



## Southern Tajikistan Wildlife and Nature tour – April 2021

### TRIP OVERVIEW

Departure: April 24. 2021

Style: Wildlife watching / Camping / Hiking

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Season: All year round

Location: Khuroson, Shamsidini Shohin, and Dusti districts in South Tajikistan

Length: 11 days

Group size: min. 3 people / max. 6 people

### JOINING PRICE:

1860\$ per person

Price includes: All meals | Transportation from and to Dushanbe, including transfer from from and to the airport | An English speaking guide | Conservancy rangers services | Camping equipment – tents, utensils, stove etc. | Camera Traps | All accommodation

WHY IS IT BETTER TO BOOK WITH ANCOT?

- All the tours listed here have been developed exclusively by ANCOT
- Tours listed are built upon many years of experience in wildlife conservation and management
- The pricing policy is established on the priority conservation needs and long-term sustainability of tourism

- If you are looking for a wildlife tour in Tajikistan, book it with professionals, from whom you can learn so much, what you will probably never learn and experience by booking with regular commercial tour operators
- You may find similar wildlife tours with cheaper prices. However, you will not benefit wildlife conservation by using a cheaper way

## HIGHLIGHTS:

Wildlife watching – Mammal species like Bukhara Urial, Bukhara Markhor, Goitered Gazelle, Bukhara Deer, and possibly Striped Hyena as well as more than 50 species of birds. Researching and learning about unique ecosystems of Tigrovaya Balka reserve and exploring the flora of Aktau and Hazratishoh mountain ranges.

## DESCRIPTION:

Tajikistan is a spectacular and little-visited country lying between Afghanistan and China on the famous 'Silk Road'. It offers a wonderful mix of central Asian history and culture with an exciting variety of mammals, birds, and other wildlife. Remarkable flora and a highly interesting avifauna that combines elements of Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent can be found in this mountainous land. We will visit the largest floodplain forest area in Central Asia at the confluence of the Vakhsh and the Panj river where they become Amu river, the Steppe Mountains of Aruktoy range, and the Hazratishoh Mountains of Darvoz on this tour. Our tour begins with arrival to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, where we get familiarized with the history and cuisine of Tajik people. We will drive to the Aruktoy mountain range in the south-west of the country to explore blossoming flowers and plants along with a variety of bird species and Bukhara Urial. Soon after, we will drive further south to Tigrovaya Balka Nature reserve which has the biggest remaining floodplain forest in Central Asia. Home to Bukhara Deer's reserve is rich with both avifauna and other mammals like Jackals, wild boars, wild cats, wolves, Goitered gazelle, and striped hyena. Having explored the reserve we will continue our expedition to the Darvoz region of Tajikistan set on the border with Afghanistan to the east of the country. In Darvoz we will stay at M-Sayyod conservancy camp. M-Sayyod conservancy is the first Markhor conservancy that was established in the region. Run by a family of former hunters who carry out wildlife surveys, habitat protection, and management in its territory the conservancy has served many tourists who are into wildlife photography, game watching, and trekking. As a result of conservation work and the implementation of sustainable management practices, the number of wildlife is thriving in its territory. Communities here to a great extent engage in mountain agriculture. Many families practice beekeeping and take pride in their practice. In fact, the honey produced here is considered the best in Tajikistan. The highlight in M-Sayyod conservancy includes an abundance of wildlife, birds, waterfalls, towering snowy peaks, incredible flower fields (Amaryllis), and breathtaking views into Afghan villages across the river. This tour will give you a complete picture of Tajikistan's biomes and habitats as well as its flora and fauna.

## CONSERVATION

Association of Nature Conservation Organizations of Tajikistan (ANCOT) supports the conservation of wildlife in areas managed by people from the local communities. These organizations – being it local NGOs or small family businesses – are rooted in the local communities and aim at providing benefits to the whole populations of the areas where they are active. Through the revenues generated from tourism, we motivate these local communities to protect their natural resources and wildlife. Thus participating in this tour you are contributing to the conservation of endangered wildlife species and their habitats in Tajikistan.

