

ORNITHOLIDAYS TOUR TO BULGARIA
Rhodope Mountains & Black Sea

27 May – 04 June 2010



Leaders: Simon Boyes and Tihomir Stefanov

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A Personal Diary

Thursday, 27 May

Our small and select group meets up in Gatwick's North Terminal for the afternoon British Airways flight to Varna, in a Boeing 737. Varna is a port on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast, close to resorts which are popular with families during summer half-term week. With the help of a two-hour time change, it's dark as we land. Entry formalities are quick, and soon we are heading north to Vetren, in a minibus driven by our birding guide Tisho. There's no chance to nod off on the way thanks to a spectacular display of lightning, which accompanies us all the way, several forks per minute. When we eventually arrive at Pelican Lodge, a Beech Marten scurries across the road and up over a roof, while a Common Nightingale keeps up a constant solo. Dora is our hostess, who shows us to our rooms and sits us down to a three-course meal. The hour may be late, but the food and local red wine, Mavrud, is much appreciated. We even embark on a conversation about what constitutes a species, inspired by Tisho's Ph.D. work on hybridizing fish. As we sink into comfortable beds, a vixen calls repeatedly.

Friday, 28 May

After our 0200 bed time, we stagger out for a 0900 breakfast buffet, observing the not-quite dawn chorus of Black Redstart, Common Cuckoo and Golden Oriole. There is no sign of last night's electric storm, but every indication that the day will be a scorcher. Danube marshes are today's theme, and we start with a view over the river itself, which is a busy highway for herons, egrets and cormorants. Purple and Black-crowned Night Herons easily outnumber Greys and Squaccos; and the Pygmy Cormorants, so rare in most parts of their range, are abundant, easily outstripping our familiar Great Cormorants. Glossy Ibises are another regular item of Danube traffic. In the landward direction, an obliging Lesser Whitethroat is a new bird for John. A Cardinal (a large fritillary) opens the butterfly account.

Nearby is the Srebarna Reserve, a UNESCO and Ramsar site, offered the greatest level of official protection that Bulgaria can give. As we arrive at our first stop, a flock of White Pelicans are circling at eye-level, but soon disappear. They are passage birds here, but nest not far away in Romania's Danube Delta. However, many Dalmatian Pelicans are in view at the same spot, since they have a nesting colony in the huge reedbeds. We see them regularly throughout the day, flying and swimming. Black Terns can be seen among the more numerous Whiskered below us; and two Ruddy Shelduck fly past. Ferruginous Duck is the commonest duck – not many places can make that claim. A European Roller, as blue as the sky, performs a rolling display flight. Its talents do not extend to voice, which is a dismal croaking. From the next viewpoint, we look down on a Little Bittern flying, and several Eurasian Spoonbills which are nesting in the reeds. This spot is teeming with a great variety of marshbirds, all busy with their breeding routines. We can scope Purple Herons, Great Egrets, Common Cuckoos and a Great Reed Warbler, among much else. A Lesser Emperor is our first dragonfly.

A half-hour drive to the west brings us to a marsh by the Danube at Malak Preslavets: a perfect picnic spot. We can shelter from the hot sun and watch a large breeding colony of Whiskered Terns nesting on platforms of flowering water-lilies. Here also are Common Kingfishers, a Booted Eagle mobbed by anxious terns, and dragonflies such as Green-eyed Hawker and Small Red-eyed Damselfly. A Green Lizard crosses the road safely, avoiding the fate of a giant whip snake which is squashed nearby. A Pond Terrapin has a lucky escape too, as Tisho picks it up and moves it out of harm's way. A short walk leads us to a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, preening after taking a bath.

Heading west again, we stop at a magnificent European Bee-eater colony in a sandy bank by the road. Their liquid *quilt* notes fill the air, as they soar around displaying their tropical colours. Two Lesser Spotted

Eagles glide silently over the colony, looking for Susliks (European Ground Squirrels) on the hillside beyond. Spanish Sparrows and Red-backed Shrikes are here in force too. As we turn off the main road, we stop for a Long-legged Buzzard, also on Suslik-watch. One thing leads to another, such as Ortolan Bunting on a wire, and Tawny Pipit in display flight. By a pump-house a pair of Red-rumped Swallows are flying round, and both Corn and Black-headed Buntings sing and show well too. The Black-headed have recently returned from their long east-west migration from wintering grounds in India. The day's final walk, by disused carp-ponds, produces more Common Cuckoos and a superb pair of Penduline Tits, which come to inspect us as Tisho plays them a short burst of their own song. Delighted with our first bird-filled Bulgarian day, we head back to our base in Vetren. Dora cooks us three Shad each: they are migratory fish at present moving from the Black Sea upstream.

Saturday, 29 May

The early walk round Vetren village features a Golden Oriole fiercely chasing a Common Cuckoo round and round the bushes; plus Woodlark and Ortolan Bunting. Overhead passes the Danube traffic of Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbills, Great Egret and various herons.

