

Romania's Butterflies & Moths

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Bucharest & transfer Dobrogea.

Day 2/4 Dobrogea and the Danube Delta from Tulcea.

Day 5/8 Carpathian Mountains from Zarnesti.

Day 9 Return Bucharest and fly London.

Departs

June.

Focus

Primarily butterflies and moths, although birds and other wildlife will also be enjoyed.

Grading

Grade A/B. Easy to moderate day walks only.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ROM10) or see the Naturetrek brochure.

Highlights:

- Explore the beautiful Carpathian Mountains
- Look for Weaver's and Nickerl's Fritillaries, Fenton's Wood White and Chapman's Blue
- Visit the steppe grassland of Dobrogea and the woodlands of the Babadag Plateau
- Take a boat trip through the reed-fringed waterways of the Danube Delta
- Optional evening watching Brown Bears
- Birds including Eastern Imperial Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk and Isabelline Wheatear
- Lattice Brown, Great Banded Grayling and Lesser Fiery Copper in the Macin Mountains
- Led by expert naturalist guides



*From top: Nickerl's Fritillary, White Pelicans & Lattice Brown.
Photos courtesy of D Petrescu & Shutterstock images.*



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

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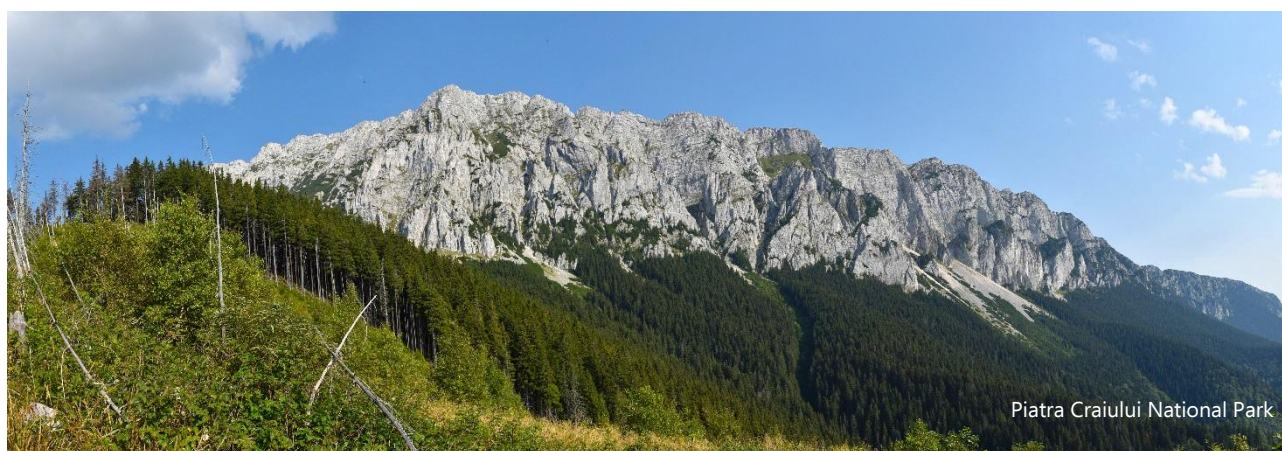
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Introduction

Romania is now well established as one of Europe's top birdwatching destinations and 'birders' flock there annually to enjoy the abundant avifauna of the beautiful Danube Delta and rugged Carpathian Mountains. Less well known, however, are Romania's other natural treasures, in particular its butterflies. This fascinating country, sitting on Europe's eastern border, is home to over 210 species of butterfly, nearly four times the number we have here in the UK. Traditional low-intensity farming, coupled with Romania's hot dry summers and varied habitats – ranging from soaring mountain peaks to flat treeless steppe – combine to create the ideal conditions for butterflies to flourish. This exciting tour focuses on these colourful sprites and during our time here we hope to see around half of the country's species, from the diminutive Eastern Short-tailed Blue to the impressive Freyer's Purple Emperor.



Following a flight to Bucharest, this holiday begins with a four night stay in the town of Tulcea, situated at the very edge of the beautiful Danube Delta and the rolling, woodland-dotted, steppe of Dobrogea. This is probably the richest area in Romania for butterflies and, as we explore the Macin Mountains, Babadag Plateau and other key sites, we will be on the lookout for Lesser Fiery Copper, Niobe Fritillary, Lattice Brown and Great Banded Grayling amongst many others. The birdlife here is also superb and amongst the species we most hope to see will be Eastern Imperial Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk and Isabelline Wheatear. No wildlife tour of the region would be complete, however, without a day on the water exploring the stunning Danube Delta; so we will end our time in this region amongst the willow-lined channels and vast reedbeds of this UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. We will then move on for a four night stay in the Carpathian Mountains, the dramatic arc of pine-clad hills and high peaks that sweeps through the centre of the country. Here we will explore the Piatra Craiului and Bucegi National Parks in search of butterflies, amongst them Weaver's and Nickerl's Fritillaries, Fanton's Wood White and Hungarian Glider. There will also be the opportunity to watch for European Brown Bears and to look for a variety of birds and other wildlife before we make our way back to Bucharest to catch our flight home.

