

# Bird – Watching Holiday

To

## BULGARIA

MAY 11<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> 2015



## TRIP REPORT

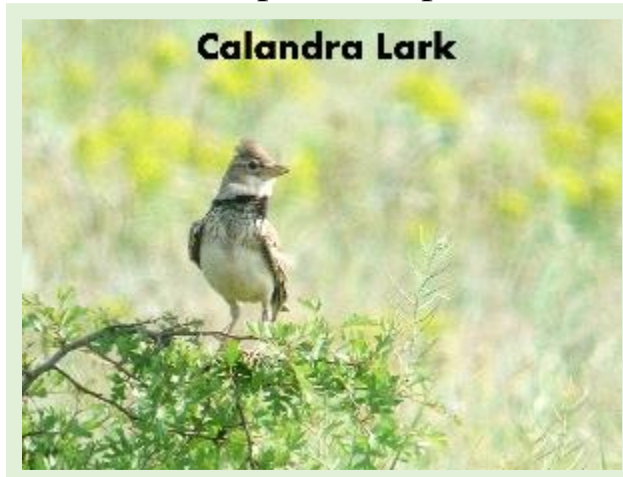
## DAY 1 – MONDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015

LONDON TO SOFIA - TRANSFER TO YAGODINA with stops at PAZARDZHIK QUARRY and sites near KRICHIM

Our group of 12 ‘WINGSPANNERS’ met up at the departure gate in London’s Gatwick airport and after a very smooth flight and landing we met up with ‘Dancho’ our Bulgarian guide at Sofia Airport around 11am.

It was dull and overcast, just 12C and it was raining, not a great start, we all loaded up onto our 22 seater air-conditioned bus for the journey to Yagodina some 4 hours away.

We notched up some species on the first part of the trip, Hooded Crow, Common Buzzard, Barn Swallow and Crested Lark. After a quick stop in Pazardzhik to buy lunch supplies we stopped just outside the town for our first birding session of the tour.



The rain had eased off and it brightened a little and consequently we saw a good variety of species despite the cold and damp conditions.

Just before we stopped we noted a European Roller on a wire and a Lesser Grey Shrike in a bush.

Black-headed Buntings were everywhere as well as the common Corn Bunting. Calandra Larks gave good views whilst they sang on the wing or perched nearby. A good number of both Spanish and Tree Sparrows flitted about and we listed both Isabelline and Northern Wheatears.

A Long-legged Buzzard drifted over before it perched in a middle distance tree where we had great scope views of it, but a calling Common Cuckoo could not be located.

Our next stop was just a few kilometers further along the road just outside the village of Krichim, we parked at the roadside and viewed open

scrubland on one side and small orchards on the other. Both Red-backed and Woodchat Shrike were seen here as well as Isabelline Wheatear, Bee-eater, Golden Oriole and a very showy Wryneck. Just after this we made an impromptu stop to look at a male Red-footed Falcon perched on telephone wires, it flew off before we could get off the bus.

We drove further heading southwest into the Western Rhodope mountains, the road traced the shoreline of an immense reservoir before turning off into a steep sided gorge. A fast flowing river ran alongside the road as we drove through the gorge where we saw Grey Wagtail and a few of us saw a White-throated Dipper.

We finally arrived at our hotel in Yagodina at about 6pm, the village was deserted, it was cold and damp but set in beautiful surroundings.

We ate dinner at 7:30pm and afterwards we called the bird log, 42 species was a good total for our first afternoon. By 9pm everyone had gone to bed how nice, it had been a very long day.

## **DAY 2 - TUESDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015**

### **YAGODINA VILLAGE – TRIGRAD GORGE – PREVALA MOUNTAIN PASS – KARDZHALI – KRUMOVGRAD**

We couldn't have asked for a better start to our first full day of this tour, it was dry, not too chilly and lots of birds were singing as we left the hotel at 6:30am for a pre-breakfast walk.

We noted Black Redstart, White Wagtail, Serin, Coal Tit and lots of common species as we passed through the village walking up to a track that led into the beautiful countryside that surrounded the village.



