

Birding Central Turkey

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Fly Kayseri
Days 2 – 3	Aladağlar National Park
Day 4	Adana
Day 5	Gaziantep
Day 6	Sanliurfa
Day 7	Bozova
Day 8	Inbound flights from Sanliurfa

Departs

April – May

Focus

Birds

Grading

Grade A/B – Easy to moderate day walks.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code TUR05)

Highlights

- Superb Western Palearctic birding
- Excellent chances for sought-after species including Caspian Snowcock, Northern Bald Ibis, Iraq Babbler and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
- Explore a remarkable variety of habitats, from alpine peaks and mountain gorges to wetlands, river valleys and semi-arid steppe



From top: Cretzschmar's Bunting, White-throated Kingfishers & Radde's Accentor



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Introduction

Turkey stands at the meeting point of Europe and Asia, and nowhere is this more evident than in the varied landscapes of its central and south-eastern regions. From the extraordinary volcanic scenery of Cappadocia and the high peaks of the Taurus Mountains to the fertile Euphrates Valley and the ancient sanctuary of Göbekli Tepe, this tour explores one of the most fascinating and least-visited corners of the Western Palearctic. Combining outstanding birdwatching with a rich tapestry of history, culture and scenery, it offers an unforgettable journey through a remarkable part of Turkey.

Our tour begins amid the surreal landscapes of Cappadocia, where wind-sculpted rock formations, cave dwellings and ancient churches create one of Turkey's most distinctive regions. From here we travel to Aladağlar National Park, one of the country's most spectacular mountain wildernesses. Against a backdrop of dramatic peaks, alpine meadows and traditional villages, we search for a range of high-altitude specialities, including Caspian Snowcock, choughs, accentors and snow finches, while enjoying some of the finest mountain scenery in the Taurus range.

Continuing south-east, we visit a succession of superb birding sites, from the wetlands and river valleys near Adana to the Euphrates Basin around Halfeti and Birecik. Here we encounter some of the region's most sought-after species, including Northern Bald Ibis and Iraq Babbler, together with a wealth of other Middle Eastern specialities. Time spent around Şanlıurfa and Bozova provides further opportunities to explore this fascinating landscape and its wildlife.



Northern Bald Ibis

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.

Itinerary

Day 1

Fly London to Kayseri via Istanbul

Today we fly to Kayseri, via Istanbul, arriving in the heart of Turkey's Central Anatolian region. From here we transfer to Cappadocia, renowned for its extraordinary volcanic landscapes, rock-cut dwellings and distinctive 'fairy chimneys'. This evening there will be time to meet fellow travellers over dinner and enjoy an introduction to the tour before settling in for our first night in this fascinating region.