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

Bucharest

We depart from London on our 3 hour flight to Bucharest, the capital of Romania. From here we'll make our way south east to the Dobrogea region, where we'll stay at a guesthouse in the city of Tulcea for the first four nights of the tour.

Days 2 – 4

Dobrogea Steppe & Danube Delta, from Tulcea

We have the next few days to enjoy the butterflies, birds and other wildlife of the Dobrogea Steppe, the Babadag Plateau and beautiful Danube Delta. The extensive steppe grasslands of Dobrogea and the low hills of the Macin Mountains National Park are rich in butterflies and other insects, fuelled by the region's hot summers and abundant sunshine. This is an area of nutrient-poor grassland dotted with rocky outcrops and wooded slopes climbing to cliffs and crags higher up the hillsides. The Babadag Plateau is an extremely botanically rich area, containing some of the most extensive lime forests in Europe alongside mixed oak woodland, meadows and forest steppe. With such a wide range of habitats on offer it is not surprising that the region is home to an equally wide range of plants including Ground Pine, Cornelian



Cherry, Spiked Speedwell and Wild Clary, which in turn provide food for numerous butterflies. If the weather is kind then this region can be alive with a wonderful range of species, which may include, amongst many others, Poplar Admiral, Danube Clouded Yellow, Large Copper, Niobe, Heath, Queen of Spain and Lesser Spotted Fritillaries, Cardinal, Idas Blue, Lattice Brown, Great Banded Grayling and perhaps the rare, and localized, Delattin's Grayling. Numerous raptors will be sharing the skies with the butterflies such as Eastern Imperial Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Levant Sparrowhawk and Saker Falcon, whilst closer to the ground we hope to see Sombre Tit, Wryneck, Pied Wheatear and Ortolan Bunting.

We also aim to have timed it just right to find the very localized Nogel's Fritillary, which has a very short flying season, and we hope to catch sight of these rare butterflies.

On our final full day here we will take to the water and explore the reed-fringed waterways of the Danube Delta. This UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is one of the most important wetlands in the whole of Europe and comprises a vast complex of reedbeds, willow forest and wetlands, bisected by an intricate network of channels. The Sulina channel that runs through Tulcea is wide and straight to facilitate passage of large freight through to the Black Sea, so we will aim to get access to the smaller, less disturbed channels as quickly as possible where birdlife is more abundant. . Although there will be butterflies to look for - our main target being the scarce Freyer's Purple Emperor - our main focus, in the delta, will be the birds. Typical sights include numerous Glossy Ibises, Squacco Herons, egrets, Pygmy Cormorants and Cormorants which can gather in impressive numbers where the water levels are low. Large flocks of White Pelicans glide serenely overhead whilst in the shallower channels Kingfishers are ubiquitous and Common Sandpipers feed along the banks. Fringing reeds hold several species of reed warbler, plus family parties of Penduline Tits and other reed bed skulkers, including a bumper population of Little Bitterns. Raptors will include frequent sightings of Marsh Harriers, whilst Red-footed Falcons may be seen in small groups hunting insects overhead. In places, the channels unexpectedly open out into wide eutrophic lakes covered in white and yellow water lilies. Here marsh terns swoop low over the water hawking insects (all three species occur, Whiskered Tern being the most abundant) and waterbirds such as Ferruginous Duck and Red-necked Grebe breed. A visit to the Danube Delta is an unforgettable experience in every respect.

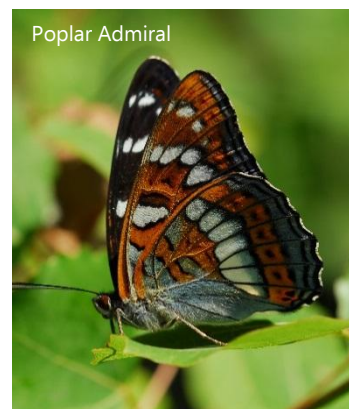


NB - Throughout the holiday, wherever possible, we will running moth traps overnight to sample some of the abundant species of moths that also occur in Romania.