Just as we left the village we found a couple of BLACK WOODPECKERS, it was amazing we had fantastic views of both male and female going in and



around their nest-hole, they both called frequently and posed for the cameras so well, the whole group were enthralled by the performance.

It was going to be hard trying to top that and views of Dunnock, Yellowhammer, Jay, Lesser Whitethroat and European Robin didn't come close. We saw the woodpeckers a couple of times on the return journey, what a great way to start the day.

After a strange breakfast of toast, feta cheese and egg-toast we set off on the next leg of our tour, we were heading east but first we drove to the Trigrad Gorge to look for the most wanted species on the tour ..... the WALLCREEPER. On the way down the Yagodina Gorge we had several sightings of both Grey Wagtail and Dipper, it was a similar situation as we drove the 8km up the Trigrad Gorge.

We parked near to a known nest-site of the Wallcreeper and had to wait about 10 minutes before the bird appeared. What a show, it was a male that turned up, he sat just 10 meters above us and sang his little heart out for about 15 minutes, showing extremely well before hopping up the rock face and then flying off. How fantastic was that? I'll bet over 1000 pictures were taken between the group!



From Trigrad we took the long and winding road to Smoylan passing over the mountains where a lot of snow still lay on the ground. We stopped at the head of the Prevala Mountain Pass to look for Firecrest, Ring Ouzel and Nutcraker. After several short walks and a long drive to a height of 1800 meters we found only Ring Ouzel, Mistle Thrush, Dunnock and Black Redstart.

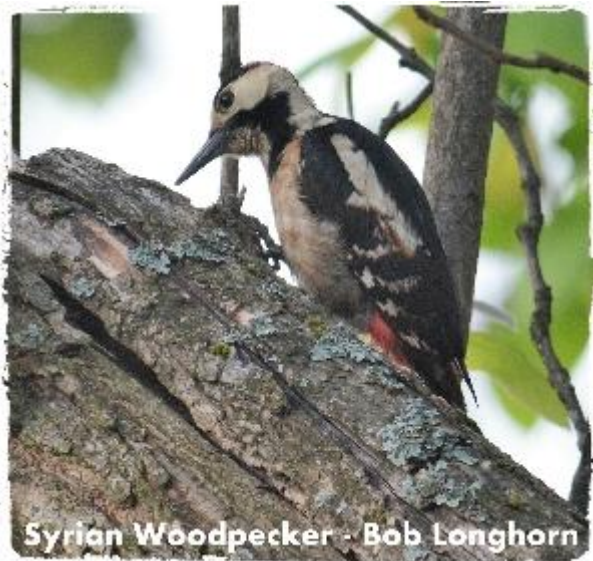
At Smoylan we ate a superb lunch before finishing our journey to Krumovgrad. At Kardzhali, a town en-route, we stopped for a quick coffee/ice-cream where we saw Syrian Woodpecker, both Great and Pygmy Cormorants, Little Egrets and few common birds. A couple of impromptu stops added Honey Buzzard to the list we saw about 30 at one point.

It was a little late when we arrived at our hotel in Krumovgrad so we never went for an evening walk. We had a late dinner and most of the group opted for an early night, no surprise there as it had been another long day.

### **DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015**

#### **KRUMOVGRAD PARK – KRUMOVITSA RIVER – MADZHAROVO**

Our early morning walk was to a local park just a couple of hundred meters from the hotel. It was a glorious morning, clear blue sky, no wind and a nice temperature. Our mission was to try to find woodpeckers and Scop's Owls. It took us a while but we found a single roosting Scop's Owl and a Syrian Woodpecker which was visiting a nest hole.



From Krumovgrad we drove just a few kilometers out of town to visit a beautiful river valley, it was superb, the terrain was wonderful, scrubland on both sides of the road, one side leading down to the Krumovitsa River the other side led up to some high hills with steep cliff faces and craggy nooks.

