

Bulgaria: Rhodope Mountains & Black Sea Coast

Fri 16th - Sun 25th May 2014



Photos, clockwise from top right: Bird of the trip, **Wallcreeper** at Trigrad! • **Black-headed Buntings** were on territory almost everywhere • **Male Eastern Black-eared Wheatear** is another smart bird • **Male Silver-studded Blues** were quite common • **Rosy Starlings** were seen arriving in good numbers • Another special bird – **Rock Nuthatch** © Brian Small.

report compiled by tour leader:
Brian Small

Trip Diary

Tour Leaders: Brian Small and Lyubo Profirov

with Alan & Margaret Bennett, Peter & Judy Farren, Ed & Elaine Gathercole, Andrew Guest, Mac Mackereth, Martin Phillips, Roy Swallow, Jeff Wigley and Simon Yates

Our 'Grand 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, Eastern 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, managing to avoid most of the heavy rain plaguing parts of the region this year, with generally sunny weather most days. We were lucky too with the birds, the highlights too many to list in full: the Wallcreeper at Trigrad was maybe highest on the list – our patience here being rewarded with some amazingly close views as it visited the nest cavity; the Rock Nuthatch, with its subtle colours, was a fitting end to a great day in the Arda/Krumovitz rivers region; the Lesser Kestrels and Imperial Eagles at Levka and Topolovgrad – great birds and spectacular views at the establishing breeding sites; White Stork nests full with young and breeding Spanish Sparrows near the coast; Paddyfield, Great Reed and Savi's Warblers showing brilliantly in the reeds at Durankulak – being a bit later this year meant that they were very territorial and showed brilliantly; Pied Wheatears and Calandra Larks abounded on the coastal steppes; and superb views of Grey-headed Woodpecker at Vetren – the final European Woodpecker for one of the group! We had such great views of many, too, with just the Corn Crake and River Warblers not showing, though even these were so close at times you could feel the air reverberate!

Fri 16th May

A smooth, but late landing at Sofia was followed by a good transit through security and we were soon stood outside with Lyubo. Our drive to Dospat was broken by two important stops. The first was just east of Sofia at Vakarel for Corn Crake (heard only), our first Barred Warblers and nice views of Ortolan Bunting. At a brief roadside stop for refreshments near Vinigradec, we had a fine male Montagu's Harrier, Red-rumped Swallow, another Barred Warbler and Golden Oriole. Finally, as we began to climb up into the mountains, we stopped at Besaparski for Black-headed Bunting. Sadly, we were later than we had hoped, but the evening meal was good and hot.

Sat 17th May

Rising early to a cold and cloudy start, an eventful hour's birding around the hotel produced a number of interesting sights: Wood Larks, Rock and Cirl Buntings, a pair of Sombre Tits (probably at their altitudinal limit in Bulgaria), Red-backed Shrikes and Firecrest; it was also nice to see numerous Mistle Thrushes. A calling Black Woodpecker was too distant and did not show.

The start to our 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, and no doubt we would have been pleased with these views, but staying put for 15 minutes longer and it flew onto the cliff right above our heads and performed brilliantly, jostling and fluttering about the rock face, not more than four metres away at times. Quite stunning! Some found a Dipper below us, but tearing ourselves away, we made a short drive to Trigrad, our walk found more Dippers, Black Redstarts, a Willow Tit and Serins. Then followed a fine trout lunch and a long drive east.

Various stops were made along the way to Krumovgrad: near some ponds near Pamporovo - where we saw singing Black-headed Wagtail and Ortolan Bunting; at Smolyan – to change the bus to one that was more spacious and with larger windows to enjoy the views; along the Arda River – Black Storks at a nest and Glanville and Knapweed Fritillaries; before finally pulling into Krumovgrad. We had covered a lot of ground and we were tired, but not too tired to go out and watch Scops Owl right outside the hotel.



Sun 18th May

It was a surprise to awake to low cloud, but this did not dull the Nightingales from singing as we made a pre-breakfast stroll down to the river. It was quite cool and we watched a few Whitethroats and Bee-eaters perched across the river, but the best bird was the Roller, which sadly flew off into the mist.

Our day was taken up touring the local area. Firstly we had a brief roadside stop and were rewarded by a male Sardinian and Subalpine Warblers – a Lesser Grey Shrike was seen as we drove along. We then followed the track above Potochnitza for a visit to the vulture-feeding area. Jumping out the bus, in the bushes near the village we immediately heard the croaking and disjointed song of an Olive-tree Warbler. Moving down the slope towards it, we eventually managed to get it in the ‘scope – a fine if not-very-bright warbler. Also here were singing Golden Orioles and Woodchat Shrikes.

