

Birdwatching trip in Bulgaria: 15-19 July 2016

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Shortly after we took our bins out and cameras ready we had two young Saker Falcons playing together. A few minutes later three Ravens turned up and chased the falcons away. Then a Short-toed Eagle stopped over the hillside and hovered for a while. Wow, What a start of our new birdwatching trip in Bulgaria!

Day 1

The focus of the trip would be the birds of the Western and Eastern Rhodope mountains in Bulgaria. I picked up my guests from Plovdiv and we headed westwards towards Pazardzhik hills where we were going to spend the morning.

We continued along a quiet lane stopping now and then and saw our first Lesser Grey Shrikes which were rather noisy and active. A big group of 20+ Grey Partridges walked right by the road giving us great views and photographic opportunities. For the next half an hour we logged Isabelline, Northern and Black-eared Wheatears. A Little Owl sat nicely for us to enjoy on a concrete wall and a Long-legged Buzzard sat quiet for a while when it dropped on the floor to get a prey. Soon we exhausted the place and moved location.

En route to the next place we stopped for a Levant Sparrowhawk and for a pair of Bee-eaters which was actively feeding young presenting superb photography opportunities. Shortly after this we stopped for a short walk towards a little water sink in the middle of a dry field which was attracting mainly common birds but great to see. When walking we had a brief view of a Masked Shrike, good views of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and couple of Hoopoes showed well for us. At the water sink we got a few Ortolan Buntings, Black-headed Buntings and a few finches.

The sky darkened and soon we were feeling rain drops on ourselves. The clouds did go around us though so we did not get any rain although the streets further down the road were wet. It was already late in the afternoon so we headed for lunch. We sat in a nice restaurant by the riverside in the town of Krichim. After a wonderful meal we headed to our next stop.

This time we were not after birds but Chamois. The Balkan Chamois wonders around the hills not far from our hotel for the next two nights we wanted to give it a try and scan the cliffs. The first couple of stops were without result but at last we got a wonderful animal sitting calmly and cooling down on a nice flat rock right under the forest. What a wonderful view! We spend a few minutes enjoying it and headed to our hotel for the night. We had a pleasant meal and counted a total of 60 species for the day. Nice start of the trip.

Day 2

The day was fairly quiet bird wise. Our main target for the day was the Wallcreeper. We went out for a walk before breakfast and logged a few new birds for my guests. Some of the birds we saw were Serin, Blackcap, Mistle Thrush, Red-backed Shrike, Siberian Chiffchaff and a few other common birds.

After breakfast we headed to the gorge where we were going to spend the morning searching for the Wallcreeper. We did stop at the usual place and spend an hour or so but in vain. No bird turned up other than some Crag Martins and Alpine Swifts so we changed places. At the next spot there were no Wallcreepers either but we heard a Nutcracker. The number of people started growing so it was more and more challenging hearing bird calls. That is why we decided to take a side trail away from people where we saw a pair of Crested Tit and Bullfinches were calling here and there.

The views from the trail were superb. We spend some time along the trail and by the cliffs but in vain. Soon we decided to go back to the hotel for lunch and rest. In the late afternoon we did another walk in the same area but with no results. The day wasn't very productive but we still counted about 30 species.

Day 3

The day was very productive photography wise. We started early from our lodge to have more time for stops along the road. The weather was fairly chilly but we were keen for more birding. Our first stop for birding was high up in the mountains to search for birds from the conifer area. Our main targets were the Nutcracker, Ring Ouzel, Firecrest and Crossbills. Birds were pretty active and it did not take us long to locate our first Firecrest right by the car. So we enjoyed superb views and managed to take some great pictures.

About 50 m down the track we logged the Nutcracker. Although we heard it in the previous day we could not see it but now it showed well sitting on the top of a pine tree as they usually do. Shortly after this i heard both Ring Ouzel and Crossbill but neither of them showed. There were plenty of Black Redstarts, Serins, Linnets and Coal Tits. We spend about an hour in the area and soon we felt like leaving. At 2000 m a.s.l. was getting quite chilly and the wind was building up.

We stopped at a few more place along the way to see Pallid Swift when a man with an accordion started playing in the middle of nowhere. The sounds of the Rhodopes were echoing in the surrounding forest. What a great pleasure this was! We still managed to see the Pallid swifts just a few metres away from us.

After a pleasant lunch on the terrace of a nice traditional restaurant we continued our way to the East. We decided to divert a little bit to a cultural site known as the [Devil's bridge](#). Right after we got off the main road we pulled out for a family of Black Storks that were feeding in the fields by the road. This was one of the top birds to see of Steve. Congrats Steve. We would call them Steve's Storks. The family stayed around for some time giving him enough opportunities for pictures. In the meantime i heard a Lesser spotted Woodpecker, Golden Oriole, a barking Roe Deer but neither of those showed up.

The bridge was rather busy but it was great seeing it and taking some pictures. We tested a variety of compositions from different positions and here is the most preferred one:

It was getting rather late and we pressed on to arrive on time for dinner but the weather and the light were getting so wonderful for pictures. We just could not stop it. We first stopped for a sunflower field, then for piles of hay when the booked time for dinner was approaching. Luckily we were quite close already so we were just on time.

"It is a great pleasure to be guided by a birder and a photographer", said Steve, one of my guests. What a delight this was!

What a wonderful day. We listed a total of 29 birds. Although not many it felt like a very good day.

Day 4

After the traveling yesterday we wanted to have a relaxed day. We were going to spend the day birding around the town of Madzharovo in Eastern Rhodope mountains in Bulgaria. The night was rather windy but we were still willing to go out for a pre-breakfast walk and did not regret it.

We did not go much further than a couple of hundred metres from our guest house and we started recording new birds. Two Sombre tits came rather close for us to enjoy. I heard a Syrian Woodpecker but we only had glimpses of the bird in flight. Golden Orioles, Woodchat Shrike, Cirl Bunting and an Egyptian Vulture right by the house were the other treats for this one hour long walk.

After a fantastic breakfast with home made honey and biscuits we drove down into the caldera of the volcano for more birding. Booted Eagle, Black Kite and lots of Griffon Vultures were some of the first birds we saw there. The highlight of the morning must be the Subalpine Warbler which showed rather well. It was getting rather warm so we hid from the sun for a light and pleasant lunch.

The afternoon was fairly quiet with very few bird calls. After an early dinner we decided to do some owling. The evening light was great for landscape photographs so we couldn't stop ourselves from taking some pictures:

The owling session was rather productive. Once we stopped the car, two Little Owls chicks started calling. Shortly after this we had wonderful views of Scops Owl and minutes later we heard the Barn Owl calling but I caught only glimpses of it. Thus the day total was 47 bird species.

Day 5

Today is the last day of our trip. We had no time for birding and drove directly to the Turkish border where my guests were going to be met by a Turkish guide.

On our way to the border we saw a few birds like Black Kite, Turtle Dove, Little Owl and Woodchat Shrike. The trip was over and it was time to say good bye. I consider it as a really

inspiring trip. The communications we had with Steve and Robin helped me build a vision for future activities. I am really happy i managed to show them the beauties of Bulgaria.

The trip list counted a total of 93 bird species. Here are a [few words on the WAND website that Steve wrote about his experience during the trip](#).

Thank you very much!

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Images:



Lesser grey Shrike © Iordan Hristov



Bee-eater © Iordan Hristov



Trigrad gorge © Iordan Hristov



Crested Tit © Iordan Hristov



Giovren village © Iordan Hristov



Firecrest © Iordan Hristov



Devil's bridge © Iordan Hristov



Sunflower fields © Iordan Hristov



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