Day 1: Dushanbe

Driving distance: around Dushanbe

Hiking distance: Short walking

Arrive in Dushanbe. The most convenient route from Europe or the Americas to Tajikistan's capital is via Turkey. Turkish Airlines operates flights from Istanbul to Dushanbe 3 times per week and arrives early in the morning. Once you arrive to Dushanbe airport our representatives will meet you and take you to the hotel where you will rest after your flight. Closer to lunchtime you will meet your guide at the lobby and embark on a sightseeing tour of Dushanbe. You will visit the central square with big Ismail Somoni

monument and the tallest flagpole in Central Asia. After having lunch in a traditional Tajik restaurant you will visit Kokhi Navruz Palace, a huge entertainment and business complex consisting of 4 completely tailored halls where the Tajik government holds high official meetings. In the evening you will meet with our lead biologist who will give you detailed information about the wildlife species you will see on the tour, their behavior, history, and conservation status in Tajikistan.

Day 2: Dushanbe to Khuroson

Elevation gain: 816m / 2677 feet

Distance: 180km / 112 mi

We drive to Khuroson district today, where you will meet the "Obi Safed" conservancy staff. The road from Dushanbe to Khuroson takes 3 hours, going south through Fakhrobod mountain pass to Uyali town and continues along the Vakhsh river down to Garavuti village. After meeting with rangers we will drive to one of the gorges of Aktau mountains. In these remote steppe mountains, which can reach altitudes of up to 1,600 meters, there are interesting biotopes in ravines and watercourses. Striped hyenas are regularly seen here, it is the northernmost biotope of these shy animals worldwide. The areas of your search will vary depending on the season and mainly rangers information. Closer to the evening you will drive to one of the campsites close to the areas of Bukhara Urial and spend the night in tents. Next morning from the good viewpoint we will scan the slopes and search for Bukhara Urial.

Day 3-4: Aktau mountains

Elevation range: 1770-2010-1910m/5807-6600-6260feet

Hiking distance: 14-24km/9-15mi

The next two days we will wake up early in the morning before the sunrise and start hiking from one viewpoint to another to spot Bukhara Urial and other wildlife of the area while enjoying the sunrise and spectacular mountain views. Today you will have lunch and set up a camp in an amazing juniper meadow with a superb view of Kofarnihon river and Babatag mountain range on the border of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. After lunch you will spend some time resting and then hike to a nearby gorge for observation and Urial and other wildlife. You will hike back to the camp as the sun will go down. Tonight will be colder because you will be at a higher altitude and if the weather will allow, you will sleep under the bright stars.

Day 5: Drive to Tigrovaya Balka reserve

Elevation loss: 1570m / 5150 feet

Distance: 80km / 50mi Today in the morning we will go for observation for the last time before collecting our cam-traps and drive back to Garavuti village. Depending on the time that we will spend collecting the cameras we will arrive in the village at noon or before where delicious food will be waiting for us at a local conservancy family. After lunch, we will investigate our cameras and hopefully get good photos. We say goodbye to our host and rangers for their service and hospitality and drive to Tigrovaya Balka Nature Reserve.

Established in 1938, Tigrovaya Balka Nature Reserve consists of river-floodplain forest or "Tugai forest" and is considered to be one of Central Asian's important aquatic ecosystems upon which many wildlife rely. The name – Tigrovaya or Tiger's stems from the fact that it was the last habitat of Turan-Caspian Tiger in Central Asia – now extinct. In fact, the last time Tiger was seen in the reserve was in 1953. Today the reserve is home to original main prey of Tigers such as Bukhara deer, porcupine, goitered gazelle, and wild boar and a variety of bird species.

Upon arrival, we will drive into the reserve and forest to spot Bukhara deer. Tonight we will stay at a White House – rangers check-point and guesthouse within the reserve.