The bird song was prolific we spent a good while in one place sorting them out. Along the approach track to the valley we saw White Stork, Roller, Hoopoe, Bee-eater and Red-rumped Swallow.

During the first 30 minutes once out of the bus we found Red-backed & Lesser Grey Shrikes, Common Whitethroat, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Black-headed Bunting, Corn Bunting, Golden Oriole and Turtle Dove whilst Common Nightingales sang from most thickets. A Barred Warbler was a crowd pleaser and a lifer for some of the group.

Overhead we saw Long-legged Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Hobby and both Black and White Storks. We drove further along the road to where it climbed a rise into the hills and from where we had great views of the river and we were much closer to the craggy hills. From this vantage point we

found Black-eared Wheatear, Chukar, Ortolan Bunting, Grey Heron and over the hills we saw Griffon Vultures, two more Hobbys, Common Buzzard and a few Alpine Swifts.

We boarded the bus after our 3 hour visit, it was a shame to leave such a wonderful place. After just 2 minutes in the bus we all piled out again when



a call of “Levant’s Sparrowhawk” went up. Fantastic, this superb addition to our list was one of the main target species for a lot of the group. The bird decided to circle right over the top of us giving us a great display.

We set off for our next destination the huge crater just outside of Madzharovo, we made a couple of stops along the way, the second one produced marvellous views of Barred Warbler.

We stopped to eat our picnic lunch in the ‘crater’ but as we were surrounded by magnificent volcanic peaks most of our lunchtime was spent looking at raptors. We found many Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Kestrel, Common and Long-legged Buzzard. Many butterflies were on the wing too and this interested some of the group, we found Knapweed Fritillary, Brown Argus, Small Heath, Eastern Festoon and a few ‘Blues’.

Our birding began again in the scrub at our picnic site, we found Red-backed Shrikes, Black-headed Buntings, our first Orphean Warbler and another very showy Barred Warbler this one was performing its display light.



Before exploring the crater area further we headed off to a track on the other side of the town, this track followed the course of the river but was much higher up giving us great views of the wooded hillside below us. We found a Golden Eagle perched high on a rock and several Eastern Bonelli’s Warblers in the trees. Our efforts to find Lesser Spotted Woodpecker went unrewarded.



Our last birding of the day was spent walking along the road back in the crater area, it was quite hot even at 4pm, consequently the bird-life was quiet too. We saw fleeting glimpses of Subalpine Warbler and a Green Woodpecker and the vultures showed well again. A Black Kite flew low over us and a Long-legged Buzzard performed its display flight high up.

Before going to our hotel we made one final stop, it was beside a huge volcanic outcrop that towered a 100 metres or so above the road. We searched for Blue Rock Thrush and Ortolan Bunting without success, but we turned up a Western Rock Nuthatch which was visiting its nest of mud stuck to the rock face.



That concluded our birding for the day we drove the short distance to our hotel arriving around 6pm. Dinner was served at 7:30pm which we all enjoyed, washed down with a nice cold beer.

#### **DAY 4 – THURSDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015**

#### **ARDA COMPLEX AND RIVER – MADZHAROVO – SAKAR MOUNTAINS – TOPOLOVAGRAD – BOURGAS**

Our early morning excursion was a nice walk around the Hotel complex and grounds and also along the approach track. It was a beautiful morning, clear blue sky and even a light breeze. We didn't see any new species for the trip but we had wonderful views of Rollers, Golden Orioles, Hoopoes and Turtle Doves, even the elusive Common Nightingale showed itself well.

Down at the river other group members saw Reed Warbler, Little Ringed Plover and Black Kite. At breakfast we could see out over to the cliffs on the other side of the Arda River where a Peregrine Falcon sat on a pinnacle and two Ruddy Shelducks flew around.

Later we returned to Madzharovo, we spent sometime in the caldera trying see Subalpine Warbler, this time it showed well to a few of the group but our

most successful sightings were of Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting and Ortolan Buntings, especially the latter which showed extremely well.

