

# BULGARIA

Rhodope Mountains & Black Sea    Fri 15th – Sun 24th May 2015

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*Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): We saw Egyptian Vulture near Potochnitza • Few birds are as smart as a male Pied Wheatear – here at Kaliakra • Semi-collared Flycatchers breed in nestboxes at Goritza • We had good views of Whiskered Terns including birds nesting on lily pads • A much-wanted species seen excellently: Wallcreeper • Beautiful Rollers were seen on a number of dates © All photos by tour leader Gary Elton*

**report compiled by tour leader:  
Gary Elton**

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## TRIP DIARY

Tour Leaders: **Gary Elton & Lyubo Profirov**  
with **John (the elder) Blackburn, Jim Knight and John (the younger) Smart**

Our 'tour' of Bulgaria started in Sofia, swinging southeast to the hills and pine forests in the Rhodope Mountains around Dospat and Trigrad. Moving further east, we entered the barren hills and lower, deciduous, stunted oak woodlands near Krumovgrad - with riverbeds lined by poplars and rich flower meadows. This region hosts many important European species like Black and Griffon Vultures, Wallcreeper, Rock Nuthatch, Olive-tree Warbler, Black-eared Wheatears and Masked Shrikes. Then on further east to the Black Sea coast, with its lakes and salt pans at Burgas and Pomorie, and coastal steppes and lakes north of Kavarna. Finally, we headed back west to Silistra and Vetren, visiting the reedy lakes at Srebarna, with its breeding pelicans and Penduline Tits. We were lucky with the weather, with most days clear and sunny, though several were hampered a little by a strong breeze.

The sheer number of birds and variety of species amazed us all on this trip. In Bulgaria many of the old traditional farming practices are still common place and the lack of people pressure, compared especially to our part of the world, meant large swathes of land are still accessible to wildlife, which was very much reflected in the variety and the pure volume of the birds we saw.

### Highlights

- Amazing views of Wallcreeper at Trigrad
- Rock Nuthatch at its nest
- Masked Shrike and Lesser Kestrel colony in eastern Rhodope Mountains
- Great views of Eastern Imperial Eagle
- Four Broad-billed sandpipers at Pomorie
- Semi-collared Flycatchers breeding at Goritza
- Pied Wheatears and Red-footed Falcons on the coast
- Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes in breeding plumage along the Danube

### Fri 15th May

A smooth, but late landing at Sofia was followed by a good transit through security and we were soon stood outside with Lyubo and our driver for the week, Mihail. Our drive to Dubrash was broken by several stops. The first was just east of Sofia at Vakarel for Corn Crake where there were at least six calling around us though, unsurprisingly, these remained hidden from view. Calling Cuckoos and Red-backed shrikes, and our first Corn Buntings, were also picked up.

### Sat 16th May

Rising early this morning, gave us an hour's birding around the hotel before breakfast. Three different singing Rock Buntings, a Spotted Flycatcher, several Serins, a rather smart male Bullfinch, plus calling Black and Green Woodpeckers made a good start to the trip. The start of what was to be a long day took us first east to the Trigrad Gorge, where we were treated to the most amazing views of Wallcreeper you could ever wish for. The male first appeared on the cliff opposite, showed well then eventually flew over our heads to its nest site situated in a crack in the cliff wall just above us. We then enjoyed some fantastic views, which were heightened by the bird singing on occasion and flying over and around us.

We moved on to Trigrad itself, where a short walk produced three Dippers, including a fresh juvenile bird, Grey Wagtail, Black Redstarts, and Serins. This was followed a fine trout lunch and then the continuation of the long drive east. Various stops were made along the way to our ultimate destination, Krumovgrad. One such stop at Banite along the Arda River producing a Black Stork on its nest and our first, albeit distant, Roller. We arrived at Krumovgrad slightly later than hoped but after a welcome evening meal we made the short walk to the local town park. Several Scops Owls were heard, and the impressive sight of dozens of fireflies over the adjacent rough grassland heralded the close of our first full day.

**Sun 17th May**

Our pre-breakfast walk this morning was a stroll down to the nearby river. Immediately obvious were the singing Nightingales, with glimpsed views had of several birds. Golden Orioles announced their presence nearby and the cyclical sound of our first Eastern Olivaceous Warblers could be heard from the riverside bushes. A pair of Little Ringed Plovers ran along the shingle river edge signalling an 'about turn' as we returned to the hotel for breakfast.