Moving a little further along the track, the open grassy patches in the oaks had numerous butterflies, including Silver-studded Blues, Queen of Spain, Knapweed and Glanville Fritillaries. The skies were full of Griffon Vultures and no sooner had Jeff indicated his desire for a Black Vulture then one flew into view; we later found a rather distant Golden Eagle. On the deck by the feeding area, an Egyptian Vulture was noted, often chased by ravens; the trees about us held Wood Lark, Short-toed Treecreeper and Eastern Subalpine Warbler.

As we descended back to the village, a stop to check another wooded valley treated us to great views of Hawfinch and Eastern Orphean Warbler – the latter feeding well-grown youngsters. At the village of Studen Kladenets we had lunch and a mooch for butterflies, then after our picnic visited the remains of the crater above the village, where we found our first Eastern Festoon butterflies and Eastern Black-eared Wheatears. The basalt cliffs held a large group of Griffons (53) and four Egyptian Vultures. Over at the Krumovitza river, we put up from a close tree a male Levant Sparrowhawk, which promptly disappeared, then watched a small colony of Bee-eaters, had good views of Eastern Olivaceous Warblers and a very showy Nightingale. A few spots of rain made the decision for us, so we left for another section of the valley, returning to Krumovgrad to reach it.

Along the road, we saw at least three Rollers, one of which perched long enough for a few distant photos, and good numbers of Lesser Grey Shrikes. A brief walk along the road and we could hear a Quail calling close by; a quick scan revealed that the top part of the bird could in fact be seen and it then offered most their first ever chance to see a Quail, let alone a singing one, as it threw its head back as it asked us to wet its lips. This part of the valley offered us the best (only?) chance of finding Rock Nuthatch, but our first attempt was not successful, though two lithe falcons were most interesting: one turned out to a pale phase Eleonora's Falcon and the other a Hobby. Then the heavens opened and we retreated rapidly to the bus, then used this opportunity to drive to the end of the track and turn round. With good timing, as we got back to the nuthatch site, the rain stopped and we gave it another go, and again with patience (and after a brief panicky moment when only the leader had seen it) we managed to track it down and enjoyed some lovely views of one bird just below us on the rocks. Strolling back, some paused to watch a couple of Chukars; though we had stayed longer than planned the birds we had seen were excellent.



Mon 19th May

With a good drive ahead of us, we had a 7am breakfast and prompt departure. Our first stop was a scheduled one, hoping to pick up Blue Rock Thrush at Studen Kladanets dam, which we did as it perched below us on a pylon. With Hawfinches constantly calling, flying past and occasionally perched it was tempting to move on, but an Eastern Bonelli's Warbler seen briefly before it disappeared up the slope, began to sing. With careful directions to where it was perched in the open we all got views of it as it trilled, but it was better in the 'scope.

Pushing on, we stopped briefly at a few places – Booted Eagle at one – before eventually reaching Levka via a detour for fuel. At the Green Balkan Centre, there is a re-introduction programme for Lesser Kestrels and was too good an opportunity to miss. Right by the bus were numerous Lesser Kestrels flying about and perched – most were colour ringed and part of the Spanish birds transported here, but we were lucky to see one of the two local birds not ringed – a very smart second calendar-year male. Simon from the trust accompanied us to a local spot – after a coffee – where we enjoyed great views of Isabelline Wheatears, Calandra Larks, a hybrid Spanish x House Sparrow (identical to Italian Sparrow), but best of all Eastern Imperial Eagle – high but still spectacular. Lunch back at the centre followed a fascinating talk by Simon, and views of a number of nesting birds via the monitors.

As time had passed by, we intended to take a short cut towards Topolovgrad, but the roads were closed so we had to return towards Svilengrad, and take the old road east past Yerusalimovo. This proved serendipitous (despite again putting us behind schedule) as it produced a pair of Masked Shrikes in the oaks by the road. We then made an important stop near Topolovgrad for Eastern Imperial Eagle and were treated to a bird found by Lyubo feeding atop a tree stump, whilst another over a hillside soared higher and higher in no time at all; several Lesser Spotted Eagles were seen en

route. The day pushed on and we managed to get to the hotel at Pomorie with time enough for a small group to check out the salt pans behind the hotel, where a flock of 1000+ Whiskered Terns were noted distantly.

Tue 20th May

A day spent locally, visiting firstly the Pomorie salt pans before breakfast (a little quiet apart from our first Turnstones), but after breakfast doing the rounds of Vaia, Mandra and Atanasovsko lakes. At our first stop near the main road overlooking Vaia Lake, we spent some time sorting out the features of the two pelican species: White and Dalmatian – seeing over 200 of the former on and over the lake and 23 of the latter. In the reeds we found Great Reed Warbler singing and several Little Bitterns flushed from the reed edge. However, the highlight was the Honey Buzzards that flew low north over us, with the light reflecting up onto the underside we were even able to sex them. A couple of Purple Herons were seen here and at the next stop by the garage, as were several calling Penduline Tits, a male of which was eventually found high in a willow.