After breakfast we leave the wonderful Pelican Lodge, which is more like staying in a private house than a hotel: we are the only guests, and Dora has looked after us wonderfully. Her husband is Nikolay, who has organized our tour. We head to the Black Sea coast, stopping for a portrait of European Rollers on a wire, a pair of Lesser Spotted Eagles, and an indecisive flock of White Pelicans on their migration. They take an age to choose whether or not to stop at a small dam: clearly strong leadership is lacking! We leave before they have made up their minds. Next is a fascinating impromptu stop, as heavy winter rain has left a shallow lake in what should be a productive arable field. Here are over a hundred White Storks, and three Black ones; as well as Garganey, and three wader species that are nesting (judging from their stork-mobbing behaviour): Northern Lapwing, Pied Avocet, and Black-winged Stilt.

The picnic spot is under walnut trees at the top end of the Bolata Valley, which runs down a few hundred metres to the Black Sea. Here we enjoy our meal with cherries, Golden Orioles, Common Cuckoos, and Eurasian Hoopoes. The orioles are especially visible here, frequently perching out in the open; and as for the Common Cuckoos, it is amazing that so many can be vying for this small territory of marsh and valley. Their most likely target species is Great Reed Warbler, which are singing all along the valley bottom. Also here are great numbers of European Bee-eaters, our first Black-eared Wheatear and two migrating Rose-coloured Starlings. Like the Black-headed Buntings, they have wintered in India, and these two are still heading west. Tisho is delighted to find and photo two Dark Spreadwing Damselflies, but they turn out to be the first of many. Close by are the cliffs of Cape Kaliakra, which protrudes far out into the Black Sea. Although weighed down with weekend visitors and souvenir shops, it produces its special birds for us: European Shags on the rocks below, and large numbers of nesting Pied Wheatears and Alpine Swifts. It is especially enjoyable looking down on these huge swifts which are more usually viewed from far below. Seven more Rose-coloured Starlings fly round the car-park before working out where to go next: a much longer and rosier view than at lunch.

The final stop in this exciting bird-filled day is on nearby steppe which is carefully protected from the development rampant elsewhere along this coast. Here we find Tawny Pipit, Short-toed Larks in abundance and several Isabelline Wheatears. Tisho finds us the resident pair of Stone Curlews, which are skulking among the carline thistles. It takes us a while to achieve good views, but in the end this cryptic wader shows extremely well. From here it only a short distance to our guest-house in Kavarna, where our host Kosta plies us with generous amounts of grape *schnapps* at dinner. John chooses a fine Bulgarian *Cabernet Sauvignon* for us to enjoy too.

Sunday, 30 May

Our hotel overlooks a wooded valley that is worth a look before breakfast. There seems no obvious way down into it, so we are happy just to stand and watch from the top. We are immediately rewarded by a male Levant Sparrowhawk, perched below us and looking magnificent in the scope. The grey cheeks help to rule out our familiar Eurasian Sparrowhawk, but Levant is the species known to nest in the valley anyway. A Hawfinch flies past, and a Syrian Woodpecker gives several views from various trees below us. Common Nightingales again remain hidden, but an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler appears in a sumac tree just below us.

After breakfast, we head north towards the Romanian border, passing close Calandra Larks on the way. A short stop at the reed-choked south end of Lake Durankulak turns up a distant Savi's Warbler reeling its insect-like song, and a Coypu swimming. Again the place is alive with the songs of Common Cuckoos and Great Reed Warblers. We continue to a sea-side restaurant at the other end of the lake, where two huge dead trees have an impressive colony of Great Cormorants nesting. Parking here, we set off to explore the dunes between sea and lake. Our main target is Paddyfield Warbler, a mainly Asiatic species here at the western end of its range. Thanks to Tisho's sharp eyesight, we have one in our scopes within ten minutes. So obliging is this rarity that he even manages a series of pleasing photos of it. Its long supercilium is much admired – the key feature for separating it from the European Reed Warblers – and although it doesn't sing, there is no doubt that it is responding to a short playback. There are other delights here too: a female Common Cuckoo of the rufous (or 'hepatic') morph, which utters its bubbling call as we watch, a Caspian Tern that flies past twice, and both Mediterranean and Black-headed Gulls on the beach. Five Common Eiders are out on the sea: Tisho tells us they have recently begun nesting here. Two Little Bitterns fly over the reeds, one chasing the other, with an exaggerated slow wing-beat that I have never seen before. A Little Ringed Plover is waiting for us as we return to the minibus.

During our picnic, a Eurasian Hobby flies over, upsetting the swallows. Before we leave, we have fine views of a European Reed Warbler to compare with this morning's star performer. At Shabla Lake, Garganey and Ferruginous Duck fly round together, a pair of Western Marsh Harriers perform a food-pass, and we take great interest in a snipe. In the end it turns out to be a Common Snipe, but it briefly gave hopes of Great Snipe by flying only a short distance with neither a zig nor a zag. A Savi's Warbler appears far closer than this morning's, rounding off a fine set of difficult wetland warblers. The lakeside flora is a superb blend of scarlet poppies, mauve cranesbill, yellow spurge, white asters and much else. There are also plenty of Lesser Grey Shrikes and a colourful pair of European Rollers. The next lake, Shabla Tuzla, is separated from the sea by a narrow range of dunes, like Durankulak. Here we have Common Shelduck, a late wintering Teal, another Eurasian Hobby, and a courting couple who are surprised by the sudden appearance of binoculars and scopes.

