

BULGARIA

The Secret Flyway: Mon 14-Mon 21 September 2009



Above: White-tailed Eagle - a pair was seen at Lake Mandras © Stephen Daly

**report compiled by tour leaders:
Tim Earl & Dobri Domuschiev**

Trip Diary

We came to see birds of prey and other large birds migrating down the Black sea flyway and were not disappointed. A huge passage of raptors was seen with more than 1,000 birds in two and a half hours, repeated to a lesser extent on our way to the airport at the end of the tour. It was not just the number of birds we saw that lunchtime – they represented 19 species including 861 Lesser-spotted Eagles, 101 Hobbies and double figure numbers of Short-toed Eagles, Marsh Harriers, Buzzards and Booted Eagles. It was an amazing climax to an already fabulous trip!

The full list of what was seen in just 150 minutes is: Osprey (1); Black Kite (2); White-tailed Eagle (2); Short-toed Eagle (13); Western Marsh Harrier (11); Hen Harrier (1); Pallid Harrier or Montagu's Harrier (1); Levant Sparrowhawk (5); Eurasian Sparrowhawk (1); Northern Goshawk (4); Common Buzzard (15); Lesser Spotted Eagle (861); Booted Eagle (12); Common Kestrel (1); Red-footed Falcon (1); Eurasian Hobby (101); Saker Falcon (1); Peregrine Falcon (2); Black Stork (70); European White Stork (22); Great White Pelican (350 + 350 elsewhere); Spoonbill (31); Lesser Black-backed Gull (9).

An hour at the Banya hills on our last day was timed to catch the start of migration activity and produced one Lesser Spotted Eagle, four Short-toed Eagles, five Buzzards, single Black Kite, Levant Sparrowhawk and Booted Eagle. It was a great final session (although seeing a flock of Bee-eaters while we had coffee was pretty good too).

Autumn in Bulgaria is far more than observing birds of prey, however. Other highlights included watching a pair of Eagle Owls start their nightly activities. this was such a fascinating experience we repeated it the following evening. On the first views (and sounds) of the owls were preceded by sightings of a Red Fox, while two Badgers put in an appearance on the second. Supporting casts included Grey-headed, Syrian and Great-spotted Woodpeckers, Spotted and Red-breasted Flycatchers and, on the second evening, a calling Long-eared Owl.

Middle-spotted Woodpeckers in Gortisa Forest showed well and completed some folk's European lists of this charismatic family. the wood was delightful with Nuthatches giving their electric calls, and a 'Europasian' Treecreeper, an early winter visitor. Great White Pelicans soaring the cliffs at Yailata were a thrill only surpassed by far greater numbers later in the tour. We saw them in numbers on lakes around Burgas but it was the huge wheeling flocks migrating towards the Bosphorus, their gateway to the Middle east and Africa, which delighted us most. Our second visit to the Lake Mandra hill coincided with the arrival of about 70 Great White pelicans which came in at a great altitude 'wiffing' like geese to lose height and join their companions roosting on the lake.

We also saw a second Saker Falcon but it was nothing like as exciting as the first at Tuzla Lake, which swooped down and around the group giving excellent views. Broad-billed Sandpipers were also seen here, this rare wader never ceasing to thrill when encountered on the Bulgaria tours. Hoopoes, Black-winged Stilts, Red-breasted Flycatchers were all expected highlights but the visible migration of hirundines, herons, pipits and wagtails was a dream realised for many. A huge flock of Starlings took on a life and shape of its own as they prepared to roost – similar events in the UK attract crowds of onlookers but we had these to ourselves. And it is perhaps this feeling of being at one with Nature, able to watch migration in awe and wonder delighted which several people took home with them.

Tim Earl

Systematic List of Birds Recorded
(171 species)

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

Three seen on the first day.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

One or two occasionally.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Hundreds on the southern lakes.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Common to abundant eg 2,000 on Pomorie Lake.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Two on Lake Mandra.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

A few on lakes and watercourses, common around Burgas.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Hundreds on Lake Atanasovsko.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Three on Pomorie Lake; five on Lake Atanasovsko.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

One in eclipse on Tuzla Lake; three on Lake Atanasovsko.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Abundant on lakes Burgas and Atanasovsko.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Huge numbers on Lake Burgas.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Four on Lake Burgas.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Uncommon in the north, common on lakes Burgas and Mandra.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Common on lakes Burgas, Mandra and Atanasovsko.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Seen most days; max 20 on Pomorie Lake.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

See the list in the trip diary; max 70; one at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

European White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Seen on three days in ones and twos; also see the list in the trip diary; max 22.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

See the list in the trip diary; max 37 at the northern end of Lake Atanasovsko.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Two at the northern end of Lake Atanasovsko.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Three at Lake Mandras.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Common; a total of 19 seen migrating over Tuzla Lake.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Fairly common; eight seen migrating with Grey Herons over Tuzla Lake; on in reeds at Lake Mandras.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Less common; max eight on Pomarie Lake; 20 on Lake Mandras.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Two on Pomarie Lake, 25 Lake Mandras.

