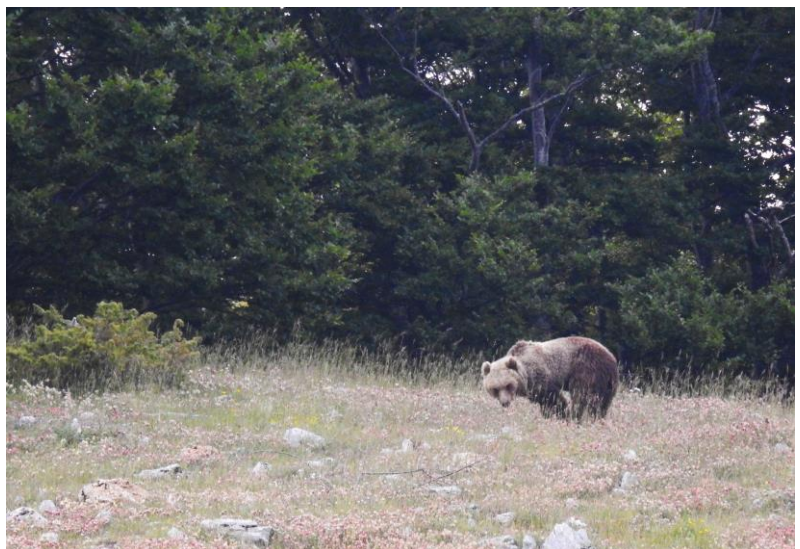
## Introduction

Stretching the length of Italy, the Apennine Mountains provide a refuge for much of Italy's most interesting natural history. This is very much a working rural landscape of rolling hills and traditional sheep farming, made special by its wealth of atmospheric mediaeval villages, traditional cuisine and aromatic local wines, all of which combine to make this holiday a well-rounded and enjoyable Italian experience.

Set in the heart of the Apennines is the Abruzzo National Park, established by royal decree in 1923 and today protecting an area of 400 square kilometres. This park is the focus of our single-centre holiday, during which we will be based throughout the tour in a comfortable, family-run hotel, set in a quiet location at the edge of the large, friendly village of Pescasseroli, in the foothills of the Apennines. Pescasseroli is situated in the valley of the River Sangro, surrounded by the gentle green meadows and imposing partly-forested mountains which make up the Abruzzo National Park.

On this week-long holiday we will enjoy daily natural history walks amongst the beautiful Apennine valleys and shady beech forests aiming to see the best of the wealth of wildlife this park has to offer. We will explore some of the 150 trails of the park and enjoy the exceptional variety of birds, mammals, plants and butterflies of the region.

The park is the last bastion of the endemic Marsican Brown Bear and there is a chance we might catch a rare glimpse of this wonderful animal, of which there are some 40 adults present. Apennine Wolves are also to be found in the area, although both these and the Marsican Brown Bear are typically elusive. Even so, our recent groups have enjoyed sightings of both mammals during the week and we hope this success will continue! Please check the tour reports for details of specific sightings.



Marsican Brown Bear by Paolo Iannicca

The best times for seeing bears are in the early morning and late evening, so our programme of daily walks will be varied to allow for this. Being only a short drive from an excellent viewpoint, early morning, pre-breakfast outings will be put on to scan for these enigmatic species.

## Day 1

### London – Pescasseroli

We depart from London to Rome in the morning, arriving approximately two hours later and transferring to our privately hired minibus(es) for the 2.5 hour drive to Pescasseroli, ascending rapidly on winding roads during the last hour of the journey. It will be well worth keeping your eyes open during the final stages of this journey for the colourful roadside flora found in the region.

On arrival in Pescasseroli we will settle into our hotel before, if time permits, taking a gentle stroll to explore the local area.

## Day 2

### Camosciara

This morning we will drive a short distance along the valley of the River Sangro to where it meets a small tributary, the River Scerto, which is the starting point for today's walk. Following the river valley, our goal will be the Cascata di Nimfi (the Waterfall of the Nymphs). Initially, our route will take us through a mosaic of flower-rich pastures and Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) where Common Globularia (*Globularia punctata*) Glaucous Spurge (*Euphorbia myrsinites*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), and Nice Milkwort (*Polygala nicaeensis*) may be seen. Along the streamside we will search for the rare and beautiful Lady's Slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*), together with Lady Orchid (*Orchis purpurea*). As we progress we will scan the hillsides around us for Red Deer and Wild Boar.