Overnight: Cappadocia

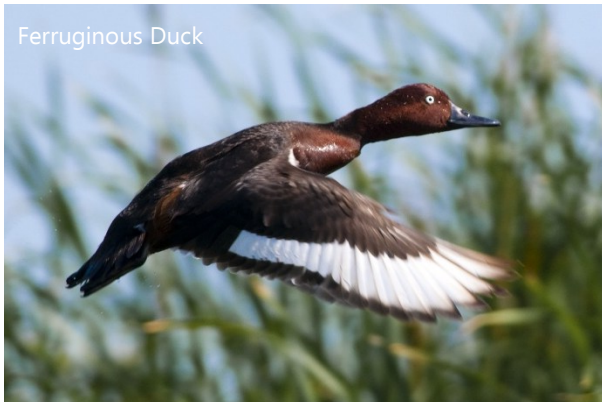
Day 2

Sultan Marshes – Aladağlar National Park

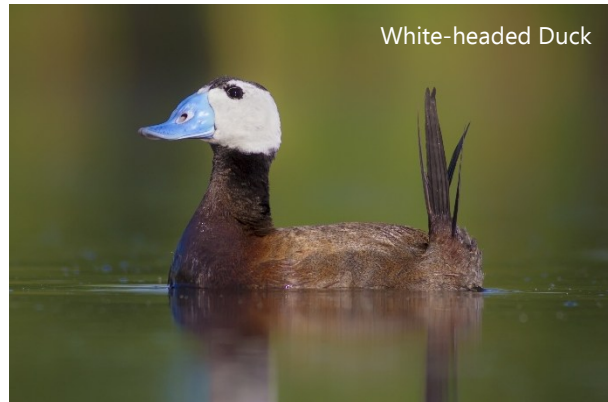
After breakfast, we drive to the beautiful Soğanlı Valley, a landscape of weathered cliffs and conical rock formations that has been inhabited since Roman times. The Romans used these natural towers as burial chambers, while later Byzantine communities carved churches and monasteries into the soft volcanic rock. Many of the valley's finest churches, including Karabaş, Yılanlı, Kubbeli and St Barbara (Tahtalı), still preserve remarkable frescoes dating from the 9th to the 13th centuries. As we explore this fascinating cultural landscape, we will also look for birds among the rocky slopes and ruins, with Rock Nuthatch, Egyptian Vulture and Blue Rock Thrush among the species regularly encountered.

Later, we continue to the Sultan Marshes, one of Turkey's most important wetland reserves. Here we take a leisurely excursion by small boat through extensive reedbeds and open lagoons, offering excellent opportunities to observe the marshes' rich birdlife at close quarters. Among the species we hope to find are Great Reed Warbler, Bearded Reedling, Little Bittern, Little Grebe, Red-necked Phalarope, Black-necked Grebe, Eurasian Penduline Tit, White-headed Duck and Ferruginous Duck, together with a variety of herons, waders and other wetland birds.

Ferruginous Duck



White-headed Duck



In the late afternoon, we leave the plains behind and make our way into the Taurus Mountains, travelling to the spectacular Aladağlar range, home to the highest peaks in the Taurus chain. This magnificent mountain landscape is renowned for its crystal-clear lakes, towering rock faces, deep valleys and dramatic canyons, offering some of Turkey's most breathtaking scenery. On arrival, we

settle into our welcoming family-run accommodation, where we can relax and enjoy dinner while surrounded by the grandeur of the mountains. Tomorrow, our exploration of this remarkable region begins in earnest.

Overnight: Aladağlar National Park

Day 3

Aladağlar National Park

We make a very early start this morning for one of the highlights of the tour. Travelling by 4WD vehicle, we ascend a rough mountain track to around 1,500 metres and, depending on snow conditions, potentially as high as 2,300 to 2,500 metres. Reaching our vantage point before first light gives us the best chance of finding the elusive Caspian Snowcock, whose haunting calls often echo across the mountains at dawn. The surrounding slopes also offer the possibility of encounters with Anatolian Wild Goat (Ibex), adding to the excitement of a memorable morning in the high Taurus Mountains.

As the sun rises over the peaks, we enjoy tea, coffee and a light breakfast while taking in the spectacular alpine scenery. A variety of mountain birds can be found in the area, including Radde's Accentor, Alpine Accentor, Alpine Chough, Red-billed Chough, Crimson-winged Finch and White-winged Snowfinch. The combination of superb birding and dramatic mountain landscapes makes this one of the most rewarding excursions of the tour.

Later, we descend to enjoy a traditional Turkish breakfast, or perhaps lunch, depending on the altitude reached and the pace of the morning's birding. Around our accommodation there is often further wildlife to enjoy, and species such as Rosy Starling may provide a fitting end to another excellent day in the Taurus Mountains.

White-winged Snowfinch



Crimson-winged Finch



Overnight: Aladağlar National Park

Day 4

Adana

After an early breakfast, we continue our exploration of the Aladağlar with a walk into a spectacular gorge, where the dramatic cliffs and rocky slopes provide habitat for a variety of mountain specialities. Here we will search for such species as Wallcreeper, Red-billed Chough, Ring Ouzel, Red-fronted Serin and Chukar, while also enjoying the magnificent scenery of this wild and rugged landscape.

Later, we leave the national park and drive south towards Tarsus via Çamlıyayla, descending from the high mountains to the warmer Mediterranean foothills. We expect to arrive in the area during the afternoon, when we will explore a picturesque river valley, concentrating on quiet riverbanks, overhanging trees and waterside perches. This is an excellent area for a range of woodland and scrub species, including Krüper's Nuthatch and Rüppell's Warbler, while various raptors and other passerines may also be encountered. With a little luck, we may even find the scarce Olive-tree Warbler, one of the region's most sought-after breeding birds.