Our day was taken up birding the local area. At our first stop we were rewarded with a displaying male and female Sardinian Warbler and a confiding male Eastern Subalpine Warbler. We then followed the track above Potochnitza and spent the next hour or so wandering around the hillside there. The list of birds seen and heard was mouth-watering and included Lesser Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, two singing and displaying Barred Warblers, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Honey-buzzard, Golden Oriole and Black-headed Bunting. A frustratingly elusive Olive-tree Warbler remained hidden throughout our visit despite several attempts to locate it, though a second bird was 'jammed in on' by Gary as he scanned the hillside with his 'scope. This bird stayed in view for long enough for several of the group to see it. Our position on the hill overlooked a nearby vulture-feeding site and although no fresh carcasses had been put out, the vultures were still being attracted to the area. Several Egyptian, at least 20 Griffons and one Black were seen with a Golden Jackal also vying to get in on the action.

Lunch was taken at a picturesque roadside pull in at Stari chal, where an obliging Chukar called in full view from a hillside rock, though as we were to discover throughout the trip the woodpeckers were going to prove tricky. A Syrian called repeatedly from the nearby tree line but allowed only glimpsed views as it flew from tree to tree. The afternoon was spent around the area of Dolna kula, where our first stop near an old Turkish Cemetery gave us some great views of perched Rollers and Bee-eaters, a Black Kite and two Hobbies. We also visited a nearby quarry where two more Black Storks were seen at their nests and an old Rock Nuthatch nest was viewable with unfortunately no sign of any recent activity. Now familiar sounds included another singing (and elusive) Olive-tree Warbler, with more confiding Cirl and Black-headed Buntings noted. A stop to fill water bottles from a roadside fountain gave us our first encounter with a Levant's Sparrowhawk, with the bird flitting rapidly through the understorey enabling some of the group to see it. A scan of the surrounding rock and cliff faces revealed a male Black-eared Wheatear. We then returned to the hotel after another full and enjoyable day.

A return visit was made to the village park after dinner. With dusk only just falling the Scops Owls were largely concentrated in one corner, presumably where they had been roosting. Shining a torch into the trees enabled several of the birds to be picked out, although you had to be quick! John 'the younger' had come armed with a bat detector and two species of pipistrelle could be identified from the echoes, one undoubted Common Pipistrelle, the other unclear due to several species being in that echo range.

**Mon 18th May**

With a good drive ahead of us, we had a 7:00am breakfast and prompt departure. Our first stop was a scheduled one, hoping to pick up Blue Rock Thrush at Studen Kladenets dam. We unfortunately had to wait a little bit longer to see this species, though consolation came in the form of singing River Warbler. Its ID initially fooled us due to its choice of habitat but once tuned to the sound it was obvious what it was, though as is often the case with this species it remained hidden from view. We continued our journey towards Madjarovo where a 'Rock Nuthatch twitch' was in full swing with a large British group already enjoying views of the bird. We were quickly pointed in the right direction and enjoyed good views, before slipping off to get ahead of the crowds, so to speak. A further stop a short distance further on gave us several Blue Rock Thrushes, a second Rock Nuthatch and both Rock and Ortolan Buntings. Our next stop was a roadside one at Yerusolimovo, a site for Masked Shrike. The bird eluded for most of our visit, though once again good views of Golden Orioles, Woodchat Shrikes and Turtle Doves were a nice consolation, and several Olive-tree Warblers were again heard. This morning our luck 'was in', with a male Masked Shrike appearing close to the minibus just as we were reboarding, showing several times allowing all to see it.

Pushing on we arrived at our lunch destination at the Green Balkan Centre at Levka, where there is a re-introduction programme for Lesser Kestrels. Arriving and disembarking we were immediately treated to nice close views of the kestrels, though a bird found circling above us turned out to be a Goshawk, not the most welcome of visitors around the colony! Before lunch we were given a short presentation the work of the centre and the scheme itself and over lunch we enjoyed views of the Lesser Kestrels around us. After lunch we said our goodbyes and continued our journey, this was short lived though with a perched Eastern Imperial Eagle causing us to stop. The bird flew off disappearing from view but we needn't have worried with a stop a bit further on revealing not one but two birds, a pair, which gave us great views both perched in a nearby field and in flight. Calandra Larks were also viewable, along with the now familiar Black-headed Buntings and Crested Larks.

Our journey continued with our next stop near Topolovgrad, where we were treated to views of good numbers of Isabelline Wheatear and another albeit distant Eastern Imperial Eagle. Several further stops were made which gave us very distant and far from ideal views of species such as Long-legged Buzzard, Booted Eagle and Montagu's Harrier with a woodland stop producing two Nuthatch. The best sighting though was a Golden Jackal, which wandered into the road in front of the bus, pausing to look as we stopped, before disappearing into the roadside undergrowth. We arrived slightly later than hoped to settle into our accommodation at Pomorie, following an excellent day in the field.