In these delightful forests and clearings, we will listen out for Firecrests, Coal Tits, Serins, Western Bonelli's Warblers and Red-backed Shrikes. We can scan the small waterfalls where dippers are known to breed. Towards the top of our walk the views of the mountains all round us are quite spectacular. Golden Eagle regularly nests nearby and we will keep an eye out for this and other mountain birds such as Alpine Chough. Along the way we will find a scenic spot to partake of our picnic lunch, before we have to return down the valley in the afternoon.

We will aim for an early dinner this evening, before going out for our first bear watch. The main bear watching site is from a church at Gioia Vecchia. A journey of around 15 minutes leads up the valley past meadows and wooded hillsides, all perfect Bear habitat. We will keep a look out on the way and spend time at the church, which provides a fantastic view of a large section of the valley. It is exiting knowing that a Bear or Wolf may wander out at any time but this does require patience, luck and some early starts! Red Deer, Roe Deer, Fox and Wild Boar are all regularly seen from here.

## Day 3

### Val Fondillo

For those who wish to do so, there will probably be an opportunity to go out soon after dawn this morning, to visit one of our bear watching sites before breakfast.

Today we will visit Val Fondillo, another beautiful valley, blessed with a wealth of wildlife. Leaving our minibuses by a small visitor centre, we begin our walk up the valley of the River Fondillo. The first part of our walk takes us

through pastures and small wetlands where we hope to see Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*) Toothed Orchid (*Orchis tridentata*), Military Orchid (*Orchis militaris*) and the bright blue Speedwell *Veronica orsiniana*.. As we reach the forest we may come across Mezereum (*Daphne mezereum*), the leaves of Martagon Lily (*Lilium martagon*) and Stinking Hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*) amongst the stately Beech trees, many of which are centuries old. Crossing the stream, we will look for the endemic Trumpet Gentian (*Gentiana dinarica*) and Shrubby Milkwort (*Polygala chamaebuxus*).

Again the variety of butterflies on this walk can be excellent and the birdwatching is also good. Redstarts, and with luck any of the five species of woodpecker (Green, White-backed, Lesser, Middle and Great Spotted) and also Western Bonelli's Warbler may all be found in the forest, whilst overhead Choughs, Golden Eagle and other birds of prey may all be seen. We will also keep our eyes open for evidence of Wolves!

We will enjoy a leisurely picnic lunch in a meadow by the stream, and a post-picnic potter, before retracing our route slowly back down the valley.

## Day 4

### Valle di Rose

This walk is the most strenuous of the week, as we climb above the tree line, often to lying snow, and it can only be undertaken in favourable weather conditions. However we walk at a naturalist's pace, with plenty of rests to enjoy the stunning views and wildlife.

We start in the medieval hilltop village of Civitella Alfedena, above the Lago di Barrea. The stony path goes steeply upwards through forest and clearings. Under the Beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) we will look for Sword-leaved and White Helleborines (*Cephalanthera longifolia* and *C. damasonium*), Bird's-nest Orchids (*Neottia nidus-avis*) and the delicate Coralroot Orchids (*Corallorhiza trifida*). Wood Warblers and Western Bonelli's Warblers are often heard here, and we will watch out for Wolf droppings by the path.



Valle di Rose by Lee Morgan

As we come out of the trees we will probably encounter snow and the earliest spring flowers: Crocus (*Crocus vernus*) and Alpine Squill (*Scilla bifolia*). Here too are a wealth of other alpine flowers, including Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*), the endemic pansy *Viola eugeniae*, Alpine Pasque Flower (*Pulsatilla alpina*) and the endemic Reddish Saxifrage (*Saxifraga porophylla*). However, the main focus will be the Abruzzo Chamois, which we hope to see on the slopes around. We will enjoy our picnic in these stunning surroundings.

The extent of our walk is likely to be determined by the quantity of snow on the pass, as well as by the energy of the group. We will look for Alpine Accentor, Rock Bunting and Snow Finch around the snow patches, and scan the

horizon for birds of prey as Peregrine Falcon, Black Kite and Golden Eagle may all be seen. This is also a great area for the beautiful Rock Thrush.

We return by the same path.

## Day 5

### Vallone Pesco di Lordo, and the 'Landslip meadow'

Today we will explore the Vallone Pesco di Lordo, which rises gently through meadows and well-established beechwoods (*Fagus sylvatica*), from near the hotel. The older beech trees here provide a good habitat for the range of woodpeckers found in the area including, possibly, the very rare Lilford's White-backed Woodpecker. We will enjoy the range of butterflies, while plants may include such woodland species as Coralroot (*Cardamine bulbifera*) and Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*). The main botanical focus will be, however, to search for the endemic Marsican Iris (*Iris marsica*).