It was a warm day, with the sun strong, so another brief stop by the highway was made. Here we saw good numbers of Whiskered Terns, Ferruginous Ducks and our first Pygmy Cormorants. On the electricity pylons large numbers of Cormorants had made their nests. We moved round Mandra lake and had a brief walk across a flowering meadow in the hope of some water species, but the high water levels meant we were unlucky; we did however hear our first Marsh Warbler, but despite a good effort it was only glimpsed. Continuing round Mandra, we made one more stop before lunch, by a channel that runs out into the lake, and at last saw Marsh Warbler, more Little Bitterns showed well, but the River Warbler that sang strongly, sadly was only noted when it dropped out of the bush disturbed by a Great Reed Warbler. Norfolk Hawkers and Blue Emperors were also noted.

Our final stop before lunch was for a fine White Stork nest that seemed alive with two young and Spanish Sparrows. A picnic lunch was taken at a restaurant, with ice creams to follow (violet flavour for some...), then back towards Burgas. As we entered the town we had another stop at the causeway and got good views of Little Ringed Plovers but it was rather hot. Skirting round the town we finally had our last stop at the northern edge, where a couple of Cattle Egrets were seen. Weighing up whether to chase after some reported Collared Pratincoles, we opted instead for the easier Atanasovsko for some waders.

By the information centre, we checked out the Spoonbills and a first-summer Mediterranean Gull landed, but the best bird was a Caspian Tern that flew over calling. Following the ditch south we searched for a view of the wader flocks we could see in the heat haze, but after a while some gave up and returned, whilst other intrepid birders marched on. Those that gave up found two Broad-billed Sandpipers and had views of Curlew Sandpipers and three *limosa* Black-tailed Godwits; those that continued saw the same but from a different angle, plus Black-headed Wagtails. As it had been a hot day, we ended early and returned to the hotel – a brief check of the sea produced some very distant Black-throated Divers, but such were the views that nobody really counted them.

Wed 21st May

Another sunny day dawned, but the brief pre-breakfast walk was uneventful. Departing north, our first stop was at the northern Pomorie salt pans, where we spent a good hour watching the waders and several Rollers chasing about on the wires. A close flock of waders was made up of Little Stints, Dunlin, Sanderling, but best of all three Broad-billed Sandpipers. Much better views than yesterday allowed us to really appreciate the features that differentiate the species from other waders – even the broad bill. A Ruff was noted in the distance, as were several Collared Pratincoles hawking for insects from a field. Raptors were present in the form of Lesser Spotted Eagle and a young Peregrine.



Our next stop was at Poroy, but not before we had noted 19 Rollers in total on the roadside wires. The old sand workings have been made into a motorbike track and so we only managed poor views of the Bee-eater colony and Isabelline Wheatears were rather timid; once the bikes started to go round we left. At the nearby woods, we searched for some key species, but sadly made do with Hawfinch and a rather large Blotched Snake *Elaphe sauromates* – one of the largest snakes in Europe – which reared up at Andrew! We left, not because of the snake, which was ace, but because we needed to get to our lunch stop in time.

Lunch was taken at Goritza, with stuffed courgettes (augmented by some with chicken and roast potatoes), then at the forest itself we were treated to several Semi-collared Flycatchers around both man-made and natural nest sites – the three males were two adult and a first-summer, the latter showing browner wings and less white. A Wryneck was seen, mostly in flight, several Hawfinches included young, Nuthatches and finally a Short-toed Treecreeper for Roy. As we approached Varna, a loud bang signalled a blow-out on one of the rear tyres, luckily right by a lay-by into which we pulled. Whilst Kamen put his mind to changing the tyre, we had a nice walk along a quiet road, where we saw Turtle Doves and Golden Orioles, but best of all was the superb Southern Frestoon close by the road – and not at all flighty. As we returned, Kamen had done a sterling job in fixing the tyre and so we pushed on through Varna, which was packed with traffic, and we had to forgo our stop at Topola and eventually arrived in good time at Kavarna, and a welcome beer (for some) before we got to our rooms. That evening we celebrated Mac's birthday with a fine cake!

Thu 22nd May

An hour's stand at the hotel produced a few birds including a fine Red-backed Shrike, Golden Orioles, Syrian Woodpeckers, but best of all a flock of 25 Rosy Starlings that whipped past up the valley below us. After breakfast it was up to Durankulak and Shabla and what a day we had - with so many great birds and so much excitement it is hard to know where to begin! Arriving at Durankulak, we made our first walk along the shore amongst noisy marsh frogs and numerous Great Reed Warblers also croaking from the reeds. Being later in May this year, the reeds were even more busy with *Acrocephalus* warblers than normal and we soon found our first Paddyfields singing and chasing about as they established their territories – a number of great views were had through the 'scope and bins. A Savi's Warbler did its best to pull our attention away, and again we had some ace views. Squacco Herons, Garganey, Ferruginous Ducks, White-tailed Eagles all vied for attention, as did the Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow and terns passing offshore; along the pebbly beach we picked out

Curlew Sands, Ringed and Grey Plovers; however perhaps most pleasing was the young male Red-footed Falcon that passed north over the reeds. Just as we were about to leave a fine male Golden Oriole was picked out in the holiday camp.

