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## **GEORGIA**

### **Birding on the Edge of Europe**



*Gouldenstadt's Redstart is one of the major highlights of a trip to Georgia © John McLoughlin*

# GEORGIA

## Birding on the Edge of Europe

**18-25 April 2023**

**Leader: John McLoughlin**

### Introduction

It was a spectacular journey through high mountain passes and across sweeping steppes. We saw several of the high mountain specialists including Caucasian Snowcock and Caucasian Black Grouse as well as good numbers of Güldenstadt's Redstarts and were also fortunate enough to find a flock of migrating Demoiselle Cranes near Stepantsminda.

Venturing south across the steppes of southern Georgia, we enjoyed Black Francolins, Menetries's, Eastern Orphea and Green Warblers and Eastern Black-eared, Pied and Finsch's Wheatears.

### Trip Diary

#### 18 April

After an early morning arrival in Tbilisi, we ventured north on the old Georgian Military Highway. We grabbed breakfast on the outskirts of the city before continuing on to the Jvari Pass where we watched tumbling choughs.

It was a beautiful sunny morning and as we gazed at the amazing scenery, high jagged peaks and snow-covered mountains, John spotted a Brown Bear on the far hillside quickly followed by a second individual gambolling through the snow!

Overhead a Golden Eagle was seen in display flight, whilst a group of Alpine Swifts appeared tiny against the vast mountain landscape. Numerous Water Pipits fed around the areas of melting snow and Black Redstarts soon became a familiar sight.

Between the snow tunnels we stopped in a lay-by and scanned the snow-covered hillsides before continuing our descent into the famous village of Stepantsminda.

Stands of Sea Buckthorn in the valley bottom harbour small numbers of wintering Güldenstadt's Redstarts and after a patient wait, a group of half a dozen males popped out. What an attractive bird this is !!



*Güldenstadt's Redstart © John McLoughlin*

Our friendly small hotel in nearby Stepantsminda offered warm home comforts, excellent food, as well as simply stunning views of the magnificent Mount Kazbegi and it was to be our home for the next three nights.

### **19 April**

Our hotel was ideally situated between the high mountain slopes and the village of Stepantsminda which lies in the valley of the Terek River. We awoke to clear skies and the sun gave a welcoming warm glow to the snow-covered peak of Mount Kazbegi.

We had the place to ourselves as we set off to search for the Caucasian specialities we had travelled all this way to see and it was not long before snowcocks could be heard high up on the mountainside above us. Following a thorough scan with the telescopes, we all set eyes on them.

Later, a pair was observed lower down the hillside, as they foraged on a grassy slope. From the same spot we also picked out several Caucasian Black Grouse including a couple of females, or Greyhens.

After a varied and delicious lunch, we headed up the valley to the hamlet of Kobi where at the "Wallcreeper wall" we were unable to find our main target but had brief views of several Red-fronted Serins.

We then searched an adjacent valley and explored a deserted hamlet for migrants. It had been raining and the valley floor was quiet, however, we did come across a loose flock of at least twenty Twite feeding in a roadside meadow, as well as several Ring Ouzels.

On the way back, we took a short detour into the Sno Valley to check on a small wetland which sometimes holds a surprise or two. This time, we witnessed a nice "fall" of Water Pipits

and *flava* wagtails and checking through these we found Blue-headed, Grey-headed and Black-headed Wagtails.

## 20 April

We were up a little later today for a second pre-breakfast excursion in the hope of some more views of the Black Grouse and Snowcock.

An avalanche rumbled above the valley, and we watched the boulders fly and bounce down the slopes from a safe distance! It proved to be a very successful trip with prolonged views of a party of East Caucasian Turs, essentially a mountain ibex or goat, at a good distance for nice scope views.

After breakfast and on our third attempt, we finally found a male Wallcreeper on the Terek Dam and enjoyed nice views of this fantastic bird.

On the way back to the hotel, we made a roadside stop to check for raptors and picked out a flock of 17 northbound Demoiselle Cranes flying high over the valley with this being a species that we don't find on every trip.



*Migrating Demoiselle Cranes © John McLoughlin*

In the afternoon, we travelled down the valley in the hope of seeing a female Brown Bear which had been seen the previous day with her two cubs in tow. Unfortunately, there was no trace of the bears, so we had to make do with a displaying Golden Eagle over the rocky peaks.

