

Romania - The Wildlife of Transylvania

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Bucharest & transfer Magura.

Day 2/7 Wildlife excursions from Magura.

Day 8 Fly London.

Departs

May and June

Focus

Birds, mammals, butterflies and local history

Grading

Grade B. Easy to moderate day walks

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ROM01) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

Highlights:

- 7 nights based in a small family run hotel high in the Transylvanian Carpathian Mountains.
- Watch Brown Bears from a hide in the forest.
- A general wildlife holiday focusing on birds, mammals butterflies, other insects and flowers.
- Visit Castle Bran, alleged haunt of Vlad the Impaler, better known as Count Dracula!
- Beautiful mountain scenery.
- Learn how to identify the tracks and signs of Wolf, Bear, Lynx and other forest mammals.
- Led by expert UK and local naturalists.



From top: Mosorel Guesthouse, Magura., Brown Bear, Castle Bran. Images by Geoff Carr, Rob Murray & Abby Grainger



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Introduction

The Carpathian Mountains form a majestic sweeping arc that rise in Slovakia and pass east along the Polish border before turning south into Ukraine and finally Romania. They are a relatively young chain, an eastern extension of the Alps which rose around 60 million years ago and are still growing to this day. The Carpathians are at their widest and most majestic in Transylvania, however, the forest-clad central Romanian province steeped in legend and folklore. Whilst this region is famed for the supernatural, for the naturalist such legends are but an interesting distraction from the wealth of wildlife to be found here. Fortunately, werewolves are difficult to locate these days, but Wolves and Brown Bears still roam the forests in good numbers, birds and butterflies are abundant and the flora contains a wealth of species endemic to the region.

For centuries the people living within the elbow of the Romanian Carpathians have existed in harmony with a rich variety of birds and animals. The continuation of these ancient, low intensity, agricultural techniques has allowed the wildlife to flourish and gives an insight into how our own landscape would have been in days gone by. Add to this abundance of wildlife, the soaring peaks of the Carpathians and one of the most beautiful landscapes in Europe and you have all the ingredients for an unforgettable 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.

Day 1

Magura

We depart from London at around 1150 hours on our 3 hour flight to Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Here we will meet our local guide and drive for around 4 hours out of the flat plains that surround the capital and into the cool forest-clad mountains of the Carpathians. We will base ourselves for 7-nights in the small chalet-style Mosorel Guesthouse in Magura, a small Transylvanian mountain village (around 20 minutes from the town of Zarnesti) set within flower-filled meadows and commanding spectacular views of the jagged peaks of the Piatra Craiului National Park.

Days 2 - 7

Wildlife excursions from Magura

We have the next 6 full days to explore the mountains, gorges and valleys of Transylvania. Our exact itinerary will depend on the weather conditions and advice of our local guide, but we will be focusing our efforts on the spectacular Piatra Craiului National Park (Rock-of-the-King). This dramatic park is dominated by a 25 kilometre jagged limestone ridge, widely regarded as one of Romania's most beautiful sights, which reaches a height of 2,244 metres. Brown Bears, Wolf and even Lynx still roam the forests whilst, to date, 110 species of bird and 1,100 species of higher plant have been recorded, including 2 endemics. There are many spectacular and wildlife rich areas to explore. The lower slopes are cut by a series of spectacular limestone gorges, such as the Zarnesti Gorge, home to Wallcreepers, Black Redstarts, Crag Martins, Ring Ouzels and wheeling flocks of Alpine Swifts. On one day we will take a horse-drawn cart to the start of the gorge and then walk deeper into the cleft in search of these species. The surrounding forests are also the haunt of Lesser Spotted Eagle, Goshawk, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Sombre Tit, Black, Grey-headed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, plus the majestic, but very elusive,

Ural Owl. There is also much to keep the botanist and lepidopterist interested including a wealth of orchids, plus Scarce Swallowtail, Russian Heath, Clouded Apollo, Berger's Clouded Yellow and Meadow Fritillary.