Passing Lesser Grey Shrikes sat on roadside wires and bushes was hard, as we drove round toward the southern end of the lake, stopping for ice creams and a small flock of Rosy Starlings, before ending up having a quick walk before lunch at Shabla. The first birds of note were at least five Red-footed Falcons and two Hobbies catching dragonflies above us, but actually apart from the butterflies, the meadows were quiet – though we had excellent views of a Tawny Pipit trying hard to be a Tree Pipit as it perched quietly on a branch. The best of the butterflies were the Cardinal Fritillaries, but also noted several skippers and Adonis Blues.



Lunch was taken by the beach, where a small sandy cliff was occupied by nesting Bee-eaters – making the photographers happy! The eating was punctuated by various species of tern as they moved north, but the best was a group of Gull-billed Terns and the occasional Caspian Gull – including very distinct third-calendar year and adult. Our walk along the edge of Shabla Tuzlata produced even more marsh terns, wildfowl with yet more Ferruginous Ducks, and a few distant waders. Still more was to come as we drove to Karmen Bryag for the coastal steppe, with hundreds of Calandra Larks (the best site I have ever been for them) and our target species Pied Wheatears – with both adult and immature males in larger numbers than females (presumably just arriving). At the information centre one male posed nicely by the portaloo – Jeff had good views! Finally at the steppe at Bolgarevo we searched unsuccessfully for Stone-curlews, but contented ourselves with superb Isabelline Wheatears, and Short-toed Larks, including many young.

We returned to the hotel and gave the choice to those that wanted to pop out for a long shot at Eagle Owls. Not all came out, but though we did not see the owls we had good views of Alpine Swifts and a Long-legged Buzzard.

Fri 23rd May

As we did not have to leave until late morning, we spent the first part of the day at Cape Kaliakra, the one important spot we did not visit yesterday. The weather seemed a bit 'iffy' and we had one or two light showers, but actually this probably helped as there seemed to be an increased chance of migrants.

Arriving at the car park, and the first birds were Alpine Swifts bombing around the headland, often below us, giving yet more super views. Around the archaeological site, Northern Wheatears had clearly bred and we also saw fair numbers of Pied Wheatears in a variety of plumages. A Lesser Grey Shrike showed well and at least two Marsh Warblers were singing; an Icterine Warbler flushed past the group only to disappear, a couple of Willow Warblers were noted, and Bee-eaters passed by. A young Peregrine was noticed above us, perhaps attracted by the migrants, and good numbers of Rosy Starlings flew back and forth, each time the flock seemed to get bigger – analysis of a photo of the largest flock showed over 190 birds! Offshore, fair numbers of Shags came past, and we found that the gull flocks were being attracted to pods of Bottlenose Dolphins feeding offshore. It was whilst scanning these that we saw our first Yelkouan Shearwaters; though not all saw the first one or two, eventually we managed to get 'scope views for all as small parties past the cape. A pale phase Arctic Skua was also seen. Perhaps the most interesting bird was a 'tack'ing *Acrocephalus* warbler, which flushed over the headland and then was seen very briefly on the rocks before vanishing...

Back from the headland itself, we had an exciting walk along the road, seeing and hearing good numbers of migrants: a young male Redfoot, Barred, Marsh and Great Reed Warblers and Whitethroats, Whinchat, Golden Oriole and at last a Hoopoe perched. Adonis Blues skimmed along the road, but as we returned to the vehicle a frustrating River Warbler was singing very close to us, but try as we might we could not see it – the air almost shimmered as it sang so close and so loudly.

From Kaliakra, we continued west, through a number of showers heading to the River Danube at Srebarna lake, going via Balchik and Dobric. 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, where we flushed a Lesser Spotted Eagle from the road and watched a Long-legged Buzzard on the cliff.

At Srebarna, we had a traditional roadside stop overlooking the reeds and lakes, picking out distant Pygmy Cormorants and Whiskered Terns, before heading to the village itself. The small patch of overgrown water gave us good views of Glossy Ibis and Pygmy Cormorants sunning themselves, Squacco Herons and Little Bitterns. A brief spell of excitement ensued when a Grey-headed Woodpecker called above us, then we had views of first one then two together, though we were momentarily confused when a Green Woodpecker came in to join them. After an ice cream and coffee our final stop produced a Penduline Tit's nest, whilst Savi's Warblers reeled in the distance. Reaching the Pelican Lodge at Vetren, we settled into our rooms – Scops Owls were heard at night, as were Golden Jackals.