As we return to Kavarna, we watch a Fox flush a Common Skylark from a field of young sunflowers, and make a final stop in another area of pristine steppe with a view over the Black Sea. Here all three steppe larks are common – Calandra, Sky and Short-toed, and we can enjoy their chorus of song-flights above us. The huge Calandras look especially impressive with their slow-flapping black underwings. There are also Tawny Pipit, Northern Wheatear, and an unexpected Stone Curlew in flight. We finish another superb day of Bulgarian birding with a little extra time to relax or write post-cards, and call the day's long checklist out in the garden, with a beer in hand.

Monday, 31 May

Our time out before breakfast is short, as a mist off the Black Sea only clears half an hour before breakfast. In that time, a Eurasian Jay appears in the same tree as the male Levant Sparrowhawk was in yesterday, mobbing something hidden. As we watch, the female Levant appears, and chases the Eurasian Jay off several times within the canopy of the tree. Eventually, the Eurasian Jay appears to win the battle, as the hawk flies off over the valley, and out of our sight. Syrian Woodpecker is also here again.

After breakfast we leave Kosta's friendly guest house and head southwards along the coast. Today we cover a number of different habitats, starting with a chalk cliff where a pair of Eagle Owls have a nest. The nest hole is visible but the owls unfortunately not. After diligent searching all over the ledges and crevices of the cliff face, we admit defeat and try Baltata Wood, a small forest of ash and alder within a resort area. A Red Squirrel shows well, and there's a brief Hawfinch view, but otherwise the birds are ones we would expect commonly at home. A much more productive forest follows at Goritsa, where we order lunch at the hilltop restaurant and set off walking while it's being prepared. There are views of Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper, Eurasian Nuthatch, Spotted Flycatcher, and brief glimpses of over-active Semi-collared Flycatchers. This species, only recently confirmed as a separate species from Collared, is regarded as globally near-threatened, so we need better views. A break for lunch gives us the luck we need, as a pair are feeding young in a nest-box right by the restaurant. So, after our enjoying our traditional Bulgarian sausage-and-beans stew, we take our drinks and spend a few more minutes watching the comings and goings of both parents. While we watch, the female makes nine visits, while the male appears twice.

Continuing on a minor road, we reach a hillside in the Balkan Range where over ten Isabelline Wheatears appear within a mile of driving. The landscape here is superb, a natural parkland of bushes and flower-filled meadows. Unfortunately, a thunderstorm threatens, and delivers just after we have scoped a fine male Cirl Bunting. By the time we reach Burgas, the rain has cleared and a fine afternoon ensues. Tisho suggests a look at the Atahasovsko Salt pans, where the light suits a visit late in the day. Here we enjoy nesting terns – Sandwich in a tight colony, and Common all along the bunds and embankments that separate the pans. Black-winged Stilt and Pied Avocet are abundant, and there are a few Dalmatian Pelicans, Eurasian Spoonbills, Common Shelducks, Kentish Plovers and a Eurasian Oystercatcher. Sadly, we seem to be too late for migrant waders such as Curlew Sandpiper or Little Stint. Common Nightingale and Olivaceous Warbler sing visibly in the same tree as we return to the minibus. At a nearby fuel station, John and I watch a Penduline Tit chasing another round a willow.

We soon arrive at Pomorie, where our hotel overlooks both Black Sea and abandoned salt pans, with a large Sandwich Tern colony.

Tuesday, 1 June

Outside the hotel, Bottle-nosed Dolphins cavort in the shallows to the east of us; while to the west the tern colony is a hive of activity. Closer inspection reveals about 120 pairs of Sandwich Terns, with a few Commons around the edge, and an anxious pair of Pied Avocets. They are busy trying to nest too, but spend most of their time chasing terns out of their space. Also here are Kentish Plovers, and a Common Cuckoo on a wire.

After breakfast we leave Pomorie for our long drive to the Rhodope Mountains. Before we leave the built-up area of Burgas, we stop at Vaya Lake, whose surface is littered with pelicans. Most are White, with much smaller numbers of Dalmatian. Two Little Bitterns fly past; followed a few minutes later by a third as we wait at traffic lights. We run out of time to search for lingering migrant waders: it is time to cover some miles inland. Between Sredets and Elhovo, Tisho stops for a rest from driving as we pass through an open oak forest. At first we hear Ortolan Bunting, Common Chiffchaff and Common Nightingale, but a scratchy song directs us to a dead tree-top. Here a male Masked Shrike makes a fine portrait in both scopes. We search suitable cornfields for Montagu's Harrier without success, but find two Black Kites. European Turtle Doves, Common Skylarks and Black-headed Buntings are all extremely common on the journey.

Near Topolovgrad, we drive off-road in an area of open upland steppe, where (by arrangement over Tisho's mobile phone) we meet his friend Petr. He is spending the summer working for the BSPB (Bulgarian instead of Royal) on a project partly financed by the EU and partly by the RSPB. His job is to warden one of the country's 30 or 40 pairs of Eastern Imperial Eagles. He shows us an impressive adult male perched in a dead tree, looking jet black (with pale buff head) in the scopes. A European Turtle Dove, perched close by, is not much larger than the eagle's head! Not far away, we are told, is an eyrie with a three-week-old chick. Each bird needs to eat four Susliks a day. We see several of these nervous ground squirrels, some standing up on back legs. The eagle's living larder is all around them. The empty Suslik burrows attract large numbers of Isabelline Wheatears to the area: some already have fledged young. We retreat a short distance to set up our picnic, and are delighted when the eagle changes perches to one we can see from our table. Whenever this type of habitat is ploughed, Susliks immediately disappear; so the threats facing this superb ecosystem are obvious.

