

Birding Western Turkey

Naturetrek Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Izmir & transfer Selçuk
Day 2	Selçuk
Day 3/4	Lake Bafa
Day 5/6	Denizli
Day 7	Selçuk
Day 8	Fly London

Departs

April

Focus

Birds

Grading

Grade A/B – Easy to moderate day walks.

Dates and Prices

Visit website (tour code TUR02)

Highlights:

- Eastern specialities including White-throated Robin, Finsch's Wheatear & Rüppell's Warbler
- Visit Ephesus & Hierapolis, two of the world's best-preserved classical sites
- Masked Shrike, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Krüper's Nuthatch & Red-fronted Serin
- Explore the Dilek National Park & the freshwater marshes of Lake Bafa



From top: White-throated Robin, Rüppell's Warbler & Masked Shrike



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Introduction

By almost any measure, Turkey is a remarkable country. Straddling the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, it has occupied a position of global importance for millennia. For more than a thousand years it was the heartland of the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire, administered from the magnificent city of Constantinople, now known as Istanbul. Later, it became the centre of the Ottoman Empire, whose influence extended across the Mediterranean, into North Africa and deep into Arabia. Lasting for more than 500 years, the Ottoman Empire shaped much of the modern Middle East before the foundations of the Republic of Turkey were laid in the early 20th century. The legacy of this rich and colourful history can be seen throughout the country, and during this tour we will visit Ephesus and Hierapolis, two of the finest and best-preserved classical sites in the world.

Turkey is one of the most rewarding destinations in the Western Palearctic for the travelling naturalist, particularly in spring. By mid-April, the flow of migrant birds arriving from Africa has become a veritable flood. Shrikes, including the striking Masked Shrike, adorn roadside wires, while the songs of Nightingales and numerous warblers fill the air. Coastal lagoons host impressive gatherings of Greater Flamingo, pelicans, terns and waders, whilst in the mountain forests the distinctive nasal calls of Krüper's Nuthatch echo through the pines.

Across western Turkey, the arrival of spring is celebrated in a blaze of colour. Bee-eaters, European Rollers and Eurasian Hoopoes add brilliance to the landscape, while flower-rich meadows are transformed by a profusion of blooms. Combined with a wealth of archaeological treasures, beautiful scenery and a fascinating blend of cultures, it is this rich diversity that makes Turkey such an outstanding destination for the keen birder and naturalist.

Krüper's Nuthatch



NB. 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.

Itinerary

Day 1

Selçuk

We depart London on a direct flight to Izmir, Turkey's third-largest city. On arrival, we will meet our local guides and, time permitting, head straight into the field. Even around the city there is plenty to look for, with Pallid and Alpine Swifts overhead, Red-rumped Swallows around buildings, and European Serins and Spanish Sparrows frequenting more open areas.

The pine-clad hills surrounding Izmir are also home to one of the region's most sought-after birds, Krüper's Nuthatch, and this will provide our first opportunity to search for this attractive near-endemic species. We will have further chances later in the tour when we visit Mount Bozdağ, one of the species' strongholds in western Turkey.

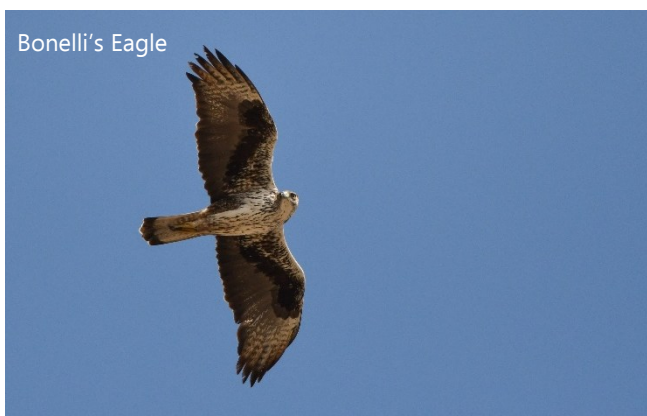
Later in the afternoon, we will continue south to Selçuk, our base for the next two nights. The journey takes approximately 1½ hours and passes through a landscape of fertile plains, olive groves and low hills, providing an enjoyable introduction to the rich scenery and wildlife of western Turkey.