Pearl-bordered Fritillary by Ron Brown

After a picnic in the meadows, we will retrace our steps and travel to the Landslip, north of Pescasseroli. Although the landslide of soil across part of the road happened several years ago, it has not been cleared, and remains a feature of the area. Here we will revisit the meadow we use for bear watching, this time focusing on the rich variety of orchid species it holds. Lady Orchid (*Orchis purpurea*), Burnt Orchid (*Orchis ustulata*), Toothed Orchid (*Orchis tridentata*), Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), and a form of Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis ovalis*), together with some interesting hybrids may all be found. Amongst the birds may be Cirl Buntings, and Red-backed Shrikes.

After dinner, we will have another opportunity to watch for mammals at one of the sites.

## Day 6

### Barrea

Depending on our success and enthusiasm for mammal watching, we may go out early again today.

After breakfast, we will drive into Pescasseroli, and there will be an opportunity to look round while the leaders shop for the picnic. We then drive the length of the Sangro Valley, to the small hillside town of Barrea, which is perched above the artificial Lago di Barrea. We take the short path to the local nature reserve overlooking the Sangro Gorge. Here we may see Golden Eagles, Crag Martins, Alpine Swift, Blue Rock Thrush and Red-billed Choughs, while we also look for Red Deer on the hillside opposite. In sunny weather there are many butterflies and other insects, while among the plants we will look for Thick-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga callosa*), Livelong Saxifrage (*Saxifraga paniculata*), and Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster intergerrimus*).

We will also visit the Lago di Barrea, where we will probably have a late lunch, before returning to the hotel for some free time, and the opportunity to for further exploration of the surrounding area. After an early dinner, we will again have the opportunity to look for mammals.

## Day 7

### Pescasseroli

For those who wish to do so, we take our final opportunity of an early outing.

After breakfast, we will take a short circular stroll at the edge of the town, to the ruins of Castel Mancino on a rocky outcrop. According to legend, this was where the young lovers, Prince Serolo and his Saracen wife Pesca met their tragic deaths, giving rise to the town's name (there are also more mundane explanations!). Here we may be lucky enough to see a host of butterflies, such as Common and Scarce Swallowtails, Moroccan Orange-tip, Clouded Yellow, Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Sooty Copper, Black-veined White and Green Hairstreak. We should also add some new orchid species to our list, including the Adriatic Lizard Orchid (*Himantoglossum adriaticum*), while birds may include Black-eared Wheatear.

We will have our picnic in a meadow nearby, before taking the opportunity to sample the wares of the town's gelateria. We will return to the hotel to give people the opportunity to rest or pack, before another local walk. After dinner, we will have a final chance to go out, or we may spend the evening relaxing by the fire!



Adriatic Lizard Orchid by Lee Morgan

## Day 8

### London

An early start is likely, as we must reluctantly leave the mountains to drive back to Rome for our return flight to London.

## Tour grading

On this holiday we will be based at one hotel throughout – the very friendly and comfortable Albergo Paradiso, where we will be excellently looked after by our hosts Geraldine and Marco. We will explore the mountains of this spectacular region and enjoy their natural history, by means of day and half-day walks of between two and ten kilometres in length. Our pace will be gentle and we will frequently be merely pottering as we take a closer look at the plants, butterflies and birds.

Most of the tour is graded A/B, with day and half day walks which can be on uneven stony tracks. One walk (the Val di Rose) is certainly graded B and the most strenuous walk of the week, due to the steady steepness of the path (we climb about 500 metres over about three kilometres, with an optional extra 300 metres or so to the pass at 1942 metres). We walk slowly, with plenty of breaks to enjoy our surroundings. Walking poles are highly recommended for this walk, even if you don't regularly use them, as they ease the strain, especially on the descent. It's a fantastic walk, well worth the effort! Please note that all walks are optional and the surroundings of the hotel provide plenty of opportunities for more gentle (or strenuous!) exploration, although still mainly on stony tracks.

## Weather

We have chosen late May as being the prime time for flowering plants, bear activity, butterflies and birds in this region. 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. Whilst we can expect mostly clear, sunny and hot (c 75°F or 23°C) weather, we should also expect some wet, cloudy and cool weather; the changes can be dramatic, so bring a good range of clothing! We have had snow blizzards on a previous tour!

## 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.

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