Thrilled with this encounter, we continue our journey south-westwards, passing a Lesser Spotted Eagle and a singing Woodlark together on a wire. We drive along the Turkish border, even into an area of No Man's Land between two rows of obsolete military fences and towers. Bulgaria and Turkey were fierce enemies in communist days. Near the village of Shtit, which means shield in Bulgaria, there is another border to our left: the Greek one. An hour's stop in an oakwood produces a fine Olive-tree Warbler singing peacefully in a dead tree with no need of playback for perfect views. Here there are several pairs breeding, and seem far easier to see than in Greek habitats I know. Also here are Woodchat Shrikes, a Sombre Tit and hundreds of Spanish Sparrows in a loose colony. A powerful female Northern Goshawk flies straight over us carrying prey, close enough to see the bars on the belly. In Svilengrad we refuel minibus and ourselves with drinks. Just before Madzharovo we stop at a vulture breeding viewpoint below huge cliffs on one side, and the Arda River on the other. Several Griffons and three Egyptian Vultures are soaring around, despite the cool, cloudy conditions. Soon they are joined by a Peregrine and a Long-legged Buzzard. At the same spot are Eurasian

Crag Martin, a silhouetted Blue Rock Thrush and a singing Rock Bunting. From here, we have only half an hour to reach our new base, further west along the Arda River.

Tisho is alert enough to spot a Little Owl perched on a rooftop as he drives. The villages round here are interesting: some are dominated by the ruins of communist-era collective farms; and these final ones we pass are inhabited by ethnic Turks. There are several gypsy encampments, and horse- and donkey-carts are a common sight. Many villages have White Storks on nests, and we pass two Black Storks fishing. At 1900, just as a light drizzle turns to a deluge, we reach our brand new lodgings, and relax in our warm rooms before dinner. It's been a long journey, but filled with both superb rural landscapes and great birding.

Wednesday, 2 June

Black Stork, Red-rumped Swallow, Eurasian Hoopoe and Black-headed Bunting are a few of the birds round the hotel this morning. As we sit at the breakfast table, we can watch a small colony of Griffon Vultures on the crags across the river.

Our first stop is at the vulture feeding station above Potocharka village. Nikolay, our ground agent, has arranged for a lamb carcass to be placed up on a designated hillside. We spend the morning up here, enjoying the beautiful landscape in sunshine and the very clear atmosphere after yesterday's storm. The Griffons, 20 or so, are not brave enough to come to the ground, but they circle overhead most of the morning. The offal scattered nearby attracts four squabbling Egyptian Vultures, and several Common Ravens and Hooded Crows. Also in the area are three shrike species, European Roller, Woodlark, Sardinian and Eastern Orphean Warblers, Cirl Bunting and Syrian Woodpecker. The warblers are tricky as they are not singing – probably already too busy feeding young. A Sombre Tit mobs a Little Owl on a chimney of a dilapidated house.

For our picnic, we accept the kind offer of enjoying the hospitality of Ismail, the local who has placed the carcass on the hill. We eat our meal in his garden in Studen Kladenets, supplemented by his home-made yogurt and home-grown cherries. Black Storks are nesting on the cliffs behind the house, and his Barn Swallows have six young chicks – an unusually large brood. In a nearby field, Turkish women in traditional dress are planting tobacco by hand, which looks back-breaking work. We drive on, close to Krumovgrad, and to the hillside above Dolna Kula. Here Rock Nuthatches have a mud nest plastered to a cliff-face. One parent is feeding young, but it needs the scopes to enjoy them. Unlike in Greece, this is not a common bird in Bulgaria. This walk also produces several Eurasian Crag Martins, male Black-eared Wheatears of both the black- and white-throated morphs, a fine Chukar on a crag, and a Little Ringed Plover incubating on a sandy river bank below. A resting Marbled Fritillary is worth a photograph. The Black Stork nests on these cliffs are deserted, but we stop to admire a White Stork nest with four half-grown chicks – again this is a large brood for the species. The final stop is near the dam at Studen Kladenets, where a Blue Rock Thrush gives us marvellous close-up views. Flying raptors include more Griffons and Long-legged Buzzards. We arrive back at the hotel after a lovely day in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. At dinner, we share a large carp, tastily cooked.

Thursday, 3 June

Before breakfast, a Peregrine lumbers overhead with a take-away: from the red leg visible it seems that a Chukar has come to a sudden end. An obliging Common Nightingale sings in the open as we step inside for breakfast.

Our journey westwards is an especially beautiful one, passing superb rural landscapes and villages that often contain both mosque and church. A mid-morning stop finally reveals a European Honey Buzzard, first low over the forested hills and then circling high in a thermal. These fascinating raptors come to the Bulgarian forests to feed on wasp-larvae and nest secretively, once they have finished performing their exquisite wing-clapping display flight. This individual, judging from its behaviour, is a late migrant still heading north. Soon afterwards, a female Common Cuckoo of the rufous morph keeps pace with the minibus for a while. In Smolyan, Crag Martins are the commonest hirundine, flying around the streets and nesting on buildings. John and I pass time by trying to learn the unfamiliar letters in the Cyrillic alphabet. The bilingual signposts and Tisho help us out. Bulgaria is the only country in the European Union to use the script, which has a few different letters from the Russian.