Day 5

Transfer to Zarnesti

Today we make an early start to drive to towards Zarnesti. It's a long drive which will take most of the day, although we will break up the journey with a number of stops. The drive will take us through the fertile plains, villages and towns of eastern Romania. The plains have a more open landscape, and the attendant butterfly and birdlife are lowland species, compared to the spruce forests that we will see in the mountains. We will start to leave behind the Rollers and Lesser Grey Shrikes, which have lined the roadside wires thus far, and the spectacularly coloured Bee-eaters which hawked for insects overhead. As the road ascends into the mountains, the landscape gradually changes from open plains to spruce forests. We could start to see more raptors, such as Lesser Spotted Eagle, and perhaps the first Alpine Swifts. Butterflies could include Common and Hungarian Gliders, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Chestnut Heath. We aim to arrive at our comfortable guesthouse in the Zarnesti region by early evening, our base for the next four nights of the tour.



Days 6 – 8

Carpathian Mountains from Zarnesti

We have the next three full days to look for the butterflies that live in the woodlands, alpine meadows, gorges and valleys of the Transylvanian Carpathians. 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 (Rock-of-the-King) and Bucegi Mountain National Parks. The Piatra Craiului National 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. The lower slopes are clothed in a mix of beech and coniferous forest and cut by a series of dramatic limestone gorges, such as the Zarnesti Gorge. Brown Bears, Wolf and even Lynx still roam these mountains and the area is rich in butterflies, as well as birds and other wildlife. Species to look out for include Large Copper, Marbled, Weaver's and Nickerl's Fritillaries, Lesser Purple Emperor, Mountain and Large Ringlets, Pearly Heath, Arran Brown, Fanton's Wood White, Pale Clouded Yellow and both Common and Hungarian Gliders. Birds should include Black Redstarts, Crag Martins, Ring Ouzels and wheeling flocks of Alpine Swifts. There's always a change of a Wallcreeper too, although this butterfly of the avian world tends to move higher into the mountains during the summer months.



Marbled Fritillary



Brown Bear

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!

NB - the cost of the bear watching is not included in the tour price. It is likely to be in the region of £30 per person and payable locally (in Euros or Lei).

We may also pass Bran Castle during our time in the Carpathians, the much disputed residence of 'Vlad the Impaler' on whom the legend of Count Dracula is based.

Day 9

London

Today we must make the journey back to Bucharest, but will try and break the journey wherever possible. Our return flight to London usually departs late afternoon, arriving back in the evening.

Images courtesy of Daniel Petrescu & Shutterstock

Weather

The climate in Romania is 'Continental', with hot summers and cold winters, and so warm to hot sunny days can be expected on this holiday. It will be cooler in the mountains, sometimes even cold on the mountain tops, where rain showers or even a late snow shower are always a possibility. By late-June it will be starting to heat up in the lowlands and temperatures at this time can climb into the upper 20s°C to mid-30s°C in the middle of the day, sparking off the occasional thundery shower.

Tour grading

Grade A/B - Mostly easy walks of a couple of hours or so taken at a leisurely pace. There will be a couple of longer, moderate walks in the Carpathian Mountains, however, where the paths are uneven in places and undulate. This holiday is suitable, therefore, for anyone who is able to cover several miles on foot, with longer walks of up to 5 miles (8km) and happy to be on the go for most of the day. Should you require additional information on the tour please give the Naturetrek office a call on 01962 733051.

Food & accommodation

All food is included in the price of this holiday from the evening meal on Day 1 to lunch on Day 9. Please note that the choice of rural hotels in Romania is extremely limited and, although clean and comfortable, you should not expect 5-star accommodation and luxury on this tour! All rooms have private facilities, but the hotels generally lack character and are often quite simple in nature.

Transport

For most of the tour we will be travelling in a small coach to allow us to access the narrow roads to the various sites. Space will be at a premium, so we would suggest keeping your day packs to a sensible size and your main luggage to a practical minimum. Where possible, please use a soft sided bag for your luggage as these are easier to pack into the bus. There will be a fair bit of driving involved in the tour in order to be able to find a good range of wildlife.

In the Danube Delta we will be travelling on a small boat, which will essentially be a moving hide for the day, so it would be appreciated if noise levels could be kept to a minimum, much as you would in a land based hide. Life jackets will be provided.

Flights

Flights will either be from London Heathrow Airport with British Airways, London Stansted Airport with Ryanair or London Luton with Wizzair, depending on the timings of the flights on the tour dates. Ideally, we will use a morning flight outbound, to arrive in Bucharest by early afternoon, and a late afternoon or evening flight inbound.

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 – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/romania 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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