## 21 April

Following heavy overnight rainfall, we checked the stands of buckthorn along the valley floor for Greater Rosefinches. Sadly, we were unsuccessful in our quest, as the snow was too high up the slopes to push the rosefinches down from the high meadows, although we did find several fine Gldenstadt's Redstarts.

In the late morning, we departed Stephantsminda and took the road back over the mountains to Tbilisi and then onwards to our next destination, the town of Signagi. At a roadside stop,



we found singing Semi-collared and Red breasted Flycatchers but getting decent views was a challenge as the birds remained high in the tree canopy.

Common Redstarts of the distinctive form *samaminicus* were also seen, along with some Nuthatches.

The afternoon was spent travelling and we were amazed at the amount of lorry traffic on the road. There were hundreds of vehicles which were held up by the slow progress through the customs posts on both the Azerbaijan and Russian borders!

## 22 April

We set off for a full day exploring the 'Badlands' on the Azerbaijan border in an area known as "Chachuna". It was a good drive from our hotel in Signagi but we were fortunate in having a 4x4 which meant we made good progress along the dirt roads through the steppe.

Birding highlights were many and varied with the roadside fields full of Calandra Larks and smaller numbers of Greater Short toed Larks and Turkestan Larks. Wheatears were also a major feature of the day and we found Isabelline, Eastern Black-eared, Pied and Finsch's Wheatears, all of which were on breeding territories.



Finsch's Wheatear © John McLoughlin

At an old dam, we watched a pair of Lesser Kestrels displaying as we ate our picnic lunch, with a migrating Osprey passing over and a pair of Eastern Imperial Eagles displayed over the riparian forest. Black Francolins made themselves heard and later in the day we obtained excellent views.

On the way back to Dedoplistskaro, we found two Egyptian Vultures scavenged on a sheep carcass which brought the day's proceedings to a fitting close.

## 23 April

It was a fine sunny morning, and we started the day by seeking newly arrived migrants and summer visitors on the wooded ridges between Signagi and the town of Dedoplistskaro. The

temperature reached 25 degrees during the day, and it would prove to be the hottest day of the tour.

At one stop, we located singing Barred Warbler, Eastern Orphee Warbler and a gorgeous male Red-backed Shrike, whilst a colony of Spanish Sparrows occupied the deeper scrub and parties of Common Swifts passed by overhead.

A Common Cuckoo was a more familiar sound on this spring-like morning, and we kept our eyes to the skies and soon added a nice list of raptors to our day list with both Cinereous and Griffon Vultures soaring on the rising thermals. A pair of Short-toed Snake Eagles displayed over an adjacent valley and Eastern Imperial Eagle was also found. New birds for the trip included a party of five Black Kites and a lone female Montagu's Harrier, with an adult White-tailed Eagle found later in the day.



*Cinereous Vulture © John McLoughlin*

Stopping for some delicious freshly baked Georgian bread reminded us that lunch was not far away, and we set off towards the snow-topped wall of the Greater Caucasus mountains that stretched out into the distance across the plain that lies below Signagi.

Our destination for the afternoon was the Lagodekhi National Park which has some amazing ancient forest, full of mature trees riddled with woodpecker holes. Several Eurasian Wrynecks sang around a clearing close to the park entrance and we also found a male Semi-collared Flycatcher on territory.

Even more interesting, however, was a singing Icterine Warbler which was clearly defending a territory. This species has not been officially recorded as a breeding bird in Georgia and we ended the afternoon with the surprising total of four singing males within a small area of the park; it is clear there is still more to learn about the birds of Georgia!!



*Finding Icterine Warblers on territory was an unexpected surprise © John McLoughlin*

More familiar birds included several Chaffinches and a couple of pairs of European Robins which were feeding young. The woodland was also full of Common Redstarts and Red-breasted Flycatchers.

This national park was certainly a wonderful place to visit and one that John had not visited previously despite leading many previous tours to Georgia and yes, the lunch at the park's restaurant was very tasty too!!

## **24 April**

The highlight of the morning was our first Green Warbler which we found as it sang from the roadside above Signagi. This proved to be a fortuitous stop as we also found a male Semi-collared Flycatcher and a pair of displaying Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers.



*Green Warbler © John McLoughlin*

Continuing onwards, we made a diversion into the steppe country that leads to the ancient monastery of Davit Gareja and this involved a stop off at the small township of Udabno.