Now that we approach the Western Rhodope, the hills become mountains, clothed with spruce forests. We pass through the impressively vertical Trigrad Gorge and sit down to an excellent lunch at a mountain hostel just above it. John enjoys the goulash while the rest of us have trout from the nearby fish-farms. The stream running through the garden has a White-throated Dipper and Grey Wagtails, while Lesser Whitethroat and Black Redstart are on territory in the garden. Now we head back to the gorge to discover if the Wallcreeper is in evidence this year – an iconic bird that everyone wants to see. We park and wait, but not for long! The male appears after two minutes, before I have even had time to set up the scope. Climbing the sheer rock-face just above us, it disappears (with a millipede in bill) into a deep rock crevice. This is the site the pair used last year, and we are thrilled it is in use again: it is too close for the scopes. As the male leaves, it seems to hover slowly over our heads, with its rounded, white-spotted magenta wings slowly beating, before it sets off to feed again. During the next 50 minutes, the male makes six visits, while the white-throated female appears twice from the crevice as well. Sometimes we watch the male ascending parts of the huge cliffs, searching for spiders and insects. Tisho tries hard to achieve a perfect flight shot, but his long lens struggles to focus so close. Between Wallcreeper visits, we admire the endemic flowering *Haberlea rhodopensis* on the cliffs, and we hear a Grey-headed Woodpecker calling. Entranced by such a lovely encounter, and well aware of our good fortune, we leave the industrious male in peace and take a walk above Trigrad village instead.

Here there may be a slight feeling of anti-climax after the Wallcreeper excitement, but we enjoy the mountain landscapes, with views of Pallid Swift and European Serin as well. Above 1,000 metres in the Rhodope, Pallid is the common breeding swift. An hour's drive brings us to our hotel in Pamporovo, a ski-resort set at 1500m on a mountain ridge. Here we celebrate the Wallcreeper with two bottles of Gamsa, one of the other speciality Bulgarian red grape varieties. Thanks to a good internet connection, we check-in for the British Airways flight, and save time at the airport tomorrow.

Friday, 4 June

The pre-breakfast walk round the hotel produces our first Firecrest, Goldcrest, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Bullfinch. We are short of time to find Nutcracker or Crossbill on top of the tall spruces. After a final breakfast, we load up for the last time, and head for Sofia Airport. The first part of the journey is a steady descent of the mountains, past a Dipper in the river. Skirting Plovdiv, we make faster progress and pass a Roller on the wires. A few White Storks feed in flooded rice fields by the A1 motorway. The whole journey takes three and a half hours, plus a short stop. At the airport we say our fond farewells to Tisho, and find all the airport formalities fast and hassle-free. In duty-free, John finds a bottle of Melnek to take home – the third endemic Bulgarian grape variety. The British Airways Airbus takes off on time, and flies us over still snow-covered Alpine peaks. In Terminal 5, we say our goodbyes at the luggage carousels, and set off on the last legs of our journeys home. We will all remember the wonderful Bulgarian birdlife and unspoilt landscapes for many years to come.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Tisho for excellent guiding and driving. Thanks also to Nikolay for organizing the tour. Most of all, thanks to you all for participating in the group with enthusiasm and good humour. I hope we may meet up on another Ornitholiday again soon. Thanks also to Tisho for the photographs that illustrate this report.

Simon Boyes
Ornitholidays
29, Straight Mile,
Romsey,
Hampshire,
SO51 9BB
Tel: 01794-519445
E-mail: info@ornitholidays.co.uk

June 2010

Itinerary and Weather

Wherever possible, **shade** temperatures at dawn and midday are given.

- 27 May Arrive Varna 2125. To Vetren.
Mostly dry, but electric storm nearby. 22°C (72°F)
- 28 May Vetren. Srebarna Reserve. Malak Preslavets. Nova Cherna.
Sunny, 18-32°C (64-90°F)
- 29 May Vetren to Kavarna, via Bolata Valley, Cape Kaliakra and steppe.
Sunny, cooler, 16-26°C (61-79°F)
- 30 May Kavarna. Lake Durankulak. Lakes Shabla & Shabla Tuzla. Rusalka Steppe.
Sunny, 19-24°C (66-75°F)
- 31 May Kavarna to Pomorie, via Baltata Wood, Goritsa, minor road over the Balkan Range,
Atahasovosko Saltpans (Burgas).
Mostly sunny, one storm in pm, 18-28°C (64-82°F)
- 1 June Pomorie to Complex Arda, via Lake Vaya (Burgas), Topolovgrad, Shtit, and
Madzharovo.
Cloudy, rain late pm. 14-27°C (57-81°F)
- 2 June Complex Arda. Potocharka Vulture Feeding Station. Dolna Kula. Studen Kladenets.
Sunny, 13-27°C (55-81°F)
- 3 June Complex Arda to Pamporovo, via Trigrad Gorge.
Dry, partly sunny, 11-21°C (52-70°F)
- 4 June Pamporovo to Sofia Airport. Depart 1445.
Sunny, 7-23°C (45-73°F)

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

| No of days recorded | Location | Abundance Scale (max. seen on one day) |
|---------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 1 2h means seen on | D = Danube area | 1 = 1 – 4 individuals |
| 1 day and heard on | S = Black Sea coastal area | 2 = 5 - 9 |
| 2 other days | R = Rhodope Mountains area | 3 = 10 - 99 |
| | >R= on journey to Rhodope | 4 = 100 - 999 |