Sat 24th May

A hot and sunny day and one to take it (relatively) easy. A pre-breakfast walk for some above the village produced Lesser Whitethroat, Ortolan Bunting and Wood Lark, then later we head for the northern edge of Srebarna lake for a gentle 3km walk. Looking out over the lake, there was great activity as Dalmatian Pelicans were breeding on the platforms; Night Herons, Glossy Ibis, Purple and Grey Herons. Spoonbills, Little and Great Egrets, cormorants and Whiskered Terns, were all seen in flight above the breeding colonies. Savi's and Great Reed Warblers and Cuckoos sang, and Penduline

Tits called constantly below us. Lyubo picked out a Red-necked Grebe, which was excellent spotting. The walk had also produced some interesting butterflies, including Common Glider, Freyer's Purple Emperor and Freyer's Fritillary; dragonflies too were interesting with many Downy Emeralds, Lesser Emperor and Yellow-winged Darters noted.

After a drink in Srebarna, we headed to Malak Preslavets for lunch. This is a very quiet area to visit and we were not disappointed with our walk and lunch. Along the road by the lake, we saw many Whiskered Terns nesting on the lily pads (some with eggs), in the trees we found a Middle Spotted Woodpecker and a smart singing Icterine Warbler, but a Thrush Nightingale failed to perform for the group having been heard briefly – however, we later heard it close by and some even saw it quite well, though it was elusive. At the picnic site, we sat in a blizzard of poplar fluff, ate lunch and were deafened by a Great Reed Warbler in song close-by – yet another heard-only Marsh Warbler was also noted! Just as we finished lunch a Black Woodpecker called, then showed well in the poplars allowing us to see its white eye and red crown – superb. We returned early for a bit of packing.

Sun 25th May

A brief pre-breakfast walk produced some great birds in the village – Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, Syrian Woodpeckers and Lesser Whitethroats, but we had a bit of travelling to do, so after breakfast left promptly. Driving west we first headed for the Bee-eater colony then on to Nova Cerna, an old area of fish ponds, where we had a good hour's walk. Here we found yet more Marsh Warblers (at least four) and our last new species of the trip, White-winged Black Tern. Freyer's Purple Emperors typically enjoyed landing on droppings and we also saw our first Large Coppers – so bright they burned the retina!

Sadly timed pressed on, and after an unintentional tour of central Bucharest and almost a visit to the wrong airport, we made it to the Henry Coanda International airport for our flight home. We had been amazingly lucky with the weather considering what had been going on about us; we had seen (and heard) some fantastic birds – each of you will have your own highlights; we had a good number of laughs, too, but it was time to say farewell.

Brian Small

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(A total of 213 species recorded by the group)

Chukar *Alectoris chukar*

Four Krumovitza valley on 18th

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix* –

Twos seen on three dates

Quail *Coturnix coturnix* –

Seen and heard well at Krumovitza; heard on 22nd

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* -

Four dates, in low numbers

Greylag Goose *Anser anser* -

Up to 12 at Srebarna

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* -

Recorded on seven dates; with 80+ seen at Vaia and elsewhere on 20th

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* -

Seen commonly at various southern coastal locales

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* -

Nine at Srebarna on 24th; a pair with 12 shelducklings on a roadside lake later

- Gadwall *Anas strepera*** -
Common in the Burgas and Srebarna areas
- Wigeon *Anas penelope*** -
Five at Vaia and two Atanasovsko on 20th
- Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*** -
Noted on six dates at all wetland sites
- Shoveler *Anas clypeata*** -
See near Burgas on 20th
- Garganey *Anas querquedula*** -
Seen on three dates, but the best views were at Durankulak on 22nd
- Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*** -
Recorded on four dates at sites near Pomorie and Srebarna
- Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*** -
Good numbers this year, with the first at Mandra on 20th
- Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*** -
25+ past Cape Kaliakra
- Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*** -
Two dates near the coast, but in small numbers
- Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*** -
One nice summer-plumaged bird at Srebarna
- Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*** -
Six dates, with 20 at two sites, Pomorie and Srebarna – also on sea at Durankulak
- Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*** -
Just four dates, the first at Asenovgrad, and in low numbers
- White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*** -
Seen every day; the nests near Mandria lake on 20th hosted numerous Spanish Sparrow nests
- Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*** -
Up to ten around the Burgas lakes on 20th; 25+ at Srebarna
- Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*** -
Three dates, but in quite small numbers – 14 at Atanasovsko the best
- Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*** -
Noted on six dates, the first at Vaia and Mandra on 20th
- Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*** -
The first en route on 17th, then five dates in variable numbers at Vaia, Atanasovsko, Kavarna, Srebarna, R. Danube
- Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*** -
Five dates and always great to see; daily max. of 30 on 20th
- Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*** -
Nine dates at coastal and Danube wetlands
- Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*** -
Four dates, with the first at Vaia and the most 10+ seen on at Srebarna
- Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis***
Two at northern Mandra lake on 20th
- Great Egret *Ardea alba*** -
Seen on three days, but in low numbers
- Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*** -
Seven dates at all wetland sites
- White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*** -
300+ at Burgas on 20th and 30 at Srebarna on 24th
- Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*** -
Six dates at sites near Burgas on 20th then many at the breeding platforms at Srebarna – 150+

- Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*** –
First seen at sites near Bourgas and at Srebarna
- Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*** –
Noted at coastal and Danube sites
- Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*** –
At least five at Cape Kaliakra on 23rd
- Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni***
A highlight of the trip was the breeding colony near Levka – with most ringed reintroduced birds, we saw one young male that was local
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*** –
Noted daily
- Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*** –
The first, a 2nd calendar male, was seen at Durankulak on 22nd, then five at Shabla
- Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora***
One at Krumovitza river on 18th
- Hobby *Falco subbuteo*** -
Five dates, the first with the Eleonora's (above) but the best at Shabla
- Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*** –
Two young birds at Pomorie and Cape Kaliakra
- Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*** -
Seven dates in total, but in low numbers – ace views at Vaia
- Black Kite *Milvus migrans*** –
Noted on just two dates: Potochnitza and en route the next day
- White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*** –
Two seen 20th at Mandria lake and one at Durankulak
- Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*** –
Five at Potochnitza
- Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*** –
Noted on three dates: 50+ at Potochnitza
- Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus***
Two at Potochnitza on 18th
- Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*** –
Three dates in small numbers – good views at Mandra
- Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*** –
Seen on six dates at coastal sites and Srebarna
- Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*** –
A fine adult at Vinogradec and a female at Kamen Bryag
- Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus***
A superb immature male at Kamen Bryag flew across the steppe past the bus
- Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*** –
Noted on three dates: pr and single m along Krumovitza river; fm and then a superb male at Kavarna found by Simon
- Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*** -
Singles noted on three dates and only three birds seen
- Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*** -
One dropped past the bus near Studen Kladenets – a brief but exciting moment
- Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*** –
Seen every day in generally low numbers
- Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*** –
Seen on four dates, again in low numbers – the best at Topola and Onogur
- Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*** –
Recorded on five days usually in ones or two, but five on 19th

- Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*** –
Three seen at two sites on 18th
- Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*** –
An adult near Potochnitza
- Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*** –
Singles noted at four sites on three dates
- Corn Crane *Crex crex***
Heard at very close range on 16th, but apart from grass moving never seen
- Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*** –
Four dates at freshwater wetlands
- Coot *Fulica atra*** –
Ditto, but in larger numbers
- Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***
Up to six on the beach at Pomorie
- 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 on all salt pans
- Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*** –
Small numbers on six dates, the daily max. being three
- Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*** –
Two on the beach at Durankulak and two at Shabla
- Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*** –
Two dates, mostly singles apart from c. 10 at Shabla
- Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*** –
Two on the Krumovitza river on 18th; low numbers of three dates near the coast
- Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*** –
Three days near Burgas, the best being at Pomorie
- Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa*** –
Just three at Atanasovsko
- Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*** –
Three at Pomorie and two at Durankulak
- Sanderling *Calidris alba*** –
Two at Atanasovsko and four at Pomorie, then two on the beach at Durankulak on 10th
- Little Stint *Calidris minuta*** –
Good numbers near the coast, with many noted at Atanasovsko, Pomorie and Shabla
- Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*** –
Up to 30 at Atanasovsko on 20th and five shared between Durankulak and Shabla
- Dunlin *Calidris alpina*** –
Noted on three dates, with fine summer plumaged birds, perhaps of the long-billed race *centralis*, at Atanasovsko and Pomorie
- Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*** –
Two at Atanasovsko and three the next day at Pomorie – one of the birds of the trip
- Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*** –
A female at Pomorie and two at Shabla, and that was it!
- Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*** –
Only seen near Pomorie, where ten were hawking over fields on 21st
- Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans***
Four seen at Shabla on 22nd: a 1st-summer, two 2nd-summers and an adult
- Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*** –
Seen daily, but obviously most common on the coast

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Two off Cape Kaliakra around dolphin pods

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* –

Four dates near the coast and at Srebarna

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* –

Four dates, but in relatively low numbers

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* –

Always nice to see, so the two rising to three at Pomorie were pleasing – an adult and two 1st-summers