### **Tue 19th May**

Very little travelling for us today, with a visit firstly to the Pomorie saltpans before breakfast; Kentish Plover and Mediterranean Gull were new additions to the list. After breakfast our destinations were various stops at Vaya, Mandra and Atanasovsko lakes. Our first stop was near the main road overlooking the first of these. We spent some time sorting out the ID features of the two pelican species, White and Dalmatian, with a male Little Bittern also seen in flight along the reed edge. Another brief stop further along the highway got us our first Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns, with a perched adult White-tailed Eagle on a nearby raft being a real bonus. We moved on around Mandra Lake and had a brief walk across a flowering meadow in the hope of some water species. Water levels and conditions were ideal and we were soon enjoying views of several Collared Pratincoles, Garganey, Spoonbill, Ferruginous Duck and Glossy Ibis to name a few! Continuing round Mandra, we made one more stop before lunch, by a channel that runs out into the lake, where we enjoyed our first Pygmy Cormorant of the trip and a 3<sup>rd</sup> summer Caspian Gull found by Lyubo in amongst the loafing Yellow legged Gulls.

After lunch we headed on to Atanasovsko, for a slightly more leisurely finish to the day viewing the lake from the side of the information centre. The water level was relatively low, exposing large areas of mud around the edge, we scanned the area finding several Slender-billed and Little Gulls. We then walked along the path south attempting to view some of the more distant areas, though the heat haze made this difficult and Spoonbills and Little Egrets were the only birds identified with any certainty.

### **Wed 20th May**

A cloudy start today, with the brief pre-breakfast birding uneventful as the increasing wind strength made viewing difficult. Departing for our journey north, our first stop was at the northern edge of the Pomorie Saltpans. Here we spent a good hour watching the assembled waders from several viewpoints. Curlew Sandpiper and Ruff started the proceedings, with wader watching briefly interrupted by two fly-over Gull-billed Terns being pursued by two Common Terns, a useful comparison. A larger flock of waders revealed several hundred Little Stints, more Curlew Sandpipers, Dunlin and Sanderling, but best of all were four Broad-billed Sandpipers in amongst them.

We dragged ourselves away, starting our journey towards our evening destination of Kavarna. Our next stop was Poroy Reservoir where we enjoyed views of several Black Stork, Glossy Ibis, Garganey and Ruddy Shelduck. Around 50 Bee-eaters were in the area breeding in the sand bank below us and a Peregrine appeared briefly above us. We continued on, stopping for lunch at Goritza, with some very nice stuffed courgettes on the menu. Next stop was the forest itself, where we were treated to some great views of nest-box breeding Semi-collared Flycatchers. Our final stop today was at a cliff face

near Topola, just outside Kavarna, where we enjoyed views of a young Eagle Owl sat in the mouth of a small cave high up on the cliff face. The adult had to be somewhere close by and patient scanning revealed it sat in the lower branches of distant tree, undoubtedly well aware of our presence and watching us!

### **Thu 21st May**

Our next hotel's location, overlooking a large wooded valley that leads up from the sea, gave us an ideal pre-breakfast viewpoint and we started the day looking at several Golden Orioles, Cuckoo and Lesser Grey Shrike, amongst others. After breakfast, it was off to Durankulak and Shabla. Arriving at Durankulak, we made our first walk along the shore amongst the noisy and numerous Great Reed Warblers croaking from the reeds and giving great views. A very productive birding session followed with Purple and Squacco Herons, Ferruginous Ducks, Whiskered and White-winged Black Tern, Roller and our first Pied Wheatear all on show. We drove round towards the edge of Shabla lake, walking out through a large meadow. The area initially looked very quiet, but things quickly changed, with several Lesser Grey Shrikes noted on the nearby wires, then Lyubo picked out an Osprey distantly over the water. A Hobby and two Marsh Harriers followed, then a pair of Red footed Falcons, which turned out to be the forerunners for a good day for this species. A small flock of eight Rosy Starlings appeared next, though the views were frustratingly brief.

Lunch was taken by the beach, though a short walk along the edge of Shabla lake precluded this, which gave us perched views of a singing Paddyfield Warbler, a very much hoped-for species for the day. A pair of Caspian Terns, a singing Barred Warbler and several more Red-footed Falcons left us more than ready for lunch. A Black Redstart and several Red-backed Shrikes were noted during our lunch stop after which we drove to Kamen Bryag for the coastal steppe. Here we enjoyed dozens of Calandra Larks, Pied Wheatears, a Long-legged Buzzard, a larger flock of around 15 Rosy Starlings (which again unfortunately disappeared from view far too quickly!) and more Red-footed Falcons and Hobby.

Finally at the steppe at Balgarevo we searched unsuccessfully for Stone-curlews but consolation came in the form of a Tawny Pipit. Luckily a short drive along the road to a second stop revealed a pair of Stone-curlews along with some nice views of Short-toed Lark and Isabelline Wheatear.