Overnight: Selçuk

Day 2

Selçuk

This morning we head south to explore Dilek National Park, situated on the Aegean coast opposite the Greek island of Samos. Comprising rugged mountains, rocky outcrops, pine forests, deep valleys and extensive areas of Mediterranean scrub, the park is one of western Turkey's most important wildlife reserves and is also exceptionally rich botanically.



Dilek was one of the last strongholds of the now-extinct Anatolian Leopard and, whilst gazing across the dramatic landscape, it is easy to imagine one of these elusive cats surveying its domain from a rocky crag. Although the leopard has long since disappeared, the park remains an important refuge for wildlife, with Wild Boar regularly encountered in the forests and scrub.

Birdlife is particularly rewarding. Raptors soaring above the hills may include Bonelli's Eagle, Peregrine and Eleonora's Falcon, whilst migration can bring species such as Lesser Spotted Eagle, Black Kite and Eurasian Hobby. The scrub-covered slopes support Subalpine, Rüppell's and Eastern Orphean Warblers, while Western Rock Nuthatch can often be heard calling from its rocky haunts.

After lunch, we will visit the magnificent ancient city of Ephesus, one of the finest archaeological sites in the Mediterranean and once the capital of Roman Asia. The extensive ruins provide a remarkable glimpse into the past and also offer excellent birdwatching. Red-rumped Swallow, Blue Rock Thrush, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Syrian Woodpecker and Long-legged Buzzard are all regularly recorded amongst the ancient buildings and fallen columns.

Later in the afternoon, we will explore the wetlands of the Little Meander Delta. This extensive network of marshes, lagoons and fishponds attracts a rich variety of waterbirds, including Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, Spur-winged Lapwing, Ruddy Shelduck, Pygmy Cormorant and Purple Heron. Depending on migration conditions, a variety of waders may also be present.

As evening approaches, we will visit the nearby Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. White Storks frequently nest atop the solitary surviving column, while Eastern Olivaceous Warblers sing from the surrounding vegetation, providing a fitting end to a day that combines both the natural and cultural riches of western Turkey.

Overnight: Selçuk

Day 3

Lake Bafa

This morning we will set out to explore the southern reaches of Dilek National Park and the extensive wetlands of the Büyük Menderes Delta. The rich mosaic of lagoons, saltmarshes, agricultural land, olive groves and Mediterranean scrub makes this one of western Turkey's premier birdwatching areas. A wealth of species may be encountered, including Dalmatian Pelican, Caspian Tern, Marsh Harrier, Short-toed Snake Eagle and Eleonora's Falcon. Spring migration can be especially rewarding, with Masked, Woodchat and Red-backed Shrikes, European Bee-eater, Rüppell's Warbler, Crested Lark and a variety of other migrant passerines all possible.

After a leisurely lunch overlooking the delta, we will continue inland to Lake Bafa, one of Turkey's most important wetland reserves. Surrounded by dramatic granite hills and fringed by marshes and reedbeds, the lake supports an impressive diversity of birdlife. During the afternoon we will search for Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans, Pygmy Cormorant, Glossy Ibis, Squacco and Purple Herons, Spur-winged Lapwing, Gull-billed and Common Terns, together with a variety of ducks, waders and migrating raptors. The rocky slopes around the lake provide habitat for Western Rock Nuthatch, Blue Rock Thrush and Cretzschmar's Bunting, among other characteristic Mediterranean species.

In the evening we will arrive at our peaceful lakeside accommodation, beautifully situated amongst the granite outcrops and ancient ruins of Herakleia. With its combination of spectacular scenery, rich birdlife and fascinating history, Lake Bafa provides a memorable setting in which to spend the night.