During the whole time we were there we had sightings of raptors or storks, the sky always held something of interest in it. Griffon Vultures, Egyptian Vultures, Common and Long-legged Buzzards, Peregrine Falcon, Common Kestrel, our first Booted Eagle, both Black & White Storks and lots of Crag Martins, Red-rumped Swallows and Alpine Swifts.

Some interesting Butterflies were found by some of the group, the diminutive Little Tiger Blue, the Purple-shot Copper, Chequered Blue, Scarce Swallowtail, South White Admiral and lots of other 'whites'.

From Madzharovo we drove eastward towards the Black Sea coast and our next official birding stop was in the Sakar Hills where we ate our picnic lunch on a grassy bank, it was now quite hot and the shade of an oak tree was most welcomed.



Our target species here were Masked Shrike and Olive Tree Warbler, the former was easy to find as one posed on a dead branch even as we were eating lunch. The warbler was a little harder to find, it took some effort to get everyone to see it but we managed to. Other birds seen whilst we searched the hillside were Red-backed and Woodchat Shrike, Hawfinch, Black-headed Bunting, Orphean Warbler, Mistle Thrush and Common Cuckoo.

The rest of the afternoon was spent finishing our journey to Bourgas, we made an official stop to search for Eastern Imperial Eagle which was very successful, the bird was distant at first but showed well a little later, we also saw Isabelline Wheatear, Turtle Dove and a whole bunch of Jackdaws during that stop.

Two other sightings of note were of a pair of White-tailed Eagles seen distantly from the bus and identified by their huge size of head and bill. The other sighting was of pair of Montagu's Harriers, we jumped out of the bus for these as they were so close to the road, they performed admirably for us,



their interaction and play fighting was great to watch they even performed practice food-passes where one bird spun upside down beneath the other, it was amazing.

For the last 40 kilometers we had nothing of note to report, even when passing through Bourgas to find our hotel we only saw Yellow-legged Gulls, Great Cormorants, a few Mute Swans, Little Egrets and hundreds of Common Swifts.

Dinner was at 7:30pm which was a real treat, fresh mackerel and of course the obligatory cold beer, cheers.

### **Day 5 – Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Bourgas Lake – Mandra Lake – Poda Reserve

We had a full day out in and around Bourgas today we recorded just under 100 species, the weather was smashing, high cloud cover at first but it soon burnt off to give us bright sunshine.



A short pre-breakfast walk from the hotel found us in a line of scrub between the hotel and the beach, this area can be good for passing migrants and a few breeding species and we also had the bay to look into.

The Black Sea stretched out in front of us and was flat calm we could see a good distance out into the Bay. It wasn't long before we found Black-throated Diver and Great Crested Grebe, we also saw Oystercatcher, Great Cormorant and a number of Yellow-legged Gulls.

Our concentration then shifted to the scrub area where a number of species were singing from, Olivaceous Warbler, Blackcap, Greenfinch, Golden Oriole, Common Nightingale and Cetti's Warbler were all seen or heard. A River Warbler was chuntering away in some dense scrub but stopped whilst we searched for it and never showed. One nice species seen well in the scope was the Hawfinch, seen on our way back to breakfast.

Bourgas Lake covers a huge area on the inland side of the main artery road through Bourgas, various pull-ins allow you to view the lake from the noisy roadside. It was alive with birds, especially terns, great swathes of them could be seen in the distance, they were mainly Black Terns, but we also listed Common, Whiskered, Little, White-winged and Gull-billed.



Great Crested Grebes were the most numerous of the 'floating-birds', followed by Common Pochard, Great Cormorant, Dalmatian & White Pelicans, Mute Swans, Gadwall, Coot and Moorhen. In the reeds we saw Great Reed Warbler and a few flyovers included Night Heron, Grey Heron, White Stork and lots of Yellow-legged Gulls.

Another smaller lake, called Mandra, lies in a similar position to Bourgas Lake but is found a few kilometers further south this was our next venue. It has a dense bed of reeds around most of it and the viewing area is much closer to the very noisy road but it is worth a visit. We quickly found Garganey, Black-winged Stilt and Reed Warbler and had much closer views of Dalmatian Pelicans.