Day 6-7:

Explore the reserve and it's wildlife

Driving distance: 100km / 63mi The reserve area comprises of 62,248 ha and consists of several biomes. There are more than 10 water bodies – lakes and ponds within the reserve. Early in the morning we drive to the steppe area and spend time bird watching near the rivers. In the evening we drive to a semi-desert area to spot Goitered gazelle. We will have lunch at the entrance of the reserve where the rangers and the head forester will join us for a meal. Night in the reserve.

Day 8: Drive to Shamsidini Shohin district

Elevation gain: 560 m / 1840 feet

Distance: 240 km / 150 mi After spending 2 days in the reserve which is in the lowlands we will move to the mountains again. Shamsidini Shohin district, former Shurobod where Hazratishoh



mountain range lies on the frontier of Tajikistan. This mountain range is home for a variety of wildlife like Markhor goats, Brown bears, Foxes, Wolves, Porcupine, Badger and Lynx and birds such as Himalayan vulture, Griffon vulture, Lammergeier, Cinereous vulture, Egyptian vulture, Long-legged Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Common Kestrel, Barbary Falcon, and many other breeding, migrating and wintering species. We drive to Anjirob village and stay at one of our Markhor conservancy guesthouses, making some rest and bird watching stops en-route in steppes and agriculture fields near Dangara. Our guesthouse will be a simple Tajik village house but offer a wonderful insight into the Tajik hospitality.

Day 9: Hike to Kisht valley  
Elevation gain: 700-1180 m / 2300-3870 feet

Hiking distance: 8-15 km / 5-9,5 mi Today will walk up to the conservancy hut, which is located on the perfect viewpoint. The hike is relatively easy with only some steep hills. Rangers of the conservancy will lead the hike through red rock formations, canyons, pistachio forests on red hills, and multiple river crossings until we reach the hut. From there, you have an option hiking further to the upper camp where it will be possible to observe groups of Markhor goats. In the evening, you will return to the hut for dinner and overnight.

Day 10: Hike Back to the village and drive to Darvoz Camp  
Elevation loss: 700-1180 m / 2300-3870 feet

Hiking distance: 8-15 km / 5-9,5 mi

Driving Distance: 25 km / 15 mi We will start this morning with markhor observation and have breakfast afterward. After breakfast we hike back to Kisht village to meet our driver and continue driving to the Darvoz region. The drive will be very short and we will get to our camp of M.Sayod conservancy in about 30 minutes where a delicious lunch will be waiting for us.

M-Sayyod conservancy is the first Markhor conservancy that was established in the region. The territory of the conservancy stretches all the way to the Dashtijum Nature Reserve from the northwestern side and is the biggest in terms of area. Also run by a family of former hunters who carry out wildlife surveys, habitat protection, and management in its territory the conservancy has served many tourists who are into wildlife photography, game watching, and trekking. As a result of conservation work and the implementation of sustainable management practices, the number of wildlife is thriving in its territory. Communities here to a great extent engage in mountain agriculture. Many families practice beekeeping and take pride in their practice. In fact, the honey produced here is considered the best in Tajikistan. The highlight in M-Sayyod conservancy includes an abundance of wildlife, birds, waterfalls, towering snowy peaks, incredible flower fields (Amaryllis), and breathtaking views into Afghan villages across the river.

The rest of the day we will spend in the mountains near a place called Shpir, from where we will have some steep hike to our viewpoint. In the evening we drive back to the camp.

Day 11: Drive to Dushanbe  
Elevation range: 900-1920-900m/2952-6299-2950feet

Driving distance: 282km/175mi Today we drive back to Dushanbe. Having our last breakfast at the camp we hit the road again back to Kulob and on to Dushanbe. You will arrive in Dushanbe at noon and have lunch before checking in to your hotel. After lunch and some rest at the hotel, you will have a short tour of Dushanbe, where you will explore the Mehrgon bazaar and traditional handicraft gallery to do some shopping. In the evening you will have a farewell dinner with ANCOT staff where you share your experience and possibly discuss your future trip to Tajikistan again.