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

A large flock migrating over the Elata tombs was a highlight; also see the list in the trip diary; max 750.

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*

See the list in the trip diary; max nine.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

A few seen on the first day; about 50 at Lake Mandras.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Common to abundant; vast skeins seen in the south.

European Shag *Leucocarbo aristotelis*

A few seen on the sea early in the trip.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Common; also see the list in the main text.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

Reasonable numbers of mostly juvenile birds; also see the list in the trip diary.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Migrating commonly; max 15 of which 10 were together at Prilep village; also see the list in the trip diary; max 101 birds in a day.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*

One steamed through giving great views in excellent light at Lake Tuzla; also see the list in the trip diary.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

See the list in the trip diary.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Six migrating on the first day; also see the list in the trip diary.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

One at Prilep village; also see the list in the trip diary; one at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

A pair at Lake Mandras.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

See the list in the trip diary; four at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

One or two daily; also see the list in the trip diary.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

One near Kavarna; also see the list in the trip diary.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

See the list in the trip diary.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

One near Kavarna; also see the list in the trip diary.

Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*

See the list in the trip diary; one at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Max of three seen on four days; also see the list in the trip diary; two at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Seen on four days; max of four; also see the list in the trip diary; one at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Common daily migrating and holding territory; also see the list in the trip diary; six at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Singles seen migrating on three days.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*

Seen migrating on four days; also see the list in the trip diary; max 861; one at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

One migrating near Goritsa Forest; also see the list in the trip diary; max 12; one at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

European Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Heard in the Bolata Valley.

Corn Crane *Crex crex*

One heard in the Bolata Valley

Little Crane *Porzana parva*

One at Lake Mandras.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Three in the Bolata Valley; a few on Lake Mandras.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

One in the Bolata Valley; vast rafts of thousands on the southern lakes.

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

Three at the cycle track, Burgas.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

A few seen on a beach, day one; five at the Salt Museum, four on Lake Atanasovsko.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Not common; up to nine seen at Pomarie Lake; a few on Lake Atanasovsko.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Fairly common on lakes and watercourses; max 20 at Pomarie Lake; hundreds on Lake Atanasovsko.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

About 50 at the northern end of Lake Atanasovsko.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

One at the Salt Museum.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticul*

Common.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

One at the Salt Museum, three on Lake Mandras.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Common.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

About 13 on Lake Mandras.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Five at Lake Mandras; a few on Lake Atanasovsko.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

One near Kavarna; one at the Salt Museum.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

One at the Salt Museum.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Two on Pomarie Lake; about 10 on Lake Burgas; eight at Lake Mandras.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Fairly common on Tuzla Lake and on Lake Pomarie; a few on Lake Burgas.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

Max of six on Tuzla Lake; one at the Salt Museum.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Max six on Pomarie Lake; one at the Salt Museum.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

One on Pomarie Lake.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Common; max 10 on Tuzla Lake; one on Lake Mandras.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

One on the beach near Kavarna.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Fairly common on Lake Tuzla and Pomarie Lake.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

One on Lake Mandras.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Fairly common on Lake Tuzla and Pomarie Lake; six on Lake Atanasovsko.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Fairly common on Lake Tuzla and Pomarie Lake; a few on Lake Burgas.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Up to two seen at Tuzla Lake on separate days.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Common; max 30 on Pomarie Lake; six on Lake Atanasovsko.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Two seen on Lake Tuzla; three on Pomarie Lake.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Common daily, fewer in the south.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

One on the coast first day; nine of the Scandinavian race *fuscus* at Lake Mandras hill.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Common in the Varna area, abundant on Lake Pomorie.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*

Three on Pomarie Lake; a few at the Salt Museum and on Lake Atanasovsko.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

About 10 while seawatching near White Lagoon headland; one or two at the Salt Museum; six on Lake Atanasovsko.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

Seen daily with the large numbers at Pomorie Lake, the Salt Museum and Lake Burgas.

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*

One at Lake Burgas.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

One at Tuzla Lake.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Seen on six days; more than 100 at the Salt Museum.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Just a few in the north and at the Salt Museum.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

One or two at the Salt Museum.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

A few at Lake Burgas.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

A few at Lake Burgas.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

A few at Lake Burgas.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Common in towns and villages.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Seen on three days in small numbers.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Common in towns and villages.