### **Fri 22nd May**

Pre-breakfast this morning involved a short drive to Cape Kaliakra, where we explored some of the scrub area leading up to it. The wind was still quite strong, which made viewing a bit more difficult, but we still managed our first Linnets, Spotted Flycatcher, Stonechat, a flock of around 15 Alpine Swifts distantly over the cliffs and a singing Quail. After breakfast, as we did not have to leave to continue our journey until late morning, we returned to visit the Cape itself, pausing again briefly en route for some roadside Stone-curlew. A very pleasant hour or so followed at the Cape as we walked along its length to its point. Half a dozen Willow Warblers flitted through the sparse bushes on the rock face, and Pied Wheatears were present in good numbers giving great views. A Hoopoe flew along past us and ten egrets were picked up flying towards and eventually right in front of us. These turned out to be seven Great and three Little Egrets. More Alpine Swifts, a Rook, Squacco Heron and two distant Porpoises concluded our visit.

From Kaliakra, we continued west, heading to the River Danube at Srebarna Lake, stopping briefly at Senokos to view a distant flooded area and another stop for a Lesser Spotted Eagle. Lunch was taken along a quiet road near Onogur, with a variety of birds and butterflies about us. We then continued down to the dry riverbed. The walk here was great, the sort of place you could spend hours enjoying the birds and insects all around. Birds seen included Long-legged Buzzard, Short-toed Eagle, Honey-buzzard, a Raven on its nest, Black Stork, several Hoopoes and our first confiding Hawfinch (well, momentarily at least!). Dragonflies were also very active in the area with Broad-bodied Chaser, Green-eyed Hawker and Black-tailed Skimmer all noted.

At Srebarna, we had a traditional roadside stop overlooking the reeds and lake, picking out distant

Dalmatian Pelicans on the breeding Platform and several Black and Whiskered Terns, though arguably (for some) the highlight was a Thrush Nightingale singing in a dense patch of undergrowth behind us though unsurprisingly the bird remained hidden from view. We headed to the village itself making a further stop to view a small patch of overgrown water which gave us good views of Roller, Pygmy Cormorant, Glossy Ibis and Whiskered Tern, with us having to wait another day for good views of the calling Penduline Tits. Reaching Pelican Lodge at Vetren, we settled into our rooms this being our final accommodation of the trip.

### **Sat 23rd May**

A pleasant, leisurely local walk started our day, through and above the village. This produced Lesser Whitethroat, Ortolan Bunting, Wood Lark, and two singing Marsh Warblers. Our post-breakfast destination was Nova Cherna, with several stops en route, one unplanned to view a section of woodland which amazingly revealed Black Stork, Short-toed Eagle, four Honey-buzzards and two singing roadside Barred Warblers. Our second stop was a Bee-eater colony though unfortunately the birds seemed unhappy with our presence and it wasn't until we climbed back into the bus that the birds returned in any number. Our walk at Nova Cherna gave us a great range of species with highlights including a ringtail Montagu's Harrier, a nest-building and very vocal male Penduline Tit and good views of a singing Marsh Warbler. We headed onto Malak Preslavets, which was to be our lunch stop.

This is a very quiet, largely people-less area to visit and we were not disappointed with our walk and lunch. On the lake, we saw many Whiskered Terns nesting on the lily pads plus several Night Herons feeding on the edge. At the picnic site, we sat in a blizzard of poplar fluff, and ate lunch noting Spotted Flycatcher and Nuthatch in the nearby trees. A Hobby flew in causing the resident House Martins to panic and a Kingfisher called and flew across the car park above our heads. The best birds here though, especially for Jim, were the Hawfinches with a vocal, seemingly distressed pair in some trees nearby which repeatedly flew over calling and landing in full view in the tree tops.

After lunch we drove onto the small lake at Garvan, which is a favoured breeding spot for Red-necked Grebe. We weren't disappointed with at least four pairs in residence, two with young, looking stunning in their summer plumage. A bonus here was a summer-plumaged Black-necked Grebe (arguably equally stunning) plus more Whiskered Terns, three male Garganey and a Little Bittern. We finished the day with a very productive 30 minute timed watch from the jetty at Vetren looking out over the Danube River. Counts and highlights in this half hour included 79 Pygmy Cormorant, 30 Night Heron, five Spoonbill and two Glossy Ibis.

### **Sun 24th May**

A pre-breakfast walk to the jetty produced some great birds in the village: a perched Syrian Woodpecker, two singing Black Redstarts, several Hoopoes and the now familiar Red-backed Shrikes and Golden Orioles. After breakfast we packed our luggage into the bus and headed to one last destination on the edge of the lake. This was to prove a fitting finale to the trip, with a 45 minute walk giving several of the group their most hoped-for birds. First up was a pale phase Booted Eagle soaring above us. A Levant's Sparrowhawk shot past, unfortunately only glimpsed but then it or a second bird returned above us carrying prey, which finally gave everyone the views they were hoping for. Penduline Tits and two Spotted Flycatchers were also seen and as we returned to the bus a Grey-headed Woodpecker called in the tree above us flying out several minutes later allowing everyone to see it.

