

Bulgaria at Leisure

The Black Sea Flyway

Saturday 28 August – Saturday 04 September 2010

Leaders: Nickolay Dilchev and Mike Witherick

2010 Cost £1,399 single room supplement £50



Our late summer tour to Bulgaria concentrates on the return migration. It exploits the fact that the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria represents a major flyway. We will stay near the port city of Burgas. This is widely recognised to be a migration hotspot due to the fact that two major migration flyways cross each other in the general vicinity. From our base, we will be able to visit key locations within this 'cross-roads' zone and also take in a range of different habitats. Of these, perhaps the most important are the three lakes of differing character – Atanasova, Via and Mandra – that surround the city of Burgas. They and their adjacent wetlands are host to huge numbers of birds during the autumn migration. More than 340 bird species have been recorded in this area. As with all migration watching much depends on weather conditions, but early September is widely held to be the prime time for the autumn passage in this part of Europe. Not only should we see a large number of species, but also many of those species will be represented by good numbers of birds, from pelicans to pipits, storks to swallows and waders to wagtails. We shall be particularly keen to watch the movement of raptors. This will be Ornitholidays' 11th tour to this region in the late summer and it will be run in a relaxed style fitting our 'at leisure' and 'one-stop' holidays.



Peregrine Falcon

ITINERARY

Days 1

We take a scheduled flight from London and fly directly to Varna. Here we will be met by our local guide, Nikolay Dilchev, and make our way to Pomorie, our base for this one-stop tour.

Days 2 to 7

During our stay we will visit a number of different sites, some of them probably more than once. This will certainly be true of the Pomorie lakes and salt pans that are a short walk from the hotel – ideal for those who like a spell of pre-breakfast bird watching. Duck, wader, gull and tern species will be the focus of interest here.

Atanasova Lake, on the northern outskirts of Burgas, is another area of working salt pans. It has also been recognised as a Ramsar site. Huge numbers of migrants pass through or over it. The lake is renowned as the best place in Bulgaria for watching and studying the autumn migration. Twelve globally threatened species occur here, including Dalmatian Pelican and Ferruginous Duck. Apart from the last species, other ducks to be seen include Common and Ruddy Shelduck, Garganey, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Wigeon and Northern Pintail. Our list of waders here is likely to include Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit, Broad-billed, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers, Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers as well as Red-necked Phalarope. Here we hope to find Caspian and Black Terns, as well as Slender-billed, Little and Mediterranean Gulls. The reed-fringed dykes of its margins offer temporary refuge to a range of migrating birds, from Little and Baillon's Crakes to Bearded Reedlings and Eurasian Penduline-Tits.

Lake Via is the largest natural lake in Bulgaria. It is also a Ramsar site. It is a popular staging post for Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans, as well as waders such as Spotted Redshank, Ruff and Wood Sandpiper. Here there are thousands of Great Cormorant and good numbers of Pygmy Cormorant. Herons and egrets, ducks and grebes are also well represented. Small flocks of Glossy Ibis and Eurasian Spoonbill are regularly seen here at this time of the year. Cetti's Warbler and Zitting Cisticola are to be found in the dense reedbeds at the western end of the lake. Summer visitor breeders, such as Great Reed and European Reed Warblers, may still be present.



Montagu's Harrier

Immediately to the south is Lake Mandra, which in the 1960s was converted from a brackish lagoon into a freshwater reservoir. Despite this change, it still contains several areas of high conservation value. This lake is perhaps more productive in terms of terns (Gull-billed, Sandwich, Common and Little) and gulls (Caspian and Black-headed). As we complete a circuit of its shore, we will spend time on two hills that over the years have proved to be excellent points from which to watch the migration, not only of storks, but particularly raptors. Indeed, virtually all of Europe's raptor species have at some time been seen here. There are good chances of watching Lesser Spotted, Spotted, Eastern Imperial and White-tailed Eagles, along with four species of harrier (Marsh, Northern, Montagu's and Pallid) as well as Eurasian Hobby and Peregrine Falcon. We will also spend some time also in the areas of woodland and scattered shrubs behind Lake Mandra looking for woodpeckers and tits, particularly Sombre Tit. In the villages, the now empty nests of White Stork are still home to large numbers of Spanish Sparrows.

Unfavourable weather can make the hills to the north of Pomorie another superb raptor-watching area for the likes of Red-footed Falcon, Short-toed and Steppe Eagles, Long-legged and Steppe Buzzards, Honey-buzzard and Levant Sparrowhawk. Here there is also a good chance of finding Eurasian Eagle-Owl in one of the many

quarries that pockmark the hillsides. In this steppe-like area, we should also see Crested and Wood Larks, Tree and Tawny Pipits, Cirl and Corn Buntings and most likely some migrants such as European Roller, European Bee-eater, shrikes and wheatears.

Lastly, the Ropotamo Reserve, with its woodland and scrub will make a welcome break from wetland bird watching. As a migration point almost anything could be found here. We should find species such as Red-breasted, Collared and Pied Flycatchers, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Hawfinch and Black Woodpecker. There will be time to do some sea watching, looking out particularly for Black-throated Diver, Pomarine Skua, Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes. We will lunch at the delightful port of Sosopol and there will be a chance to do some souvenir shopping.

Day 8

We have most of the day to spend some time birdwatching locally, before we catch our evening flight to London from Varna. On the way to the airport, we will make a number of stops as we cross the Balkan Range. We will spend some time at Goritzta where we will search an area of broad-leaved woodland for Black, Middle and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Eurasian Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper and any remaining breeding visitors, such as warblers and flycatchers.



White Stork

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Varna and transfer to Pomorie
- Days 2-7** Pomorie
- Day 8** Depart Varna

Party Size

Maximum of 14 clients.

Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms, with private facilities.

Transport

By private coach or minibus.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, VAT, airport taxes and tips.

Gradings

- Good
- 130
- Warm to Hot
- Low
- Normal
- Relaxed
- Good
- Easy
- Scheduled



Pygmy Cormorant