One of the avian highlights of the open grasslands of this region are the number of Corn Buntings which were seemingly singing from every bush and fencepost.

Udabno literally means “desert”, and the town had been built in Soviet times to house refugees from western Georgia and having enjoyed a leisurely lunch in the sun at the Udabno Café, we set off to explore. Walking around the village gardens we found a number of migrants including several Red-breasted Flycatchers and a lone Siberian Chiffchaff. Hoopoes were nesting amongst the old buildings, and we learned that it would not be long before the annual invasion of Rose-coloured Starlings.

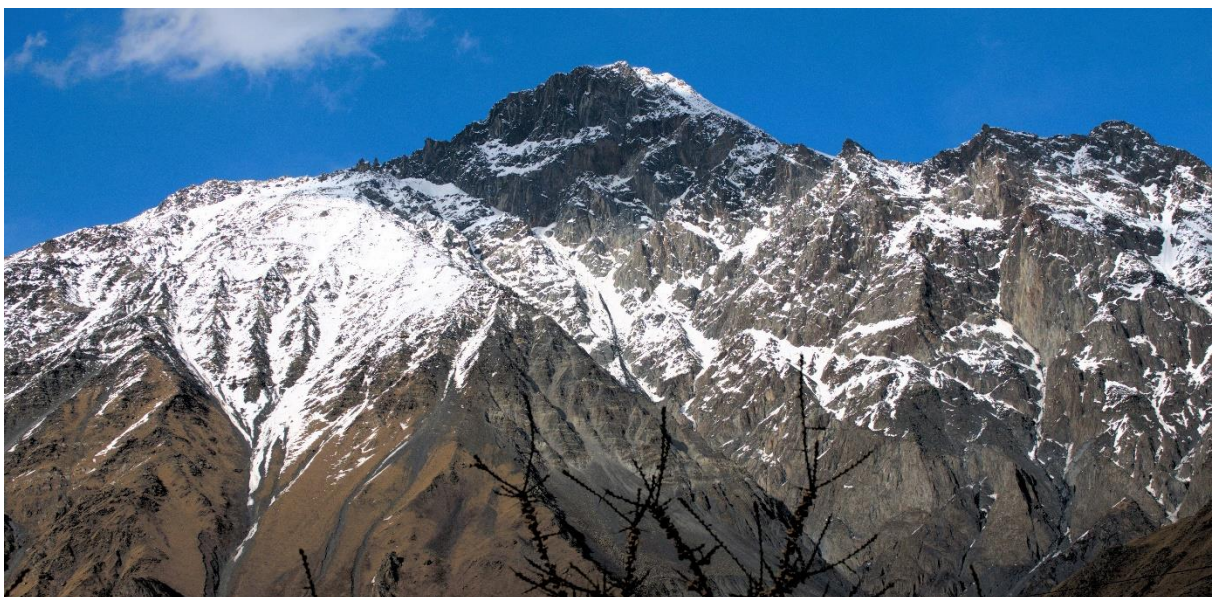
We then continued on to Lake Jandari which proved fruitful in the overcast conditions with a number of new species for the tour including a lone Dalmatian Pelican, Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns, Northern Shovelers and Garganey, and a solitary Squacco Heron.

There had also been a fall of migrants due to the rain with hundreds of Sand Martins feeding over the lake and newly arrived Woodchat Shrikes in the bushes. Roadside wires had Rollers and there were hundreds of colourful Bee-eaters as we continued onwards.

The plan for our final birding stop was to explore a newly established riverside reserve on the outskirts of Tbilisi which contained some excellent mature woodland. With steady rainfall, however, looking for birds was difficult, so we decided to continue and ended the day with a final evening meal at a traditional Georgian restaurant.

## **25 April**

An early morning departure from Tbilisi Airport for our flights back to the UK.



*The stunning Kazbegi Peaks © John McLoughlin*



## Systematic List

### **Garganey** *Anas querquedula*

A dozen drakes on Jandari Lake near Tbilisi on our final day.

### **Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*

At least ten birds on Jandari Lake on the afternoon of 24 April.

### **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

A few on Dali Reservoir at Chachuna on 23 April.

### **Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*

A party of eight birds on Dali Reservoir (23 April).

### **Caucasian Black Grouse** *Lyrurus mlokosiewiczi*

Several males and females were observed on both mornings at Stepantsminda. The viewing conditions on the morning of 19 April were excellent and we saw at least five males, two of which were jousting with both heads and wings raised in a threat display.