Little Gull *Larus minutus* –

Adult and 1st-summer at Vaia

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* –

Breeds at Pomorie in good numbers – much more than official figures

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* –

Five passed Shabla as we had lunch on 22nd

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* –

One seen twice at Atanasovsko and one offshore at Durankulak

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* –

Many 100s seen at the coast

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* –

A pair breeding at Nova Cherna

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* –

Breeds at Pomorie in great numbers

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* –

Five 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* –

Nine dates and with small flocks at several sites; a daily max. of c. 25

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 and Vetren

Little Owl *Athene noctua* –

Just two: singles at Studen Kladanets and Dimchovo

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* –

Four dates, with the best by far being those at Cape Kaliakra, where they swept around us noisily at very close range just below us

Common Swift *Apus apus* –

Seen daily

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* –

Noted at the first hotel and one at Kavarna

European Roller *Coracias garrulus* –

Seen on seven dates, with the first at Krumovgrad and the max being 19 on 21st – always nice birds to see and hard to drive past!

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* –

Seen and heard on three dates

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, often in flight en route, but finally found perched at Cape Kaliakra

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Seen and heard at Goritza on 21st

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius* –

Heard at Goritza but seen well at Malak Preslavets

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* –

Seen on seven dates, the best at Vetren

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* –

Four dates and in low numbers

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* –

Seen at Malak Preslavets

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* –

Heard or seen on five dates

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* –

Heard on three dates, but two seen at Srebarna - for which Jeff ran!

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* –

Seen daily in amazing numbers at lots of sites and habitats

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* –

Seen on eight dates with counts of over ten for five dates – a very smart bird

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* –

Seen on six dates

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* –

As usual only noted at our site near Yerusalimovo – a pair

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* –

Seen daily

Jay *Garrulus glandarius* -

Daily

Magpie *Pica pica* -

Daily

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* -

Daily

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* –

Seen around Dobric, where they breed – and Bucharest

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* –

Seen daily

Raven *Corvus corax* –

Seen on six days, often near cliffs inland

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*

One at Trigrad village

Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris* –

Always good to see, with a pair on our first morning, then singles on two dates after

Coal Tit *Periparus ater* –

Seen and heard at Sutovchka

Great Tit *Parus major* –

Seen daily, often nesting in strange places

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* –

Noted on three dates only, with the best views at Goritza

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* –

Seen on five dates near Burgas and Srebarna, often located by call; several nests were seen

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* –

Seen on just four dates, but not in high numbers

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 low numbers

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* –

Just one group near Srebarna – at least ten juveniles

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* –

Several at Levka. Another amazing Bulgarian spectacle is the many that breed on the coastal steppe near Kamen Bryag, where males wear themselves out chasing around to establish territories, seemingly from every available perch; seen on two dates

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* –

Noted on two dates on coastal steppe near Kavarna; seen well at Bolgarevo, where many young birds were seen – a great breeding season

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* –

Noted on six dates in low numbers

Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis* –

Noted almost daily

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea* –

Seen on six dates, with the best views at Vetren

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* –

Heard near Burgas on 20th

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*

Two heard: one at Mandra was despite careful searching only glimpsed when it dropped to ground; the other at Cape Kaliakra was so close the air vibrated, but still no view

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* –

Seen and heard at Durankulak and Shabla on 22nd and also heard at Srebarna

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* -

A noisy inhabitant of coastal and Srebarna reed beds

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* –

One of the birds of this trip; we saw c. 10 different birds and heard others at Durankulak

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* –

Seen or heard at coastal reed bed sites and Srebarna

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* –

Despite recording this species on six days, they were largely heard only, with birds seen at Cape Kaliakra and 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 Potochnitza and Yerusalimovo

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* –

One seen at Cape Kaliakra and another singing at Malak Preslavets

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* –

Seen on two dates in very low numbers

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* –

Seen and heard on four dates, but few seen

- Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*** –
A single singing bird at Studen Kladenets
- Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*** –
Seen or heard daily
- Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*** –
One of the first birds seen on the trip near Vakarel - a fine singer and performed its song-flight well on various occasions, but just three dates
- Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*** –
Noted on four dates in low numbers
- Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*** –
Heard and seen on two dates, with the best being the pair feeding well-grown young at Potochnitza on 18th
- 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 Potochnitza
- Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*** –
It was a surprise to find a nice male inland at Potochnitza
- Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus***
Two juveniles at Durankulak
- Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*** –
As usual in pine forests in the western Rhodopes
- Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*** –
Seen or heard at Trigrad
- Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*** –
Four at Gotitza, two at Onogur and two at Malak Preslavets
- Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer*** –
One showed brilliantly at the cliffs along the Krumovitza river
- 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 at Goritza
- Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus***
The first seen by the group was at Kavarna on 22nd, but then 50 more were seen at various places later that day; the next day produced over 200 flying past and over Cape Kaliakra
- Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*** -
Seen daily, in huge numbers near the coast
- Blackbird *Turdus merula*** –
Seen daily
- Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*** –
Seen or heard on six dates in deciduous woodland
- Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*** –
Seen in good numbers at the first hotel, then at Goritza and Srebarna
- 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 Malak Preslavets on 22nd
- Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*** –
Seen on just one date at Trigrad

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* –

Just one at Cape Kaliakra – most have past through by now

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* –

Noted on just four dates in low numbers

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* –

Another special bird, and we enjoyed our first views at Levka and those at Bolgarevo

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* –

Seen in low numbers on four dates, with fledgling at Cape Kaliakra

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* –

Superb views were had at Kamen Bryag and Kaliakra, the first flushing from the road in front of us. When seen well though this is a very smart bird!