It was fly-over species that made our stay at Mandra Lake more interesting, we saw Glossy Ibis, Purple Heron, Marsh Harrier and had better views of several of the tern species. Over the distant hillside we noted a number of raptors rising on the thermals, we picked out Lesser Spotted Eagle, Common Buzzard and more Marsh Harriers.

Next we drove inland, it was relief to get away from the busy town area, we visited an area of flooded meadows that held a good number of species which we viewed from a quiet lane that passed high up on a raised bank.



We never moved from the spot for at least an hour the birding and the light were that good. Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, Gadwall, Common Pochard were seen well along with Squacco Heron, Little Egret, Glossy Ibis, Common & Ruddy Shelduck, Northern Lapwing and large flocks of Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stint with the odd Ruff, Common Sandpiper and hundreds of Black-headed Gulls. A special find was a number of Collared Pratincoles, they gave us a great flying display as they hawked insects above us.

The movement of migrant raptors was also quite visible above the valley, we saw Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Marsh Harrier and Common Buzzard.

From the meadows we drove to a causeway on the inland shore of Bourgas Lake where after a short scan of the reed beds we settled down to lunch. We had a superb lunchtime display by a flock of Bee-eaters, they decided to



bathe right in front of us, they would drop down into the water and then quickly fly up after a short dip. Then a White-tailed Eagle came over, this gigantic beast circled right above us giving unbelievable views. Dancho, our Bulgarian guide then picked out a very distant Steppe Eagle, in the superb light we could clearly see its markings. A few Honey Buzzards also passed over

during this magical birding spell.

For the rest of the afternoon we visited the Poda Reserve found on the south side of Bourgas forming a large length of the Black Sea shoreline and affording protection to a large number of species. A series of brackish lagoons, reed beds, open grassland and scrubland forms an oasis for many species, there are a number of hides as well as a roof-top viewing area at the visitor's centre.

Our highlights there were the sighting of a Short-eared Owl, this is a rare sighting for Bulgaria, likewise a flock of Greater Flamingos that got Dancho very excited.



Other good birding moments included good close views of all three ‘Marsh’ Terns, Whiskered, Black and White-winged, good views of Pygmy Cormorant, Black-necked Grebes in the bay and a very busy herony with Eurasian Spoonbills, Night Herons, Egrets and Glossy Ibis.

Time quickly flew by and it was soon 5pm so we had to leave this little paradise and head off back to the northern part of town to our hotel.

We saw 91 species and heard three more, our best tally so far and I’m not surprised, Bourgas is a wonderful area to visit.

## **DAY 6 – SATURDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015**

### **MARINA RIVER WOODLANDS – SILKOSIA WOODS – BOURGAS SALT PANS**

In complete contrast to yesterday we went for quality not quantity, our targets were just a handful of species and we had to travel a long way to look for them.

We headed to the deep south travelling to huge oak and beech forests near the Turkish border to look for White-backed and Grey-headed Woodpeckers.



But before that we took another pre-breakfast walk, this time we walked through the suburbs around the hotel and onto a track that led into some scrubland. A pair of Golden Orioles showed well before a Hobby dashed along the row of gardens, it was probably after a House Martin for breakfast.

We had excellent views of 3 Hawfinches, before finding a new species for the list, a Pied Flycatcher, female. Finally we found a Willow Warbler in the scrubland another first for the tour.

Before returning to the hotel we decided to try to see the River Warbler that had been heard for the last two mornings. We were a little more successful this time as the bird showed itself briefly to some of the group.

After breakfast we boarded the bus and headed south, it took nearly two hours to get to our destination so we were eager for a walk once we arrived. Our walk took us through prime oak woodlands mixed with a few beech and other deciduous trees and it wasn't long before we found a few woodland birds. Short-toed Treecreeper, Great Tit, European Robin and Blackcap were seen or heard. The path led us down a gentle incline into older forest where we heard Grey-headed Woodpecker but couldn't see it and we saw Eurasian Chiffchaffs dropping from the trees to their nest in the grass. We then found our first Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, it was feeding in the canopy, everyone got wonderful views of it, smashing bird.