This grouse is named after Ludwig Mlokosiewicz (1831-1909), a Polish Captain in the Russian Army, who was based in the Caucasus region.

### **Black Francolin** *Francolinus francolinus*

A bird with an entertaining trumpet-like sound which is usually delivered from deep cover, however, we obtained some excellent views at Chachuna on 23 April.

### **Caucasian Snowcock** *Tetraogallus caucasicus*

Their far carrying calls could be heard at Stepantsminda and each morning we went out to look for them on the crags above our hotel. On our first morning (19 April), we had several good sightings from our vantage point above the village. Initially, the birds were only seen briefly and in flight until two landed atop a prominent rock and then we obtained good scope views.

### **Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix*

A bird was singing from a barley crop at Dedoplistskaro on the morning of 23 April.

### **Chukar Partridge** *Alectoris chukar*

Several birds were heard at Stepantsminda and later we saw two pairs at Chachuna.

### **Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba*

A common breeding bird in Georgia and we saw them in small numbers in the high Caucasus Mountains.

**Common Swift** *Apus apus*

A very common breeding bird in and around the capital, Tbilisi. Also seen on migration above Signagi.

**Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*

The first spring migrants were heard at Stephantsminda on 20 April and then at Signagi on 23 April.

**Rock Dove** *Columba livia*

We saw some genuine contenders in the mountains around Kazbegi and feral birds were a common sight in towns.

**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas*

At least a dozen birds at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus*

Several sightings in the Signagi and Dedoplistskaro area on 22-23 April.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

A common bird in the towns and villages of southern Georgia.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

A pair on Jandari Lake on 24 April.

**Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*

A couple of sightings at Jandari Lake on our final day.

**Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo*

We were very fortunate to come across a flock of seventeen birds migrating high over the Terek Valley below Stephantsminda on the morning of 20 April, as this species is uncommon in spring.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

Small numbers on Dali Reservoir and then on Jandari Lake.

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*

A single bird at the small lake outside Deoplistskaro (22 April).

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*

A pair at Stephantsminda on the morning of 21 April.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

Two or three pairs were present on the river Tergi (or Terek River) at Stepantsminda.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

A single bird at Jandari Lake (24 April).

**Slender-billed Gull** *Chroicocephalus genei*

A pair on Jandari Lake on 24 April was a good discovery.

**Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus*

A flock of forty on the Dali Reservoir at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Armenian Gull** *Larus armenicus*

A couple of hundred birds were seen on Jandari Lake (22 April).

**Gull billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica*.

A single bird over the reservoir at Dali Dam on 22 April.

**Whiskered Tern** *Chidonias hybrida*

Several hawking over the lake at Jandari (24 April).

**White-winged Tern** *Chidonias leucopterus*

It was nice to come across a flock of eight migrants at Jandari Lake.

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Several on Jandari Lake on 24 April.

**Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus*

A single individual was on the lake at Jandari on our last afternoon.

**Black-crowned Night-heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Only seen near the capital on Lake Jandari.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

A couple of birds at both Dali Reservoir and on Jandari Lake.

**Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea*

A single at Jandari Lake (24 April).

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba*

Two seen from the dam at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

Several sightings from the dam at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides*

A single bird in the reeds at Jandari Lake (24 April).



**Bearded Vulture** *Gypaetus barbatus*

The Mt. Kazbegi area is a tremendous place for this 'king of the skies'. We saw at least four individuals in ideal weather conditions, with some cruising the valley near Stepantsminda.

**Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus*

Two confiding birds feeding on offal in a field on the outskirts of Dedoplistskaro on the afternoon of 22 April.

**Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*

Our only sighting was on the drive to Chachuna (22 April).

**Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus*

Present in good numbers in the valleys at Stepantsminda with up to a dozen birds seen daily.

**Cinereous Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*

Only encountered near Signagi with three birds on 22 April and two more the following day.

**Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus*

A single bird was seen in at Chachuna on 22 April with displaying birds near Signagi the next day.

**Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus*.

A pale morph bird at Rustavi, near Tbilisi on 24 April.

**Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*

Several sightings of both adult and subadult birds in the Chachuna area (22-23 April).

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos*

Several sightings at Stepantsminda and surrounding mountains at the start of the tour.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*

Seen in the Stepantsminda area on 18-20 April, with two more near Udabno (24 April).