One taxonomic note (marked ¹) follows the list.

| SPECIES | No of days recorded | Location | Abundance Scale | SCIENTIFIC NAME |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Mute Swan | 4 | D S | 2 | <i>Cygnus olor</i> |
| Common Shelduck | 2 | S | 2 | <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> |
| Ruddy Shelduck | 1 | D | 1 | <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i> |
| Mallard | 5 | D S | 3 | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> |
| Gadwall | 3 | D S | 2 | <i>Anas strepera</i> |
| Northern Shoveler | 1 | S | 1 | <i>Anas clypeata</i> |
| Eurasian Teal | 1 | S | 1 | <i>Anas crecca</i> |
| Garganey | 2 | S | 1 | <i>Anas querquedula</i> |
| Common Pochard | 2 | D S | 3 | <i>Aythya ferina</i> |
| Ferruginous Duck | 2 | D S | 3 | <i>Aythya nyroca</i> |
| Common Eider | 1 | S | 2 | <i>Somateria mollissima</i> |
| Chukar | 1 | | 1 | <i>Alectoris chukar</i> |
| Common Pheasant | - | 2h D | - | <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> |
| Little Grebe | 1 | D | 1 | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> |
| Great Crested Grebe | 2 | D S | 3 | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> |
| White Pelican | 3 | D S | 3 | <i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i> |
| Dalmatian Pelican | 3 | D S | 3 | <i>Pelecanus crispus</i> |
| Great Cormorant | 5 | D S | 4 | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> |
| European Shag | 1 | S | 3 | <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> |
| Pygmy Cormorant | 1 | D | 3 | <i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i> |
| Little Bittern | 3 | D S | 2 | <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i> |
| Black-crowned Night Heron | 4 | D S | 3 | <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i> |
| Squacco Heron | 2 | D S | 3 | <i>Ardeola ralloides</i> |
| Little Egret | 4 | D S | 3 | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> |
| Great Egret | 2 | D | 1 | <i>Egretta alba</i> |
| Grey Heron | 6 | D S R | 3 | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> |
| Purple Heron | 3 | D S | 3 | <i>Ardea purpurea</i> |
| Black Stork | 3 | >S R | 1 | <i>Ciconia nigra</i> |
| White Stork | 7 | D S R | 4 | <i>Ciconia ciconia</i> |
| Glossy Ibis | 2 | D | 3 | <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> |
| Eurasian Spoonbill | 3 | D S | 3 | <i>Platalea leucorodia</i> |
| Eurasian Griffon Vulture | 3 | | 3 | <i>Gyps fulvus</i> |
| Egyptian Vulture | 2 | | 2 | <i>Neophron percnopterus</i> |
| Eastern Imperial Eagle | 1 | | 1 | <i>Aquila heliaca</i> |
| Lesser Spotted Eagle | 3 | D >S >R | 1 | <i>Aquila pomarina</i> |
| Booted Eagle | 2 | | 1 | <i>Aquila pennata</i> |
| Black Kite | 2 | | 1 | <i>Milvus migrans</i> |
| Western Marsh Harrier | 3 | D S | 1 | <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> |
| Long-legged Buzzard | 5 | D S R | 2 | <i>Buteo rufinus</i> |
| Common Buzzard | 7 | D S R | 1 | <i>Buteo buteo</i> |
| European Honey Buzzard | 1 | | 1 | <i>Pernis apivorus</i> |
| Levant Sparrowhawk | 2 | S | 1 | <i>Accipiter brevipes</i> |
| Northern Goshawk | 1 | | 1 | <i>Accipiter gentilis</i> |
| Common Kestrel | 8 | D S R | 3 | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> |
| Eurasian Hobby | 1 | S | 1 | <i>Falco subbuteo</i> |
| Peregrine Falcon | 3 | | 1 | <i>Falco peregrinus</i> |
| Common Moorhen | 1 | 2h D S | 1 | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> |