Overnight: Lake Bafa

Day 4

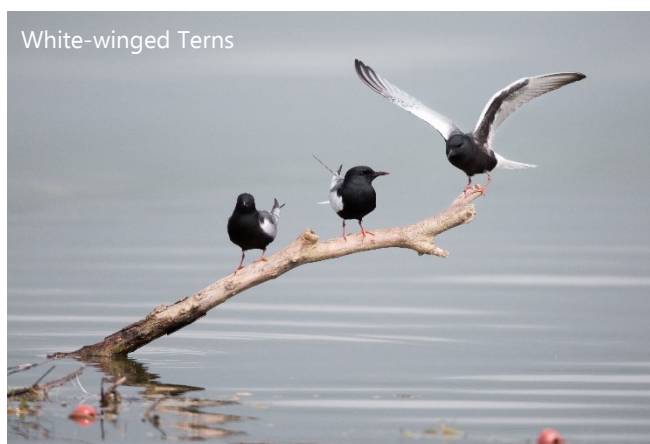
Lake Bafa

Today we will continue our exploration of the Büyük Menderes Delta and Lake Bafa region, one of the most rewarding wildlife areas in western Turkey. The wetlands support an impressive variety of birdlife and we may encounter Pygmy Cormorant, Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans, White-winged Tern, Squacco Heron, Little Bittern, Ferruginous Duck and Black-winged Stilt. Overhead, Long-legged Buzzard and Red-footed Falcon may be seen hunting, while the rocky islands within the lake provide breeding sites for Ruddy Shelduck.

We will also spend time exploring the surrounding dry countryside, which supports a distinctive Mediterranean avifauna. Here we will search for species such as Masked Shrike, Rüppell's Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Isabelline Wheatear and the elusive Olive-tree Warbler. Spring migration can add further interest, with a variety of passerines moving through the area.

Close to Lake Bafa lies the ancient city of Herakleia, once an important settlement and strategic centre in this part of Anatolia. Here we will take a brief diversion from our wildlife-watching to explore some of the impressive remains of this historic site, with our local guide providing an insight into its fascinating past.

Later, we will return to our hotel for a second night in the Lake Bafa area. Surrounded by dramatic granite landscapes and rich birdlife, it is a wonderful setting in which to relax and reflect on another rewarding day in western Turkey.



Overnight: Lake Bafa

Day 5

Denizli

Today we leave the Büyük Menderes Delta and Lake Bafa behind and follow the course of the Maeander River inland towards Denizli, situated on the Anatolian Plateau at an elevation of approximately 1,000 metres. From here we will visit the remarkable ancient city of Hierapolis, a UNESCO World Heritage Site dramatically positioned above the famous white travertine terraces of Pamukkale, the 'Cotton Castle'. Fed by mineral-rich thermal springs, these dazzling limestone formations are among Turkey's most iconic natural landmarks.

Founded as a spa city during the 2nd century AD, Hierapolis is one of the finest and best-preserved classical sites in the country. Its impressive remains include temples, baths, a theatre and an extensive necropolis, where hundreds of ornate sarcophagi provide a fascinating insight into the city's long and prosperous history.

The surrounding dry hillsides, rocky escarpments and areas of scrub support an interesting variety of birdlife. Here we will search for Finsch's Wheatear, a localised species occurring at the western edge of its range. Red-billed Choughs often wheel over the cliffs, whilst overhead we will keep watch for Griffon, Cinereous and Egyptian Vultures. Other species we may encounter include Chukar, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Calandra Lark, Lesser Short-toed Lark, European Bee-eater, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear and Rock Sparrow.

After another rewarding day combining natural history and archaeology, we will retire to a comfortable hotel near Denizli, our base for the next two nights.

Overnight: Denizli

Day 6

Denizli

Today we will explore two highly contrasting wetland habitats: the saline waters of Lake Acıgöl and the freshwater environments of Işıklı Gölü. Surrounded by open Central Anatolian steppe and backed by rugged limestone hills, Lake Acıgöl supports a specialised bird community adapted to its highly saline conditions. Species such as Greater Flamingo, Slender-billed Gull and Pied Avocet can often be found on the lake itself, while freshwater springs along its margins attract a wider range of birds, particularly during migration.

The juniper-clad slopes and rocky scrub surrounding the lake are equally rewarding. Here we will search for Alpine Swift, Western Rock Nuthatch, Rüppell's Warbler, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Rock Bunting, Red-fronted Serin, Cirl Bunting and the highly sought-after White-throated Robin.

Later, we will move on to Işıklı Gölü, a large freshwater lake that forms one of the principal sources of the Maeander River. Surrounded by mountains, extensive reedbeds and areas of floating aquatic vegetation, the lake supports a rich variety of wetland birds. Breeding species include Whiskered Tern, Little Bittern and Black-crowned Night Heron, whilst the surrounding scrub and rocky slopes offer further opportunities to see Finsch's Wheatear, White-throated Robin, Eastern Orphean Warbler and Rüppell's Warbler.