A bonus bird at the bottom of the dell was Semi-collared Flycatcher, a pair were moving around a nest hole giving excellent views and on the way back up we watched a family party of Eurasian Nuthatches.



We had our picnic lunch back at the start of the walk and during that time a large woodpecker flew across the track and into some nearby trees, a quick dash by most of the group resulted in very brief views of White-backed Woodpecker confirmed by its call.

Our second stop in this woodland area was much nearer to the border with Turkey, we stayed on the road and birded from there. Much older woodland dropped away below us giving us a greater area to view. Almost at once a Grey-headed Woodpecker called very close to us, but again we were disappointed with only fleeting glimpses, this happened a couple of times. We enjoyed views of Common Redstart, lots more Semi-collared Flycatchers and we saw our first Wren but not much else. At 3:30pm we set off back to Bourgas arriving just after 5pm.

We spent almost an hour birding at the salt pans where we added a few new species to our list, these included: Little Gull, Slender-billed Gull, Eurasian Curlew and a Penduline Tit was seen in the scrub nearby.

All in all the group decided that they enjoyed the woodland but it wasn't worth travelling for so long for so few species.

The trip total crept up to 171 today, we have a few more new species to see before we travel home in 3 days' time.

## **DAY 7 – SUNDAY 17<sup>th</sup> MAY 2015**

### **ATANOSOVSKO LAKE – POMERIE SALINAS – B PARK –BALCHIK – KRAPETS**



Our last transfer to our final hotel included a 200km journey northwards along the coast to Krapets which is only 18km from Durankalek the famous marshland near the Romania border. It took us all day to get there because we spent all morning birding near Bourgas and made a few stops in the afternoon.

Our first stop was inland but the area still formed part of the huge Atanovosko Lake reserve, we drove to some open grassy meadows where a few pools were hidden in the scrub. Dancho led us straight to a nest site of the Penduline Tit, the birds were still building the nest and fortunately for us they were using the nesting material from last year's nest which was far more visible than the current nest, we had cracking views of the male dismantling the old nest.

Another good sighting was of Red-footed Falcon, a female circled low over the top of us, the male was much higher. A Common Cuckoo perched on a pylon nearby and we had excellent views of a Night Heron sitting on the edge of one of the pools. We could hear a woodpecker tapping in a nearby tree but despite 14 pairs of eyes searching for it we never got a glimpse of the bird.



A few butterflies were on the wing in the grassy meadow surrounding the pools, we saw Amanda's Blue, Small Heath, Green Hairstreak and Small Copper.

From there we drove a little further north to a seaside resort called Pomerie, some of the beach area has been developed into a lovely nature reserve which has lagoons and shingle beaches as well as a number of shallow salt pans. Many pairs of Pied Avocets were breeding, some had chicks on display and on the beach area we saw a variety of terns including Common, Little and Sandwich. Kentish Plovers were found on the shingle beach with Little Ringed Plover.

More salt pans and larger lagoons lay a little further north and we spent the rest of the morning viewing several of these, some of them had large flocks of waders feeding in them. One lagoon held a couple of hundred Curlew



Sandpipers with just as many Little Stints, with careful scrutiny of the waders we managed to find half a dozen Broad-billed Sandpipers and a couple of Temminck's Stints. Another lagoon held a few hundred Ruff and even more Curlew Sandpipers, we also found Greenshank, Redshank, Grey Plover, Ruddy Turnstone and Common Sandpiper.

A short sea-watch from the beach produced very distant views of Black-throated Diver, Great-crested and Black-necked Grebes and lots of Great Cormorants. The power lines that ran through the area held a good number of European Rollers, we also found Common Kestrel, European Bee-eaters, Black-headed and Corn Buntings.