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|--|---|----|---|---|----|---|-----------------------------------|
| Eurasian Coot | 4 | | D | S | | 3 | <i>Fulica atra</i> |
| Eurasian Oystercatcher | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> |
| Black-winged Stilt | 3 | | | S | | 3 | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> |
| Pied Avocet | 3 | | | S | | 3 | <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> |
| Stone Curlew | 2 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i> |
| Little Ringed Plover | 2 | | | S | R | 1 | <i>Charadrius dubius</i> |
| Kentish Plover | 2 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i> |
| Northern Lapwing | 4 | | | S | | 2 | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> |
| Common Snipe | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> |
| Black-headed Gull | 2 | | D | S | | 2 | <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> |
| Mediterranean Gull | 2 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Larus melanocephalus</i> |
| Yellow-legged Gull | 7 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Larus michahellis</i> |
| Little Tern | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Sternula albifrons</i> |
| Sandwich Tern | 2 | | | S | | 4 | <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> |
| Common Tern | 4 | | D | S | | 3 | <i>Sterna hirundo</i> |
| Caspian Tern | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i> |
| Whiskered Tern | 2 | | D | S | | 3 | <i>Chlidonias hybrida</i> |
| Black Tern | 1 | | D | | | 2 | <i>Chlidonias niger</i> |
| Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon) | 8 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Columba livia</i> |
| Common Wood Pigeon | 3 | | D | S | | 1 | <i>Columba palumbus</i> |
| Eurasian Collared Dove | 7 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> |
| European Turtle Dove | 7 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Streptopelia turtur</i> |
| Common Cuckoo | 7 | | D | S | R | 2 | <i>Cuculus canorus</i> |
| Little Owl | 2 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Athene noctua</i> |
| Eurasian Scops Owl | - | 1h | D | | | - | <i>Otus scops</i> |
| Common Swift | 7 | | | S | R | 3 | <i>Apus apus</i> |
| Pallid Swift | 2 | | | | R | 2 | <i>Apus pallidus</i> |
| Alpine Swift | 2 | | | S | | 3 | <i>Tachymarptis melba</i> |
| Eurasian Hoopoe | 4 | 2h | | S | R | 1 | <i>Upupa epops</i> |
| Common Kingfisher | 1 | | D | | | 2 | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> |
| European Bee-eater | 7 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Merops apiaster</i> |
| European Roller | 6 | | D | S | R | 2 | <i>Coracias garrulus</i> |
| European Green Woodpecker | - | 1h | D | | | - | <i>Picus viridis</i> |
| Grey-headed Woodpecker | - | 1h | | | R | - | <i>Picus canus</i> |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Dendrocopos major</i> |
| Syrian Woodpecker | 4 | | | S | R | 1 | <i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i> |
| Middle Spotted Woodpecker | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Dendrocopos medius</i> |
| Lesser Spotted Woodpecker | 1 | | D | | | 1 | <i>Dendrocopos minor</i> |
| Common Skylark | 6 | 1h | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Alauda arvensis</i> |
| Crested Lark | 5 | | D | S | >R | 2 | <i>Galerida cristata</i> |
| Woodlark | 5 | | D | S | R | 1 | <i>Lullula arborea</i> |
| Greater Short-toed Lark | 3 | | | S | >R | 3 | <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i> |
| Calandra Lark | 3 | | | S | >R | 3 | <i>Melanocorypha calandra</i> |
| Common Sand Martin | 1 | | D | | | 1 | <i>Riparia riparia</i> |
| Eurasian Crag Martin | 3 | | | | R | 3 | <i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i> |
| Barn Swallow | 8 | | D | S | R | 4 | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> |
| Red-rumped Swallow | 6 | | D | S | R | 2 | <i>Hirundo daurica</i> |
| Common House Martin | 8 | | D | S | R | 4 | <i>Delichon urbica</i> |
| Tawny Pipit | 3 | | D | S | | 1 | <i>Anthus campestris</i> |
| (Black-headed) Yellow Wagtail ¹ | 6 | | D | S | R | 2 | <i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i> |
| Grey Wagtail | 2 | | | | R | 3 | <i>Motacilla cinerea</i> |
| White Wagtail | 7 | | D | S | R | 2 | <i>Motacilla alba</i> |
| White-throated Dipper | 2 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Cinclus cinclus</i> |
| Dunnock | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Prunella modularis</i> |
| European Robin | 2 | | | S | R | 1 | <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> |
| Common Nightingale | 3 | 5h | D | S | R | 1 | <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i> |
| Black Redstart | 4 | | D | | R | 2 | <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> |
| Northern Wheatear | 3 | | | S | R | 1 | <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> |
| Isabelline Wheatear | 4 | | | S | R | 3 | <i>Oenanthe isabellina</i> |
| Black-eared Wheatear | 2 | | | S | R | 1 | <i>Oenanthe hispanica</i> |
| Pied Wheatear | 1 | | | S | | 3 | <i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i> |
| Whinchat | 1 | | D | | | 1 | <i>Saxicola rubetra</i> |
| Song Thrush | 1 | 4h | D | S | R | 1 | <i>Turdus philomelos</i> |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|----|---|----|----|---|--------------------------------------|
| Mistle Thrush | - | 1h | | | R | - | <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> |
| Common Blackbird | 7 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Turdus merula</i> |
| Blue Rock Thrush | 2 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Monticola solitarius</i> |
| Blackcap | 1 | 4h | D | S | R | 1 | <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> |
| Common Whitethroat | 3 | 1h | D | S | R | 1 | <i>Sylvia communis</i> |
| Lesser Whitethroat | 3 | 1h | D | S | R | 1 | <i>Sylvia curruca</i> |
| Eastern Orphean Warbler | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Sylvia crassirostris</i> |
| Sardinian Warbler | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Sylvia sarda</i> |
| Cetti's Warbler | - | 1h | | S | | - | <i>Cettia cetti</i> |
| Savi's Warbler | 1 | 1h | D | S | | 1 | <i>Locustella luscinioides</i> |
| European Reed Warbler | 2 | 2h | D | S | | 1 | <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i> |
| Marsh Warbler | - | 1h | D | | | - | <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i> |
| Paddyfield Warbler | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Acrocephalus agricola</i> |
| Great Reed Warbler | 3 | | D | S | | 3 | <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i> |
| (Eastern) Olivaceous Warbler | 3 | 2h | | S | R | 1 | <i>Hippolais pallida</i> |
| Olive-tree Warbler | 1 | 1h | | | R | 1 | <i>Hippolais olivetorum</i> |
| Common Chiffchaff | 1 | 5h | D | S | R | 1 | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> |
| Goldcrest | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Regulus regulus</i> |
| Firecrest | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Regulus ignicapillus</i> |
| Winter Wren | - | 2h | | | R | - | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> |
| Spotted Flycatcher | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Muscicapa striata</i> |
| Semi-collared Flycatcher | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Ficedula semitorquata</i> |
| Great Tit | 3 | | | S | R | 2 | <i>Parus major</i> |
| Coal Tit | 1 | 1h | | | R | 1 | <i>Periparus ater</i> |
| European Blue Tit | 2 | | D | S | | 2 | <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> |
| Sombre Tit | 2 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Poecile lugubris</i> |
| Eurasian Penduline Tit | 2 | | D | S | | 1 | <i>Remiz pendulinus</i> |
| Eurasian Nuthatch | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Sitta europaea</i> |
| Western Rock Nuthatch | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Sitta neumayer</i> |
| Wallcreeper | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Tichodroma muraria</i> |
| Short-toed Treecreeper | 1 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i> |
| Lesser Grey Shrike | 6 | | D | S | R | 2 | <i>Lanius minor</i> |
| Woodchat Shrike | 2 | | | | R | 2 | <i>Lanius senator</i> |
| Red-backed Shrike | 7 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Lanius collurio</i> |
| Masked Shrike | 1 | | | | >R | 1 | <i>Lanius nubicus</i> |
| Common Magpie | 8 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Pica pica</i> |
| Eurasian Jay | 7 | | D | S | R | 2 | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> |
| Western Jackdaw | 7 | | | S | R | 3 | <i>Corvus monedula</i> |
| Rook | 1 | | | >S | | 2 | <i>Corvus frugilegus</i> |
| Hooded Crow | 8 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Corvus cornix</i> |
| Common Raven | 4 | | | | R | 2 | <i>Corvus corax</i> |
| Common Starling | 8 | | D | S | R | 4 | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> |
| Rose-coloured Starling | 2 | | | S | | 2 | <i>Sturnus roseus</i> |
| Eurasian Golden Oriole | 5 | 2h | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Oriolus oriolus</i> |
| House Sparrow | 8 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Passer domesticus</i> |
| Spanish Sparrow | 6 | | D | S | R | 4 | <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i> |
| Eurasian Tree Sparrow | 5 | | D | | R | 3 | <i>Passer montanus</i> |
| Common Chaffinch | 6 | | D | S | R | 2 | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> |
| Common Linnet | 3 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Carduelis cannabina</i> |
| European Goldfinch | 7 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> |
| European Greenfinch | 5 | 1h | D | S | R | 2 | <i>Carduelis chloris</i> |
| European Serin | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Serinus serinus</i> |
| Eurasian Bullfinch | 1 | 1h | | | R | 1 | <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> |
| Hawfinch | 3 | | | S | | 1 | <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i> |
| Ortolan Bunting | 2 | 1h | D | | >R | 1 | <i>Emberiza hortulana</i> |
| Cirl Bunting | 3 | 1h | | S | R | 1 | <i>Emberiza cirlus</i> |
| Rock Bunting | 1 | | | | R | 1 | <i>Emberiza cia</i> |
| Black-headed Bunting | 6 | 1h | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Emberiza melanocephala</i> |
| Corn Bunting | 7 | | D | S | R | 3 | <i>Miliaria calandra</i> |