We then headed onto the Ferry crossing, crossed over into Romania and onto Bucharest and our destination, Henry Coanda International Airport. We arrived in good time, though finding the airport again proved challenging! It had been a great trip, with some great birds and company and after saying our goodbyes to Lyubo and Mihail who had both done terrific jobs, we entered the terminal to catch our flights home.

**Gary Elton**

**ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED***(A total of 203 species recorded by the group)***Chukar *Alectoris chukar***A single at Stari chal during our lunch stop on 17<sup>th</sup>.**Quail *Coturnix coturnix***Heard on our first day at Vakarel, a brief bird in flight on 21<sup>st</sup> and heard again on 22<sup>nd</sup> on our pre-breakfast walk at Kaliakra.**Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Five dates, in low numbers

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser***Two at Srebarna on 22<sup>nd</sup>, and three over Vetren on 24<sup>th</sup>.**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***Recorded on five dates; with 60+ seen at Vaya and elsewhere locally on 19<sup>th</sup>**Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Seen commonly at various locations around Pomorie.

**Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea***

22 adults plus 12 shelducklings were seen at Poroy Reservoir, with a pair at roadside lake later also having ducklings.

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Common in the Pomorie area.

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Noted on seven dates at all wetland sites

**Garganey *Anas querquedula***

Seen on four dates, the majority males.

**Common Pochard *Aythya ferina***

Recorded on five dates most numerous again around Pomorie.

**Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca***

Recorded on three dates with largest numbers, c. 20 at Durankulak and Shabla Lake.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Recorded in small numbers on four dates.

**Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena***

Four pairs with young at Garvan Lake.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Noted on five dates, as expected on the larger water bodies.

**Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis***

A smart breeding plumaged bird was at Garvan Lake.

**Black Stork *Ciconia nigra***Recorded on seven date several on nest sites and a maximum of four on 20<sup>th</sup>.**White Stork *Ciconia ciconia***

Seen every day; the nests near Mandra lake hosted numerous Spanish Sparrow nests

**Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus***

Seen on five dates with the largest number in flight (20) over our last stop on our final day.

**Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia***Four dates, six on 19<sup>th</sup> the highest number seen.**Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus***

Noted at four sites, all males and all in flight.

**Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax***

Seen in small numbers at various sites prior to our last full day and the following morning where good numbers were seen over and along the River Danube.

**Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides***

Five dates and always great to see, seemingly more numerous around the Srebarna area of our stay.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Seven dates at coastal and Danube wetlands

**Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea***

Three dates, with the first at Vaya and the most (four) at Durankulak Lake.

**Great Egret *Ardea alba***

Recorded on two dates, with as expected most around Srebarna, though the flock of seven at Kaliakra was the most in one group.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Six dates at all wetland sites

**White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus***

60+ at Vaya Lake, two at Durankulak Lake, and ten over our last stop on our final day.

**Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus***

20+ at Vaya Lake plus larger numbers at the breeding platforms at Srebarna with at least 27 young birds counted.

**Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus***

A single, our first, was at Mandra Lake, with larger numbers and regularly seen around the Srebarna Lake area.

**Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Eight dates in total, largely noted at coastal and Danube sites

**Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis***

A single at Pomorie with Cormorants, 3 on cliffs at Karmen Bryag and at least 12 at Cape Kaliakra on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni***

One highlight of the trip was the breeding colony near Levka, the birds we saw were seemingly all re-introduced birds.

**Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Noted daily

**Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus***

At least 25 were seen on the 21<sup>st</sup> flying low past us at times as they migrated north, and at times giving great views, a single male was also seen from Cape Kaliakra on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Hobby *Falco subbuteo***

Recorded on five dates, with a maximum of three on 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus***

The only group sighting was one at Poroy reservoir on 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus***

Seen on five dates in total, with a maximum of five on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Black Kite *Milvus migrans***

Two singles on the 17<sup>th</sup>, were followed by another single bird as we crossed into Romania on 24<sup>th</sup>.

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

A rather smart adult bird sat nicely on a nesting platform for us at Mandra Lake.

**Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus***

Two adults were seen at both Potocharka on 17<sup>th</sup> and Madjarovo on 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus***

Noted on two dates: c. 30 on 17<sup>th</sup> and c. 20 on 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus***

One at Potocharka on 18<sup>th</sup>

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

Four singles at various sites during the trip.

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

Seen on five dates at coastal sites and Srebarna

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

A very distant male was seen on the afternoon of the 18<sup>th</sup>, with a female seen at Nova Cherna on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes***

Noted on three dates: with the first two being extremely brief encounters, with us having to wait until the last morning for acceptable views.

**Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

A single on the 18<sup>th</sup> was the only one seen.

**Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis***

One over the Lesser Kestrel Colony at Levka whilst nice to see gave some cause for concern!

**Osprey *Pandion haliaetus***

A good find by Lyubo at Shabla Lake on 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

1-2 birds were seen most days.

**Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus***

Birds showing characteristics of this subspecies were noted on three dates.

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

Seen on four occasions, the best view was at Kamen Bryag.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina***

1-2 birds were seen on three days, with some nice close views had.

**Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca***

Three seen in total at two sites on 18th

**Booted Eagle *Haliaeetus pennatus***

Singles noted on two dates, with great views had of a pale phase bird on our last morning.

**Corn Crake *Crex crex***

At least six were heard on our first day in a wet meadow near Vakarel.

**Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Four dates at freshwater wetlands

**Coot *Fulica atra***

Ditto, but in larger numbers

**Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus***

Two were seen at Balgarevo on 21<sup>st</sup> with two in the same spot the next morning.

**Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

Four on our visit to Atanasovsko Lake on 19<sup>th</sup>.

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

Seen at Pomorie and Atanasovsko salt pans and then around the Durankulak and Shabla Tuzlata lakes

**Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Noted regularly on the salt pans at Pomorie.

**Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Small numbers on four dates, the daily max. being 20 on 22<sup>nd</sup> which included young birds.

**Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola***

One at Mandra Lake was the only one seen.

**Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

Two dates, max. six at the flooded area near Mandra Lake

**Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius***

Two on the Krumovitz river on 18<sup>th</sup>; singles on three dates near the coast

**Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus***

Three on our first pre breakfast walk at Pomorie salt pans were the only ones of the trip.

**Turnstone *Arenaria interpres***

Three at Pomorie and two at Durankulak

**Sanderling *Calidris alba***

Two at the Northern end of Pomorie salt pans on the morning of 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Little Stint *Calidris minuta***

Seen on three dates with the largest number c. 300 on the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> at Pomorie Salt pans.

**Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea***

Noted on four dates, with the largest number noted with the above, around 100 birds.

**Dunlin *Calidris alpina***

Only seen once, two birds accompanying the above at Pomorie.

**Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus***

Four together at Pomorie was a great find in amongst the large mixed flock of the above species.

**Ruff *Philomachus pugnax***

Around 50 in total on our last morning at Pomorie salt pans, and a single in flight at Durankulak Lake the following day.

**Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola***

Ten were hawking over fields at Mandra Lake on 19<sup>th</sup>.

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

Always nice to see with two at Atanasovsko Lake on 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus***

Around 50 on our first mornings walk on the saltpans at Pomorie, with smaller numbers noted on three other dates.

**Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus***

Three 1<sup>st</sup>-summers at Atanasovsko Lake.

**Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus***

Three dates, with a noisy flock of over 100 birds over Cape Kaliakra making an impressive sight.

**Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans***

A single 3<sup>rd</sup> summer bird at Mandra.

**Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis***

Seen daily, but obviously most common on the coast

**Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus fuscus***

At least three offshore at Kamen Bryag – also known as Baltic Gull

**Little Tern *Sternula albifrons***

Breeds at Pomorie in good numbers and seen both days, with two more seen along the River Danube on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica***

Two being harrassed by Common Terns on the Northern edge of Pomorie saltpans.

**Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia***

Two were at Shabla Lake on 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida***

Many 100s seen at the coast, with large numbers breeding on the water lilies at various sites.

**Black Tern *Chlidonias niger***

Four birds were seen at both Srebarna Lake and Nova Cherna.

**White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus***

Singles at Mandra and Durankulak Lakes.

**Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis***

Breeds at Pomorie in great numbers

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***

Six dates at coastal sites

**(Feral) Rock Dove *Columba livia***

Seen daily, but are any at Kaliakra ‘real’?

**Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

Eight dates in low numbers

**Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur***

Eight dates, appearing almost numerous at times!

**Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Seen daily

**Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus***

Seen or heard daily, most numerous at Srebarna

**Scops Owl *Otus scops***

Seen and heard at Krumovgrad, heard at Vetren, with a day calling bird also noted at Atanasovsko.

**Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo***

A young bird was our first in its cliff hole nest site at Topola near Kavarna followed by an adult sighted close by.

**Little Owl *Athene noctua***

Four in total all as we travelled on 18<sup>th</sup>.

**European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus***

Heard on both nights during our stay at Pelican Lodge, Vetren.

**Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba***

Four dates, with the best and closest being those at Cape Kaliakra.

**Common Swift *Apus apus***

Seen daily.