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

Seen on two dates at Studen Kladenets; another very fine bird indeed, arguably better than Pied...

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* –

One male seen distantly at the Krumovitza River, but was trumped the next day by views at Studen Kladenets

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* –

Noted on five dates in low numbers

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, the first male being a 1st-summer bird, but the other two were adults.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* –

Just two at Trigrad

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* –

Seen daily

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* –

Almost daily views of this handsome bird, with excellent ones at Levka

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* –

Seen daily

Dunnock *Prunella modularis* –

Heard only at Trigrad

Blue-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava* –

Various forms seen and heard on eight dates, but Blue-headed *flava* or *thunbergi* types seen and heard

Black-headed Wagtail *Motacilla feldegg*

The buzzy call of Black-headed *feldeggs* is the first sign of these, and we had good views at various spots

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* –

Noted on just two dates

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* –

Seen daily

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* –

A grand total of just five on three dates, the first was in a ploughed field as we watched Imperial Eagles; that at Shabla perched in a tree for a while

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* –

Heard only, but the singing bird at Goritza was almost seen...

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* –

Seen daily

Serin *Serinus serinus* –

Only seen at Trigrad

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* –

Seen daily

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* –

Likewise, seen daily

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* –

Noted in low numbers on six dates in open areas

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* -

A pair at our first hotel near Dospat

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* –

‘Monster’ views of this bird on seven dates, with recently fledged birds at Goritza

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* –

Great views daily

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* –

Seen and heard on three dates inland, the first at Vakarel

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* –

It was nice to see a pair at the hotel near Dospat on our first morning

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* –

Seen at our first stop near Vakarel, and then on five subsequent dates

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* –

Noted on three dates in the Arda/S. Kladents/Krumovitza river area

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* -

Good numbers were well established and we saw great views almost daily – the males are especially smart as they perch out and project their distinct and simple song

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* –

Just one at Durankulak on 12th; eastern birds have different plumage and larger, bulbous bills

BUTTERFLIES

A simple list of the 52 species seen on the trip

Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides podalirius*

Southern Festoon *Zerynthia polyxena*

Eastern Festoon *Zerynthia cerisyi*

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Southern Small White *Artogeia manni*

Krueper’s Small White *Artogeia kruperii*

Eastern Dappled White *Euchloe ausonia*

Eastern Bath White *Pontia edusa*

Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*

Berger's Clouded Yellow *Colias alfacariensis*

Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow *Colias erate*

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Eastern Wood White *Leptidea duponcheli*

Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeus*

Large Copper *Lycaena dispar*

Sooty Copper *Lycaena tityrus*

Silver-studded Blue *Plebejus argus*

Idas Blue Plebejus idas
Mazarine Blue *Cyaniris semiargus*
Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*
Chapman's Blue *Agrodiaetus thersites*
Adonis Blue *Lysnadra bellargus*
Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*
Freyer's Purple Emperor *Apatura metis*
Peacock *Inachis io*
Common Glider *Neptis sappho*
Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*
Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*
Large Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros*
Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*
Comma *Polygonum c-album*
Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*
Cardinal Fritillary *Argynnis pandora*
Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia*
Glanville Fritillary *Melitaea cinxia*
Freyer's Fritillary *Melitaea arduinna*
Knapweed Fritillary *Melitaea phoebe*
Spotted Fritillary *Melitaea didyma*
Woodland Ringlet *Erebia medusa*
Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*
Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*
Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*
Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera*
Marbled Skipper *Carcharodus lavatherae*
Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*
Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus amoricanus*
Orbed Red-underwing Skipper *Spialia orbifer*
Mallow Skipper *Carcharodus alceae*
Large Skipper *Ochlodes venatus*

DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES

Small Pincertail *Onychogomphus forcipatus*
Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*
Green-eyed [Norfolk] Hawker *Aeshna isoceles*
Blue Emperor *Anax imperator*
Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope*
Dainty Bluet *Coenagrion scitulum*
Common Bluetail *Ischnura heterosticta*
Blue Featherleg *Platycnemis pennipes*
Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens balcanica*
Dark Spreadwing *Lestes macrostigma*
Common Winter Demoiselle *Sympecma fusca*
Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma viridulum*
Yellow-winged Darter *Sympetrum flaveolum*
Downy Emerald *Cordulia aenea*