

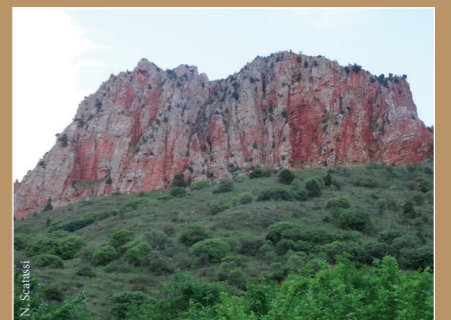
ARMENIA

Between Asia and Europe



Armenia is a wonderful, little known jewel, a rather small country, full of interesting birds and beautiful landscapes, with an extremely rich historical heritage. Mainly a mountainous country, its highest peak, mount Aragats, reaches over 4000 metres, while the mighty Ararat volcano (now in Turkey, but formerly inside the boundaries of Armenia) can be seen very close from the Erevan plains. Open rocky areas with scattered bushes and rolling hills only sparsely cultivated are among the most widespread habitats, but in Armenia there are also large expanse of forests and humid areas, and thanks to these amazing variety the set of bird species present in the country is truly impressive! And of course its geographical position means that especially during migrations a large number of both western and eastern species pass through regularly, or can turn up anytime, making Armenia a real birding hot spot! Large mammals are another feature of this country, with Brown bear, Lynx and Wolf present almost everywhere within the country boundaries, and with a few Persian leopards still roaming in some areas! During springtime Armenia is also becoming more and more appreciated for its abundance of fantastic blooming flowers, with an astonishing variety which includes wild tulips, orchids and irises, truly remarkable. Again thanks to its geographical position, Armenia is also blessed with very interesting reptile and amphibian species, as well as with an abundance of attractive butterflies and dragonflies.

Armenia is definitely a very fascinating country to visit, perfectly safe from every point of view (the only potentially troublesome area being Nagorno-Karabagh, which we will not visit), with an overall good road system and western style accommodation available in every interesting area, and with



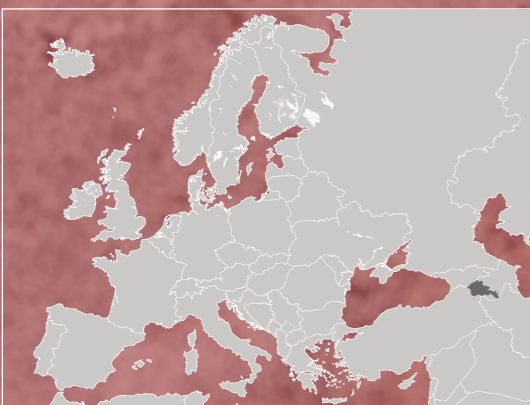
ARMENIA

Birdwatching & Photography



Armenia
Magica

SKUA Nature promotes and develops nature tourism in Armenia in collaboration with Armenia Magica. Our goal is to create nature itineraries for birdwatching and photographic tours, and we also try to develop botanical and butterfly tours.



M. Bascchi

M. Bascchi

N. Scarsini

N. Scarsini

N. Scarsini

An hotspot for very localized species



really fantastic food, with a lot of fresh, locally grown vegetables and some great, very tasty armenian dishes.

Armenia is rather easy country to explore, not too big and with good roads: in a relatively short time you can pass from high mountain habitats to semi-desert and cultivated countryside, thus allowing to see many different bird species, and often at very close range! Not far from the capital city, Erevan, is the mount Aragat, (more than 4000 metres), with a good tarmac road which ascends to over 3000 metres: along this road, from the Erevan plains to the high alpine habitat, the set of birds to be seen is truly impressive: we should be able to find Finsch's Wheatear and Rufous-tailed Bush Robin, Bimaculated Lark and the gorgeous White-throated Robin, and then higher up Radde's Accentor (arguably the best place in the world for this species!), Alpine Accentor, Bluethroat, Twite and Horned Lark, not to mention raptors, from Long-legged Buzzard to the mighty Lammergeier.

The Armash fish ponds, a private area that can be visited thanks to special permits, is among the best birdwatching areas in the whole western palearctic! A huge wetland of 1000 hectares teeming with birds: probably White-tailed Lapwing and Blue-checked Bee-eater would be enough to justify a visit here, but these star birds are only the jewels on Armash's crown, for many other fantastic species can be seen here, such as White-headed Duck and Ferruginous Duck, Pigmy Cormorant, all the european herons, Glossy Ibis, Collared (and possibly also Black-winged) Pratincole, Menetries' Warbler, Lesser Short-toed Lark and Paddyfield Warbler; while the number of Bearded Reedlings around is simply astonishing! And of course during migration almost anything can turn up!

The arid hills and gorges around the small town of Vedi are a hotspot for very localized species such as Grey-necked Bunting, Trumpeter and Mongolian Finch (and possibly even Desert Finch!) Upcher's Warbler and Persian Nuthatch. The scenery here is very nice, with rocky slopes and small patches of bushes, and also small cultivated fields, where Brown Bears come looking for water melons to dig out of the ground!

But Armenia offers not only arid areas and wetlands: the Dilijan area is covered in beautiful forests of ash, beech and maple, where Green Warbler, Red-breasted and Caucasian Flycatchers are normally fairly easy to find, while Middle Spotted Woodpecker and Levant Sparrowhawk might require a little more effort. All the four european vultures are present in Armenia, with



*Few Persian leopards
still roaming in some
areas!*



Lammergeier being possibly the commonest: they can be seen virtually everywhere, so the skies are always well worth checking, also looking for Golden, Lesser Spotted and Short-toed Eagles.
The immense Lake Sevan is again a very good place for migrants, besides holding the world's largest concentration of Armenian Gulls; here during spring migration a great set of interesting species can be seen, from White-winged Terns to Terek's and Broad-billed Sandpiper, alongside with many other waders, ducks and passerines.
During the days in Armenia, we will explore many different areas, mainly mountainous but not only, including gentle cultivated hills, countryside, rocky outcrops and beautiful canyons, and we shall visit a few beautiful christian monasteries. Birds are everywhere in Armenia, and we will be astonished by the numbers of common species like Swifts, Swallows and Martins, and the same is true for species like Lesser-grey and Red-backed Shrike, Ortolan, Corn and Black-headed Bunting.
Accommodation is very good, all the rooms have en suite facilities and the food is invariably very fresh and tasty, with a lot of local vegetables, cheese and meat. Road conditions are already fairly good on average, and major road works are being done in some places in order to further improve their conditions.
Armenia is gaining more and more attention from european birdwatchers, and rightly so, but so far not many birders have actually visited this fascinating country: so now is the time for a great opportunity to discover its charming beauty and some of its great landscapes and bird species, while there is still a bit of a pioneering feeling in the experience!

CALENDAR **S O N D J F M A M J J A**

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