**European Roller *Coracias garrulus***

Seen on seven dates, with best views and highest numbers (six) on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

Two brief birds, one at Malak Preslavetz and the other along the River Danube both on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

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

Seen daily and some good views, notably at the colonies at Poroy and near Nova Cherna.

**Hoopoe *Upupa epops***

Eight dates, more often heard than seen. Several in flight plus eventually several perched birds.

**Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius***

One was heard and eventually seen at Goritza Forrest.

**Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus***

Seen or heard on six dates, though we had to wait until our last morning for the best view.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

Just one at Malak Preslavetz

**Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius***

Heard distantly on our first pre breakfast walk of the trip.

**Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***

Heard or seen on three dates

**Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus***

Heard on three dates, with one finally seen on our last morning.

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

Seen daily in amazing numbers, seemingly everywhere, at lots of sites and habitats.

**Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor***

Seen on five dates with counts of over ten on at least three of those.

**Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator***

Seen on three dates

**Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus***

A last minute male at Yerusolimovo

**Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus***

Seen daily, with some nice showy birds too.

**Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

Small numbers on six dates.

**Magpie *Pica pica***

Daily

**Jackdaw *Corvus monedula***

Daily

**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

Seen at Kamen Bryag, Cape Kaliakra and in Romania!

**Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix***

Seen daily

**Raven *Corvus corax***

Seen on six days, with a nest with young at Onogur.

**Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris***

An extremely brief calling bird at our lunch stop at Trigrad.

**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Seen and heard at Satovchka

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Seen daily.

**Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

Noted on five dates.

**Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus***

Seen on four dates near Burgas and Srebarna, often heard, with us finally getting great views of a nest building male at Nova Cherna.

**Sand Martin *Riparia riparia***

Seen on five dates, with hundreds if not thousands noted nesting on the riverbank as we crossed over to Romania.

**Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Pleasingly common and seen daily, sometimes in huge numbers as birds pushed northwards

**Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris***

Noted on four dates at inland riparian areas and cliffs

**House Martin *Delichon urbicum***

Like Swallows, very numerous and seen daily

**Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica***

Noted daily, but often only breeding birds so seen in lower numbers

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

Three family groups on two dates.

**Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra***

Noted on three dates numerous and easily seen at Levka and on the coastal steppe at Kamen Bryag

**Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla***

At least four were seen well at Balgarevo appearing on the track in front of us.

**Crested Lark *Galerida cristata***

Noted on seven dates at numerous sites.

**Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis***

Noted on five dates.

**Wood Lark *Lullula arborea***

Seen on the 17<sup>th</sup> and heard on a further three dates.

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

Several heard near Burgas on 19th

**River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis***

One heard at Studen kladenetz in what was considered unusual habitat for this species.

**Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides***

Heard distantly at Durankulak on 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus***

A noisy inhabitant of coastal and Srebarna reed beds, with some great views enjoyed by everyone.

**Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola***

One of the birds of this trip. After unsuccessfully searching for this species in breezy conditions at Durankulak Lake we were rewarded with good 'scope views of a singing bird at Shabla Lake.

**Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus***

Heard and seen at Atanasovsko and Durankulak lakes.

**Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris***

Four heard in total with one showing reasonably well at Nova Cherna.

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida***

Seen or heard on five days, the first good views at Krumovitza river

**Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum***

Seen and heard at five sites that included Potochnitza and Yerusalimovo.

**Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus***

Around six were in cliff face bushes at Cape Kaliakra.

**Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita***

Seen and heard on six dates, but few seen

**Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla***

Seen or heard virtually daily

**Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria***

Noted on four dates, a fine singer and performed its songflight well on various occasions and some nice views had.

**Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca***

Noted on three dates in low numbers during our time at Vetren.

**Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris***

Two heard at Potochnitza, with one showing very well for us.

**Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis***

Seen or heard at various sites on nine days

**Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans albistriata***

Noted on just two dates, the best being those that performed at our roadside stop near Potochnitza

**Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala***

Two males and a female at Potochnitza

**Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla***

At least one singing bird was present on our first pre-breakfast walk at Dubrash.

**Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Heard at Trigrad

**Nuthatch *Sitta europaea***

Two at the Oak wood at Golyamo Krushevo, singles at Goritza, Onogur and Malak Preslavets

**Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer***

One showed well around its nest site at the cliffs along the Krumovitza river, with a second surprise bird found by Jim at further stop further along the road.

**Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria***

A major highlight of the trip came in the form of a male singing and visiting the nest site at Trigrad

**Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla***

One heard singing at Goritza

**Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus***

The first seen by the group was at Shabla Lake (eight), with the next at Karmen Bryag (15) unfortunately flight views were the best we could do.

**Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Seen daily, noted in good numbers around Karmen Bryag.

**Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Seen daily

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Seen or heard on six dates in deciduous woodland

**Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus***

Seen around our first hotel, then at Goritza and Vetren.

**Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Like Wren, noted in damp riparian woodland at Trigrad

**Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos***

Seen and heard daily, even in the middle of towns

**Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia***

One was found singing at Srebarna Lake on 22nd

**Common Redstart**

One singing outside our first hotel and another singing outside our hotel at Kavarna.

**Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros***

Seen around our first hotel and at Trigrad on our first full day, one at Shabla Lake during our lunch break and two singing birds around the Vetren village on our last pre breakfast walk.

**Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra***

Just one at Balgarevo – most have past through by now

**European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola***

Four males on four dates.

**Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina***

Seen well at Topolovgrad, a dozen or so birds, with another seen at Balgarevo.

**Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe***

Seen in low numbers on three dates.

**Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka***

Our first at Durankulak Lake, was followed by six plus at both Kamen Bryag and Cape Kaliakra.

**[Eastern] Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca***

Seen on two dates at Dolna kula and Studen kladenetz.

**Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius***

Four near Madjarovo was a very respectable total.

**Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata***

Noted on four dates all singles other than two on our last day.

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

It is always splendid to see these and they were another highlight in the forests at Goritza. Three pairs were noted visiting their nest sites.

**Dipper *Cinclus cinclus***

Three at Trigrad including nice views of a juvenile bird.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Seen daily

**Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis***

Almost daily views of this handsome bird.

**Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus***

Seen daily

**Black-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava feldegg***

The buzzy call of Black-headed *feldegg* is the first sign of these, and we had good views at various spots, noted on seven dates.

**Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea***

Several noted along the River at Trigrad.

**White Wagtail *Motacilla alba***

Seen daily

**Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris***

At least two seen well at Balgarevo.

**Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Recorded on seven dates.

**Serin *Serinus serinus***

Singing birds were seen outside our hotel on our first pre breakfast walk and at Trigrad in the main village and at our lunch stop.

**Greenfinch *Chloris chloris***

Seen daily

**Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Likewise, seen daily

**Linnet *Linaria cannabina* –**

Small numbers were seen at Cape Kaliakra.

**Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula***

A male outside at our first hotel near Dospat

**Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes***

More often heard than seen, and we had to wait for the views we were hoping for with a seemingly distress pair showing well eventually at our lunch stop at Malak Preslavets.

**Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra***

Great views daily

**Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella***

Seen and heard on three dates inland.

**Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia***

Three singing males at the hotel near Dospat on our first morning, were followed by two more at Madjarovo.

**Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana***

Heard at our first stop near Vakarel, and then seen or heard on four subsequent dates, seemingly particularly numerous at Madjarovo

**Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus***

Noted regularly in the Arda/S. Kladenets/Krumovitz river area, also note around the Onogur valley

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

Good numbers were well established and we had great views almost daily, mostly smart males.

**Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Just one seen en route by Jim on 21<sup>st</sup>.

**MAMMALS**

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*  
 Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*  
 Brown Hare *Lepus europeus*  
 Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*  
 Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*  
 Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrelus pipistrelus*

**BUTTERFLIES**

A simple list of the 32 species seen on the trip – list follows Matt Rowlings -  
<http://www.eurobutterflies.com/gpages/speciesList.php>

Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides podalirius*  
 Large White *Pieris brassicae*  
 Small White *Artogeia rapae*  
 Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*  
 Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*  
 Berger's Clouded Yellow *Colias alfacariensis*  
 Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*  
 Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*  
 Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*  
 Large Copper *Lycaena dispar*  
 Small Blue *Cupido minimus*  
 Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*  
 Chapman's Blue *Agrodiaetus thersites*  
 Adonis Blue *Lysnadra bellargus*  
 Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*  
 Southern White Admiral *Limenitis reducta*  
 Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*  
 Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*  
 Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*  
 Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*  
 Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia*  
 Glanville Fritillary *Melitaea cinxia*  
 Knapweed Fritillary *Melitaea phoebe*  
 Lesser Spotted Fritillary *Melitaea trivia*  
 Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*  
 Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*  
 Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*  
 Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera*  
 Orbed Red-underwing Skipper *Spialia orbifer*  
 Mallow Skipper *Carcharodus alceae*  
 Small/Essex Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris /lineola*  
 Large Skipper *Ochlodes venatus*

**DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES**

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*  
 Green-eyed [Norfolk] Hawker *Aeshna isocetes*  
 Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*  
 Southern Skimmer *Orthetrum brunneum*  
 Common Bluet *Enallagma cyathigerum*  
 Azure Bluet *Coenagrion puella*

**Ornate Bluet** *Coenagrion ornatum*  
**Common Bluetail** *Ischnura heterosticta*  
**Banded Demoiselle** *Calopteryx splendens balcanica*  
**Large Red-eyed Damselfly** *Erythromma najas*  
**Broad scarlet** *Crocothemis erythraea*  
**Downy Emerald** *Cordulia aenea*