As spectacular as the mountains are, we will take a short break from the hills on one day (probably our last) to visit the Dumbravita Fishing complex, a 420 hectare Ramsar wetland teeming with waterbirds and a wealth of other lowland species. Great White Egrets, Black Stork, Purple Herons and Ferruginous Ducks are common whilst other species to look out for include Red-necked Grebe, Spotted Crake, Red-footed Falcon, Black Tern, White-winged Black Tern, Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Penduline Tit and Red-backed Shrike.

On another day we will join a local naturalist to track big mammals and learn how to find and identify the prints, spoor and other easily missed signs of the large carnivores that still patrol these hills. We hope to find wolf and bear tracks and learn how to tell the former from the more common dog prints. Then, as the sun lowers, we will make our way to a specially constructed hide deep in the forests to watch the animals themselves (approximately 1 hour from Zarnesti). Wolves and Lynx are rarely seen, but the Brown Bears frequently descend from the hills in the evening and, whilst nothing is certain in the world of wildlife watching, we have a good chance of finding one or more of these magnificent creatures. Indeed, Romania still holds the largest population of Brown Bears on the continent and whilst they are not faring so well in other regions of Europe, in the Carpathians they are flourishing!

Finally, it is impossible to visit Transylvania and completely ignore the folklore and stories that abound here. We hope to, therefore, take a short break from the wildlife to visit nearby Castle Bran, the 'alleged' haunt of Vlad the Impaler, on whom the Dracula stories are based. Likewise a journey through this region is not complete without a visit to the nearby medieval town of Brasov and, if time permits, we will spend a couple of hours here at the end of our stay to learn a little about the history of region and enjoy Brasov's medieval architecture.

Day 8

London

Today we must sadly return to Bucharest, but will try and break the journey wherever possible. Our return flight to London departs early evening arriving around 1930 hours.

Tour grading

Grade B - Easy to moderately strenuous. We will be on foot, on mountain trails, for the best part of each day and some of the trails can be steep and rocky in places. As such, this tour is suitable for people with an average to good level of fitness and a love of walking in the hills.

NB - Please note that the Mosorel Guesthouse in Magura is located at the end of an 80 metre uphill gravel track that is not accessible by coach. Group members should be aware, therefore, that they will need to walk this distance to and from the coach/guesthouse at the start and end of each day. Likewise, the village of Magura is located approximately 25 minutes from the town of Zarnesti up a winding road. Although travelling up and down this road each day adds a little to the travelling, we feel this extra driving is more than compensated for by the idyllic setting of the guesthouse and the wonderful views it commands across the valley. If you would like to discuss either of these issues in more detail please give the Naturetrek office a call on 01962 733051.

Focus

This is a general wildlife tour (with a little local history) focusing on all aspects of natural history, in particular birds, butterflies, mammals and scenery.

Weather

Mountain weather is always variable, with cloud and rain - and even snow - always a possibility, especially in the afternoons. However, at this time of year, the weather should be becoming settled, with daytime temperatures ranging from 15°C to 30°C (depending on altitude), and plenty of clear sunny weather. However, at high altitudes, overcast conditions can rapidly reduce temperatures, and here waterproofs and a warm jacket should be carried at all times.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. Hotels in Romania are fairly simple in nature so you should not expect 5-star accommodation on this tour! This holiday is based in a simple, but comfortable, guesthouse (all rooms with private facilities) in the small mountain village of Magura.

Meals will be a mix of traditional Romanian meals and more 'westernised' food. Lunches will be mostly picnics, but this will depend on the weather, and we may opt for an indoor meal on occasion. Evening meals will be generally taken at our guesthouse. Vegetarians can be catered for but please be aware that vegetarianism is a concept poorly understood in Romania and your choice of food may be somewhat limited and repetitive.

Your Safety & Security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/romania> regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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