Day 12: Departure Early morning you will be transferred to the airport where our staff will help you with the registration to your flight and leave Tajikistan.

End of tour! What's Included

- All meals
- Professional and knowledgeable guides will lead the tour.
- Transportation from and to Dushanbe, including transfers from and to the airport
- Conservancy ranger services
- Camping equipment – tents, utensils, stove, etc.
- Other equipment such as camera traps, watching scopes, etc. if outlined in the itinerary
- All accommodation – Hotels, Guesthouses, and homestays

Meals: What To Expect

During the hikes: Most of our hikes include a variety of meals to nourish our bodies with

enough carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. We usually have pasta, rice, sausages, cheese, oatmeal, canned lentils and beans, sugar, and bread. We also carry fresh vegetables and can easily accommodate vegetarians.

Additionally, we have snacks such as dried fruits, fresh fruits, chocolate bars, and each break will include hot coffee and tea. We can accommodate people with special dietary needs. In guesthouses, home-stays, and restaurants (Tajik cuisine):

Tajik cuisine offers a large variety of fruit, meat, and soup dishes. The most popular among them are dishes such as Oshi palov, Kurutob, Shurbo, Laghmon and snacks like Sambusa and Mantu. The national drink is green tea, respectively. Traditional Tajik meal begins with small dishes of dried fruits, jams, and halva, followed by soup and meat, and finished with plov. Tea accompanies every meal and is often served between meals. Besides traditional dishes, most restaurants serve Russian borsh and popular Shashlyks.

*Shurbo: boiled meat on the bone with chickpeas, red and green peppers, potatoes, carrots, and onions.*

*Laghmon: the same with homemade noodles*

*Oshi Palov: a rice dish made with shredded yellow turnip or carrot and pieces of meat, all fried together in vegetable oil or mutton fat.*

*Shashlyks: chunks or minced meat on a skewer cooked over an open fire. Vegetarian versions are often available.*

#### What's Not Included?

- Clothes, raingear, and footwear
- Any other expenses of a personal nature
- Tips (Always optional)

#### What Gear To Bring

- Personal soap/shampoo
- Personal medicines (especially against diarrhea, altitude sickness, and car sickness), most of the passes on the road are above 3500m
- High protection Sun-screen
- Sunglasses
- Sun hat
- Flashlight
- Strong hiking shoes
- Plastic bottle for water and water purification tablets, if you intend to hike in remote areas
- Camera (Including spare batteries. You won't believe how many pictures you will be taking and if you don't have a proper camera you'd wish you had one)
- Trekking poles, if there is trekking involved
- Gifts (People in most of the villages in Tajikistan are among the poorest in the world, however, they will share their last crust with you to offer hospitality. Therefore it will be nice of you to bring gifts like toys and books for the children, winter clothes or cosmetics and chocolates for women and man)

#### What Clothes To Bring

We will email you what kind of gear to bring depending on the season. Summers are usually warm in central Tajikistan; however, if you are going up to higher altitudes (above 2500m/8200ft) you will need warmer clothing, including a sweater and windproof jacket

#### Driving

Due to its mountainous nature, geographical remoteness, and deteriorated roads, traveling in most parts of Tajikistan involves a lot of driving, especially to the Pamir region. We use services of experienced drivers, who have been driving at least 5 years on such road conditions. In most cases, we use 4wheel drive SUV like the Nissan Patrol and Toyota Land Cruisers. For bigger groups, we may use 4WD Vans. We've found that how you get there significantly influences the tone of your journey, and therefore we always make sure that your ride is comfortable with reliable transportation.

#### Safety Considerations:

Your safety is our top priority. Only trained guides and experienced rangers will accompany you during your hike. All of our rangers and guides are local from the nearby villages, of the respective conservancy. All guides are trained to offer first aid and always carry the necessary first aid kit.

#### FAQ

Click on this [link](#) to read answers to frequently asked questions