After another rewarding day's birdwatching, we will return to our hotel near Denizli for our penultimate night in Turkey.

Overnight: Denizli

Day 7

Selçuk

This morning we will head into the mountains of Bozdağ, a region of spectacular scenery characterised by Black Pine forests, juniper scrub and alpine meadows. As we ascend the mountain, we will make a series of stops to explore the changing habitats and their associated wildlife. In the mature pine forests, we will search for one of western Turkey's most sought-after birds, the near-endemic Krüper's Nuthatch, together with a variety of other woodland species.

Continuing higher, we will eventually reach the alpine zone above the tree line at around 2,100 metres. Here we will explore the open slopes on foot, looking for Red-fronted Serin, Horned Lark, Chukar, Common Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting. The dramatic cliffs and rocky ridges also provide excellent habitat for raptors, and we may observe Golden Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard and Peregrine soaring overhead.

Bozdağ, at 2,420 metres, is the highest peak in the region and offers some of the finest mountain scenery in western Turkey. The rich alpine flora adds further interest, while the panoramic views across the fertile valleys and patchwork farmland below provide a memorable finale to our exploration of the Anatolian uplands.

Following lunch, we will begin our journey back towards Izmir, returning to Selçuk for our final night in Turkey. We aim to break the drive with a couple of birdwatching stops en route before arriving at our comfortable hotel in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Selçuk

Day 8

London

Following breakfast, we will complete the short journey back to Izmir, a drive of approximately 1½ hours. Depending on the departure time of our flight to London, there may be an opportunity for some final birdwatching en route, providing a last chance to enjoy the wildlife of western Turkey before concluding our holiday.

Arriving at the airport, we will check in for our direct flight back to the UK, bringing our exploration of Turkey's rich birdlife to a close.



Grading

Grade A – Easy to moderately strenuous. Most activities are undertaken at a relaxed pace, but participants should be prepared for some walking over uneven, occasionally rough terrain. Whilst this is not a particularly demanding tour, a reasonable level of fitness and mobility is required in order to fully enjoy the wildlife, archaeology and other activities included in the itinerary.

Accommodation & Food

At Selçuk and Denizli we use comfortable 3-star hotels, with all rooms featuring private facilities. At Lake Bafa, we stay in a small, family-run guesthouse on the shores of the lake. Whilst the accommodation here is simpler in style, all rooms have private facilities and the setting more than compensates, with beautiful views across the lake and surrounding landscape.

Due to the limited availability of suitable rural accommodation in western Turkey, the hotels used on this tour are generally located within towns, although all are conveniently situated for the wildlife and historical sites included in the itinerary. Our Lake Bafa accommodation is surrounded by olive groves and lies close to the lakeshore, providing an attractive and peaceful base from which to explore the area.

Breakfast and dinner are included throughout the holiday and are taken at the hotels. Lunches are not included, and participants should allow approximately £15 per day.

Please note that the accommodation outlined above may occasionally need to be changed. Should this be necessary, any replacement hotel will be of a similar standard and location and will not affect the overall quality of the holiday. We will, of course, advise you as soon as possible of any such changes.

Weather

We can generally expect warm, sunny weather throughout the tour, with daytime temperatures typically ranging from the low to mid-20s°C, although conditions may occasionally be warmer or cooler. The weather is often ideal for birdwatching and sightseeing, with plenty of sunshine and good visibility.

Temperatures at higher elevations, particularly in the Denizli region and on Mount Bozdağ, can be noticeably cooler, especially during the early morning and late afternoon. Participants should therefore bring some warmer clothing for these excursions. Although most days are likely to be dry, occasional showers are possible, and lightweight waterproof clothing is recommended.

Overall, spring offers some of the most pleasant conditions of the year in western Turkey, with comfortable temperatures, lush landscapes and excellent opportunities for both wildlife-watching and exploring the region's outstanding archaeological sites.

Tour Focus

The primary focus of this holiday is the birdlife of western Turkey. Spring migration is in full swing during our visit, offering excellent opportunities to observe a wide variety of resident and migrant species across a diverse range of habitats, from coastal wetlands and mountain forests to steppe, scrub and alpine meadows. Whilst mammals, reptiles, wildflowers and the region's rich archaeological heritage will add greatly to the experience, birds will remain our principal focus throughout the tour.

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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