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo*

A pair in the Bolata Valley put on a show over two evenings; single roosting bird at the White Lagoon junction; voted 'bird of the trip'.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Ones and twos daily; one in a tree at a coffee stop on the way to Burgas was being mobbed by a mixed flock of small birds.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

One calling in the Bolata Valley.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

One flushed on the Bolgarevo steppe.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

Seen in small flocks on three days in the Kavarna area.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Ones and twos on three days in the Kavarna area.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*

Singles on the first two days.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

About five around lakes Burgas and Mandra.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Good flocks seen on the first two days, smaller numbers thereafter; about 10 at the coffee stop on our way to the airport.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Recorded on three days with a max of five.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

Recorded on three days with singles seen near Kavarna and in the Goritza forest.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*

Three or four in Gortisa Forest.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

Common almost daily.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Common daily.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Singles heard at Kavarna and Goritsa Forest.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Seen twice in the Bolata Valley.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Abundant migrant with daily counts up to 100.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

Singles on the second day and at Lake Atanasovsko.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Seen mostly at the hotel in Kavarna.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Noted on five days with the best views when two were mobbing a Eurasian Sparrowhawk; several migrating at Lake Burgas.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Common daily.

Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

A few daily; some in a flock in Burgas showed the white shoulder marks of the eastern race *soemmeringii*.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Uncommon; one or two daily.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

Surprisingly few seen, albeit almost daily.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Common daily.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Seen on five days in ones or twos.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Good numbers at Lake Tuzla on the first day, a few daily thereafter.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Common to abundant with large flocks migrating hard daily.

Northern House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

As for Barn Swallow.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

A few recorded on three days.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*

Good numbers on the Balgarevo steppe; small flocks sighted on three days.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Seen on the second day; heard on the Balgarevo steppe.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

A few seen on most days.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Heard or seen on two days.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen almost daily; large numbers migrating at the Balgarevo steppe.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

One calling at the northern end of Lake Atanasovsko.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

One seen in the Bolata valley.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Heard or seen on just three days.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Seen on three days in small numbers.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Recorded on three days.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Common; seen every day.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

One eating elderberries at the Dimchevo coffee stop.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Common; seen on most days.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Singles noted on three days.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Six seen and more heard in the Goritza Forest.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

One in Gortisa Forest.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common daily; a huge flock of thousands swirling on dusk near the Bolata valley was a highlight.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Small numbers almost daily.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Small numbers daily.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Two mobbing a Little Owl at the coffee stop on day four.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Noted on just two days.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Ones and twos daily.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Seen on seven days with a max of five on the Balgarevo steppe.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A few seen almost daily.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

One near Kavarna.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Up to three seen daily.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Large numbers after a 'fall' on the first two days; seen on three days.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Abundant.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

A few seen in the House Sparrow flocks when investigated; nests were seen around the base of White Stork nests on poles in the villages.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Noted on two days.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Abundant day migrants.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Noted on two days in the Kavarna area.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Common, seen in double figures almost daily.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Four on the Bolgarevo steppe.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Three seen at the coffee stop near Prilep village; singles at the hill overlooking Lake Mandra and at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Small numbers noted on three days.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Surprisingly few; our first pair were mobbing a Little Owl, the last were seen at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

A few on the second day.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Common; noted daily.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

A few in the Kavarna area.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Common around the hotel in Kavarna; two at Lake Burgas.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

A few almost daily.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

One seen at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

Mammals

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

One on the Bolgarevo steppe

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

One on the cliff side in the Bolata valley

Least Weasel *Mustela nivalis*

One in front of the bus on the second day

Eurasian Badger *Meles meles*

Two watched for some time in the Bolata valley

Bottle-nosed Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*

Small numbers while sea-watching off the White Lagoon headland

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Three on the second day

Reptiles & Amphibians

Common Tree Frog *Hyla arborea*

Heard calling quite commonly.

Marsh (Lake) Frog *Rana ridibunda*

Heard calling in the Bolata Valley and at Lake Mandra.

Kotschy's Gecko *Cyrtodactylus kotschy*

One in Goritsa Forest.

Balkan Wall Lizard *Podarcis taurica*

Several in the Goritsa Forest; a few at the Banya hills on our way to the airport.

Snake-eyed Skink *Ablepharus kitaibelii*

One in Goritsa Forest was a highlight.

Butterflies

Silver-spotted Skipper *Hesperia comma*

One at the Poda nature reserve.

Swallowtail *Papilio machaon*

One near the bus in the Bolata valley.

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Common daily.

Small White *Pieris rapae*

A few daily.

Clouded Yellow *Colias crocia*

Two on the coffee stop near Prilep.

Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow *Colias hyale*

One or two on the steppe.

Large Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros*

One in Goritsa Forest.

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

A few daily.

Cardinal *Argynnis pandora*

A worn specimen at the sea-watch site; two at the Dimchevo coffee stop.

Tree Grayling *Hipparchia statilinus*

Three or four in Goritsa Forest.

Great Banded Grayling *Kanetisa circe*

A few at the Prilep coffee stop.

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Common.

Small Copper *Lycaena phalaeas*

A few daily.

Grecian Copper *Lycaena ottomanus*

One at Lake Mandra hill.

Lang's Short-tailed Blue *Syntarucus pirithous*

A few daily.

Adonis Blue *Polyommatus bellargus*

One or two on the Balgarevo steppe.

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

A few daily.