Overnight: Tarsus

Day 5

Gaziantep

After an early breakfast, we leave Adana and head east towards Gaziantep, crossing a landscape that becomes increasingly arid and dramatic. En route, we visit the dry oak scrub and rocky hills around Işıklı and Durnalık, an area of striking badlands scenery often described as moon-like in appearance. These remote slopes are home to a fascinating range of Middle Eastern bird species, and we will spend time searching for Red-tailed Wheatear, Upcher's Warbler, White-throated Robin, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Western Rock Nuthatch, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Sombre Tit and Cinereous Bunting. With a little luck, we may also encounter the elegant Black-winged Kite.

Continuing our journey eastwards, we arrive in the Nizip area during the afternoon. This welcoming town will serve as our base for the next three nights, allowing us to explore a variety of excellent birding sites across south-eastern Turkey. From here, we will make a series of daily excursions in search of the region's special birds, while also experiencing the unique landscapes and rich cultural heritage of the Euphrates Basin.

Overnight: Nizip

Day 6

Sanliurfa

This morning we travel east to the renowned birding areas of Halfeti and Birecik, situated along the Euphrates River. These two classic birdwatching sites rank among the highlights of south-eastern Turkey and are perhaps best known as one of the last refuges of the remarkable Northern Bald Ibis. During our visit, we enjoy a boat trip on the Euphrates, providing a unique perspective on the river's dramatic scenery and excellent opportunities for wildlife observation.

The valleys, cliffs and riverside habitats around Birecik and Halfeti support an exceptional diversity of birds. Pistachio orchards, reed-fringed riverbanks and limestone gorges provide habitat for a fascinating array of Middle Eastern specialities, including Northern Bald Ibis, Little Swift, Pallid Scops Owl, Upcher's Warbler, Ménétries's Warbler, Iraq Babbler, Dead Sea Sparrow, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia, Pale Rockfinch and Desert Finch. We will also visit one of the area's most celebrated birding locations, where a thriving colony of Iraq Babblers can often be observed at close range.

Iraq Babbler



In the early evening we continue to Şanlıurfa, one of Turkey's most atmospheric and culturally rich cities. Home to a blend of Arab, Kurdish and Turkish traditions, the city offers a fascinating contrast between its modern districts and historic heart. With its bustling bazaars, ancient buildings and strong sense of history, the old quarter is among the most evocative in Turkey and provides a memorable setting in which to spend the evening.

Overnight: Nizip

Day 7

Bozova

This morning we visit Hancağız Dam, one of south-eastern Turkey's lesser-known birding sites. The reservoir and its surrounding semi-arid steppe create a diverse mosaic of habitats that can be particularly productive during migration. As we explore the area, we will search for species such as Marbled Teal, Black-winged Kite, Dead Sea Sparrow and Desert Finch, while also looking out for a variety of other wetland and steppe-dwelling birds.

In the afternoon, we continue to Bozova, where the shallow bays, mudflats and reedbeds fringing the southern shores of Atatürk Dam provide an important refuge for wildlife. These wetlands preserve a small remnant of the original Euphrates ecosystem and support a number of localised breeding species. Among our targets here are Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Red-wattled Lapwing, both scarce and highly sought-after birds in Turkey. The combination of productive wetlands, open

shorelines and expansive views across the reservoir makes this an excellent location in which to enjoy our final birding in the Euphrates Basin.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater



Overnight: Nizip

Day 8

Sanliurfa & Departure

After a rewarding exploration of Central Anatolia and the bird-rich landscapes of south-eastern Turkey, our tour comes to an end. Following breakfast, we transfer to Şanlıurfa Airport for our return flights home, taking with us memories of spectacular mountain scenery, remarkable birdlife, ancient cultures and some of the Western Palearctic's most exciting birdwatching.

Tour Grading & Focus

The primary focus of this holiday will be central Turkey's birds and other wildlife.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

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

What's Included

Due to a lack of suitable rural accommodation in the regions, the hotels we use for this tour are generally located within the towns but within easy reach of the wildlife and historical sites. The rooms are simple and basic in nature but all have private facilities.

Breakfasts and evening meals are taken at the hotels and are included in the holiday cost, but lunches are not included; please allow £15 per day for lunches.

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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