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

A migrant drifted slowly over the dam at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

At least four migrants were seen including one bird crossing the snowfields at the Cross Pass.

**Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus*

A regular breeding bird in southern Georgia, however, we only saw a ringtail on 23 April.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*

The visible raptor migration was just starting, and we saw five birds near Signagi on 23 April.

**White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla*

An adult was seen at the fishponds near Signagi on the afternoon of 23 April.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*

We had a couple of good sightings on the day trip to Chachuna on 22 April, with another seen on 24 April.

**Eurasian Steppe Buzzard** *Buteo buteo vulpinus*

One of the commonest raptors we encountered during the tour.

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*

A lone sighting at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Hoopoe**

A common breeding bird in Georgia, particularly in the south, with several sightings around Signagi and Dedoplistskaro on 22-23 April, with others at Udabno on 24 April where they were breeding amongst the village houses. A single bird was also seen on the journey to Stepantsminda on 18 April.

**European Roller** *Coracias garrulous*

The first birds had arrived at the breeding colony beyond the dam at Chachuna on 22 April. On the final day, we saw several in the rain perched on roadside wires on the outskirts of Rustavi.

**European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster*

A common breeding bird in southern Georgia and plenty of migrants were on the move during our stay.

**Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla*

A few singing birds on territory at the Legodekhi National Park on the afternoon of 23 April.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** *Dryobates minor*

Some excellent views above Signagi on the morning of 24 April.

**Syrian Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos syriacus*

A couple of noisy birds in the riparian woodland at Chachuna.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major*

We found a vocal pair at Legodekhi National Park (23 April).

**European Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis*

Seen at a nest hole on 24 April.

**Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni*

A pair were back at a traditional nest site on the Dali Dam at Chachuna where we had excellent views.

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

A widespread raptor.

**Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*

A lone bird at Chachuna (22 April).

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*

The only sighting was a bird at Kobi near Stepantsminda on 19 April.

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*

A singing male was seen well above Signagi on the morning of 23 April, with another the next day.



Red-backed Shrike © John McLoughlin

**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator*

At least two smart males at Chachuna on 22 April with several more at Jandari Lake a couple of days later.

**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius atricapillus*

Several birds of the rather striking black-capped Middle Eastern race were seen at Stepantsminda.

**Eurasian Magpie** *Pica pica*

A common bird in most areas apart from the High Caucasus.



**Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

Abundant in the mountain areas above the Jvari Pass and in the valley at Stepantsminda.

**Alpine Chough** *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

Several birds greeted us at the Friendship Monument below the Jvari Pass on our first morning. The next day, an impressive flock of over a hundred birds fed on Sea Buckthorn below Stepantsminda.

**Western Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*

Only encountered on the steppes around Chachuna (22 April).

**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus*

A large flock on fields at Jandari lake on 24 April.

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix*

Common and abundant with birds seen in all habitats.

**Northern Raven** *Corvus corax*

Recorded in small numbers on a daily basis although commoner in the mountains.

**Coal Tit** *Parus ater*

A common bird in the pine woods around Stepantsminda.

**Common Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Several were seen around Stepantsminda.

**Great Tit** *Parus major*

Seen on most days in small numbers.

**Eurasian Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus*

Two pairs were observed in riverside trees on the drive to Udabno on 24 April.

*Eurasian Penduline Tits © John McLoughlin*

**Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*

This is a very abundant species in the countryside to the south of Tbilisi.

**Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris pencillata*

A small flock of seven birds were observed on the Jvari (Cross) Pass on 21 April. This distinctive form has an extensive facial mask which also reaches around and meets the breast band.



**Greater Short-toed lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Small numbers at Chachuna (22 April).

**Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra*

An abundant on the semi-arid steppelands at both Chachuna and amongst the cultivated fields enroute to Udabno. On both visits, we had some very close views of birds at the roadside.



*Calandra Lark* © John McLoughlin

**Turkestan Short toed Lark** *Alauda heinei*

A couple of sightings at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*

Large numbers at Jandari Lake (24 April).

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

We saw many birds on passage as well as local breeding birds on most days including some hardy individuals braving the harsh weather at the Jvari Pass!

**House Martin** *Delichon urbica*

Only seen in the second part of the trip in the warmer south.

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*

Heard at the Dali Dam, Chachuna (22 April).