We drove on and put in a good hour's driving before stopping for lunch at a roadside restaurant just south of Varna. From there we visited a parkland area near Balchik, the woodland there was pristine with many mature ash trees, we hoped for woodpecker sightings but all we got were calls and distant drumming. We did find Spotted Flycatcher, Eurasian Nuthatch and a very obliging Icterine Warbler which sat out in the open delivering a melodic song full of mimicry.

A quick stop in Balchik was made to see a well-known Eagle Owl nest site, we keep our distance but had great scope-views of an adult bird, a nesting colony of European Bee-eaters was nearby and a couple of Red-footed Falcons drifted over.

By now it was late afternoon and we still had 50 kilometers to go, we chose the scenic, slower route, along the coast road hoping to find the much anticipated Rose-coloured Starling. However it wasn't to be today, we did see many species and enjoyed some great sightings of European Roller, Lesser Grey Shrike, Calandra Lark and lots more.

We arrived at the hotel just before 7pm, we ate just after 8pm in the restaurant situated on the beach, the setting was magical with a flat-calm sea and warm temperatures.

Our species count edged towards 200, with Broad-billed Sandpiper, Eagle Owl and Penduline Tit being named as birds of the day.

## **DAY 8 - MONDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015**



DURANKULAK      MARSHES      –  
SHABLA LAKES      -      KALIAKRA  
CAPE and STEPPE

Our final day's birding had arrived, I can't believe how quickly it had come around. We met up at 6am for a walk in waste ground next to the hotel and the beach. I must say that the weather was just dandy, clear sky, absolutely no wind and a nice temperature, we were very lucky as sometimes it can be very windy there.

Our pre-breakfast walk in the scrub produced a number of warblers such as Lesser      Whitethroat,      Common  
Whitethroat,      Barred      Warbler,

Olivaceous Warbler, Willow Warbler and a few of the group heard River Warbler but it failed to show. Red-backed Shrikes were on every bush whilst European Golden Oriole, Common Cuckoo and Common Nightingales called from the trees.

Two or three Hobby sightings were nice as were a number of European Bee-eaters as they fed above us, a short sea-watch produced nothing of note but one of our target species was found on the way back to the hotel, it was a Pied Wheatear, we had great views of a stunning male.

It was still perfectly calm as we reached Durankulak just after breakfast, perfect for looking for bird species in the reed-beds. We parked up and walked along the beach to some large sand mounds, from the top of the mounds we had great views over the marsh and reed-beds. I have never seen or heard as many Great Reed Warblers in my life, dozens were singing and dashing about in the reeds. We also saw Reed Warblers, Spanish Sparrows, 4 Common Cuckoos and in the pools there were Ferruginous Ducks, Garganey, Moorhen, Eurasian Coot and a couple of Squacco Herons dropped in. Our first Little Bittern of the trip appeared on top of the reeds, a great sighting.



Having no sight nor sound of our main target species the Paddyfield Warbler we continued along the beach to search further along the large reed-bed, during this time we saw a couple of large mixed flocks of White-winged Terns and Whiskered Terns also several raptors flew over including: Hobby, Red-footed Falcon, Marsh & Montagu's Harriers and Common Buzzard.

A male Bearded Tit stole the show this morning by showing extremely well, it was so confiding that the photographers had to step backwards to fit it in the frame, it came that close.

After a couple of hours we gave up on the warbler and birded in the compound of a run-down campsite, we found Golden Oriole, Spotted Flycatcher, Blackcap but not a lot more. An ice-cream/coffee break at the



beach restaurant was most welcomed, we watched a pair of Pied Wheatears during this break.

Next we drove to Shabla where we ate our picnic lunch before walking down to the lake. Quite a few ducks were out on the lake, mostly Ferruginous and Garganey but we also found a single Eurasian Wigeon, Mute Swans with cygnets and lots of Great Reed Warblers.

In the scrub along the track to the lake we found a few migrants and a lucky few had sightings of a Red-breasted Flycatcher. From Shabla we moved on to our last birding location of the whole tour, the Cape of Kaliakra and the surrounding steppe.