Taxonomic Notes

- 1 Yellow Wagtails breeding in Bulgaria are all of the black-headed form *feldegg*. Some authorities regard this as a separate species from *M. flava*, but the Collins field-guide 2nd edition on which our list is based retains *feldegg* as a subspecies.

MAMMALS

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|--|---|----|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Red Fox | 1 | | S | 1 | <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> | |
| Beech Marten | 1 | | D | 1 | <i>Martes foina</i> | |
| Eastern Hedgehog | 1 | | D | 1 | <i>Erinaceus concolor</i> | |
| European Suslik | 1 | | | >R | 3 | <i>Citellus citellus</i> |
| European Hare | 2 | | S | R | 1 | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> |
| Red Squirrel | 1 | | S | | 1 | <i>Sciurus vulgaris</i> |
| Coypu (introduced) | 1 | | S | | 1 | <i>Myocastor coypus</i> |
| Bottle-nosed Dolphin | 1 | | S | | 1 | <i>Tursiops truncatus</i> |

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

| | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Giant Whip Snake (road-kill) | Green Lizard | Fire-bellied Toad (heard) |
| Grass Snake (road-kill) | Wall Lizard | |
| European Pond Terrapin | Marsh Frog | |

BUTTERFLIES

| | | |
|------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Cardinal | Painted Lady | Clouded Yellow sp |
| Comma | Southern White Admiral | Eastern Festoon |
| Orange-tip | Marbled Fritillary | |

DRAGONFLIES

| | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Green-eyed Hawker | Azure Bluet | Common Bluetail |
| Lesser Emperor | Common Clubtail | Dark Spreadwing |
| Black-tailed Skimmer | Small Red-eyed Damselfly | |
| Red-veined Darter | Common Winter Damselfly | |

This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.



Paddyfield Warbler



Eurasian Penduline Tit



Pied Wheatear



Woodlark



Rose-coloured Starlings



Little Owl



Eurasian Griffon Vulture



Whiskered Tern

Front Cover: Wallcreeper

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