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus major*

Several in the buckthorn scrub at Stephantsminda.

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

A single migrant at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita abietinus*

A few migrants at Stepantsminda with singing males on territory above Tbilisi. A Siberian Chiffchaff was seen in a garden at Udabno on 24 April.

**Green Warbler** *Phylloscopus nitidus*

Another speciality of the region, with one singing at the roadside as we left Signagi on the final morning.

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

One or two birds singing in the Ananuri beech woods (21 April).

**Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria*

A roadside songster above Signagi (23 April).

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*

At least one bird on territory above Signagi on 23 April.

**Eastern Orphean Warbler** *Sylvia crassirostris*

A couple of singing males at Chachuna on 22 April and another the following day.



Eastern Orphean Warbler © John McLoughlin

**Menetries's Warbler** *Sylvia mystacea*

There were several singing males at Chachuna (22 April) but they proved rather elusive.

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis*

One on territory near Dedoplistskaro (23 April).



**Icterine Warbler** *Hippolais icterina*

An interesting discovery at Lagodekhi with at least four singing males on territory on 23 April even though this is not currently considered to be a breeding bird in Georgia.

**Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Singing birds were heard at several sites in and around Stepantsminda.

**Western Rock Nuthatch** *Sitta neumayer*

Good views of birds at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*

Two in the beech woodland by the Zhinvali reservoir at Ananuri (21 April).

**Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria*

This is an excellent itinerary to look for this most sought-after species and after a couple of attempts, we located a male on the dam below Stepantsminda on 20 April, with another seen the following day.

**European Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

A common bird in and around Tbilisi and the surrounding towns and countryside.

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*

Several recorded on most days during the tour.

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*

Several seen around Stepantsminda where it breeds in the conifer plantations.

**Eurasian Blackbird** *Turdus merula*

A common species in Georgia, both in the towns and in the countryside.

**(Caucasian) Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus amicornum*

Another common species around Stepantsminda both on the slopes above the village and around the old farmsteads and settlements. In the Kazbegi area, we recorded at least ten birds on 20 April.

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*.

A couple of early migrants were seen on both 23 and 24 April.

**European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*

Breeding birds at Lagodekhi National Park (23 April).

**Common Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

A single bird singing near Signagi (23 April).

**Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva*

A singing male in the beech woods at Ananuri (21 April) with many migrants on 23 and 24 April.

**Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata*

A good showing for this species with males on territory at several locations between 21-24 April.



*Semi-collared Flycatcher* © John McLoughlin

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

A very common species in the high Caucasus mountains around Stepantsminda. The birds are of the nominate subspecies *ochruros* but many show characters of *semirufus* due to secondary intergradation. The result is quite interesting as the males exhibit varying amounts of red on the underparts.

**Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus samamisicus*

A common species in deciduous woodland around Stepantsminda. The subspecies here is also known as Ehrenberg's Redstart and the males show distinctive white wing panels. Some birds at Chachuna lacked this feature and were presumably migrants of the nominate subspecies heading further north.

**Guldenstadt's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythrogaster*

Probably the highlight of the tour were the daily encounters of this stunning chat in the buckthorn scrub around Stepantsminda. We recorded a total of at least 25 birds including fifteen individuals on 21 April.

This is a tricky bird to see and not every trip to Stepantsminda is successful.

**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra*

Migrants were just starting to appear with sightings on three dates.

**European Stonechat** *Saxicola torquatus rubicola*

Several sightings of breeding birds at Stephantsminda and Chachuna.

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Seen in good numbers on a daily basis in the mountains with many birds back on breeding territories.

**Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabelline*

An abundant breeding bird on the steppes at Chachuna with at least twenty seen on 22 April.

**Eastern Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe melanoleuca*

We spent some time observing the breeding wheatears at Chachuna and saw half a dozen *melanoleuca*, all of which had dark throats and were found alongside the following two species.

**Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka*

At least one male was found on territory at Chachuna, plus a single female.

*Finsch's and Eastern Black-eared Wheatears* © John McLoughlin

**Finsch's Wheatear** *Oenanthe finschii*

After some diligent searching, we found a smart male on territory at Chachuna.

**White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus caucasicus*

A pair were seen along the streams by the snow tunnels at the Jvari Pass on our first morning. Later in the tour another two birds fed along the same streams on the way back to our hotel in Stephantsminda.

**Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia*

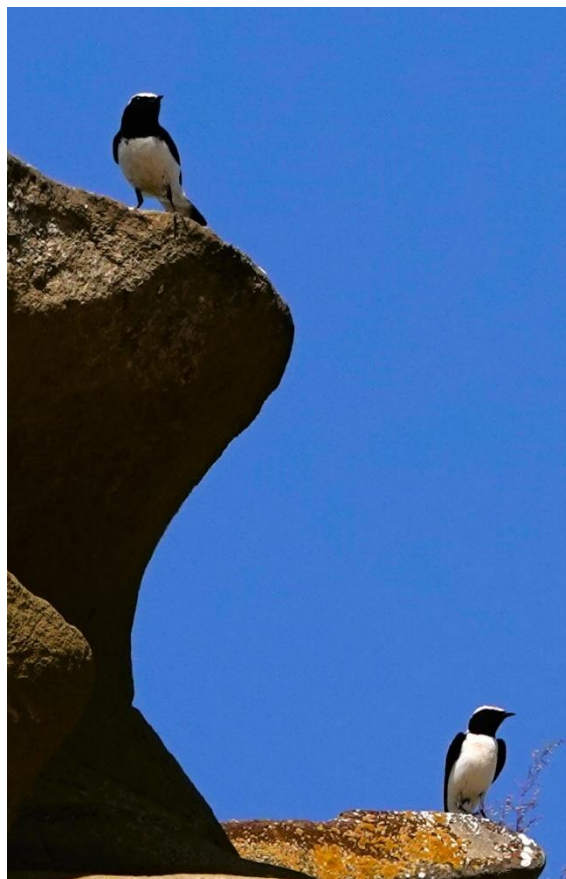
A dozen or so on the drive to Chachuna on 22 April. Also present at Udabno.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*

These were breeding in a small park near Dedoplistskaro (23 April).

**Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis*

A fair-sized colony was found near Dedoplistskaro on 23 April.



**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

Still a relatively common bird and seen on each day of the tour.

**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*

An abundant species in the valley scrub around Stepantsminda.

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*

A common migrant in the mountains where we found them in the Sno Valley and again on the steppes.

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava/beema*

“Sykes” type wagtails were observed in the Sno Valley near Stepantsminda (19 April).

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava feldegg*

“Black-headed Wagtails” were identified in the Sno Valley (19 April).

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava thunbergi*

The mixed flocks of wagtails at Stepantsminda and Chachuna included a number of grey-headed birds.

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava lutea*

Birds resembling “Yellow-headed Wagtail” were seen at the Sno Valley, Stepantsminda and near Udabno.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*

A common breeding bird in the area around Stepantsminda with several seen by the fast-flowing rivers.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

Seen in small numbers on a daily basis.

**Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris*

A species of drier areas and we saw two pairs near Dedoplistskaro (22 April).

**Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus*

A common spring migrant throughout the country and we saw a few at Chachuna on 22 April.

**Caucasian Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta coutellii*

A very common breeding bird at high elevation in the Caucasus Mountains. Large numbers were observed displaying around the melting snowfields, in the meadows and along the riverbanks.



Caucasian Water Pipit © John McLoughlin

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*

Uncommon and only seen in the forests in the mountain areas during the tour.

**Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

A single bird at the roadside above Signagi on 24 April.

**Eurasian Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

A few birds around the buckthorn scrub at Stepantsminda.

**European Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*

A few sightings around Signagi and at Udabno towards the end of the tour.

**Twite** *Linaria flavirostris*

Several small flocks in the valley above Stepantsminda (20-21 April).

**Common Linnet** *Linaria cannabina*

A male was seen at Chachuna (22 April).

**European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*

A common bird all over Georgia with birds seen on each day of the tour.

**Red-fronted Serin** *Serinus pusillus*

Also known as Fire-fronted Serin, this is a very attractive finch, and we soon became accustomed to their shrill calls in the High Caucasus. We recorded them in small numbers around Stepantsminda.



**Eurasian Siskin** *Carduelis spinus*

Present in small numbers near our hotel in Stepantsminda.

**Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra*

It was good to see this species in good numbers in both agricultural and steppe lands in the southeast.

**Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*

A male was seen well on the drive to Chachuna (22 April) at a regular spot for this species.

**Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala*

Two were seen on our day trip into the steppes at Chachuna.