During the journey between all the sites today we searched extensively for Rose-coloured Starling, every power-line and all the cherry orchards and grape vines were scrutinised in vain, we couldn't find a single one.



At Kaliakra Cape we joined throngs of tourist to look at this historic site, it had ruins dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century with a castle and large battlements as well as the most beautiful cliffs and flower meadows. Pied Wheatears breed there

we also saw large flocks of Yelkouan Shearwaters gliding passed the Cape at least 300 passed whilst we were watching. A few Eastern European Shags (*desmarestii*) were present on the rocks below the cliffs and in the surrounding water, we also saw a good number of Bee-eaters, Alpine Swifts plus a few Red-footed Falcons that drifted over.

Finally we spent an hour on the Kaliakra steppe, actually it's pseudo-steppe, more like flat grassy plains, but full of birds nevertheless. Larks were abundant, especially Calandra Larks they perched on low mounds or shrubs delivering their melodic afternoon renditions. Also Skylarks and Short-toed Larks were present, joining in with the choir practice, the odd Tawny Pipit turned up and Isabelline Wheatear dashed about. We had great views of at least 3 Hoopoes but the real prize and our target species was the Stone Curlew, despite not showing well it was our bird of the 'steppe'.

As we prepared to board the bus we found a small ‘flock’ of Whinchats, at least 5 were seen, also Turtle Doves and Rollers put in an appearance.

Our very last new species of the tour was Grey Partridge, 2 were found in a ploughed field next to the road as we made our way back to our hotel in Krapets but even though we made a thorough search we could not find a Rose-coloured Starling.

### **Day 9 – MONDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015**

#### **TRANSFER TO VARNA – FLIGHT TO SOFIA THEN ONWARD FLIGHT TO LONDON**

The trip was over we had no time this morning for birding as we had to leave the hotel at 6am to catch a 9am internal flight from Varna to Sofia. The flight was delayed by 30 minutes which gave us less time to connect at Sofia for the London flight. We made it on time and arrived back in London on schedule.



We were rewarded for our efforts by having reached a total of just over 200 species, I thank all the group for showing so much enthusiasm and endeavour in helping to achieve such a grand total. Dancho our local guide was excellent as usual, his quick eyes and excellent knowledge of bird calls enhanced this

Bulgarian experience immensely.

Bulgaria is a beautiful, verdant country, with picturesque landscapes, a great variety of habitats with vast, untouched areas provide a haven for wildlife, come and see it for yourself on next year’s WINGSPAN tour of Bulgaria.

# Places Visited

**MON 11<sup>TH</sup>**

**PAZARDZHIK - QUARRY  
KRICHIM - WRYNECK  
YAGODINA**

**TUES 12<sup>TH</sup>**

**YAGODINA VILLAGE  
TRIGRAD GORGE  
PREVALA MOUNTAIN PASS  
KARDZHALI - KRUMOVGRAD**

**WED 13<sup>TH</sup>**

**KRUMOVGRAD PARK  
KRUMOVITSA VALLEY  
MADZHAROVO (CALDERA)**

**THURS 14<sup>TH</sup>**

**ARDA COMPLEX  
MADZHAROVO (CALDERA)  
SAKAR MOUNTAINS  
TOPOLOVGRAD – IMPERIAL EAGLE  
BOURGAS**

**FRI 15<sup>TH</sup>**

**BOURGAS LAKE  
MANDRA LAKE  
PODA RESERVE**

**SAT 16<sup>TH</sup>**

**MARINA RIVER  
SILKOSIA WOODLAND RESERVE  
ATANASOVSKO LAKE  
SALINAS DE BOURGAS**

**SUN 17<sup>TH</sup>**

**ATANASOVSKO LAKE  
SALINAS DE POMERIE  
BALCHIK PALACE WOODLANDS  
BALCHIK  
KRAPETS**

**MON 18<sup>TH</sup>**

**DURANKULAK  
SHABLA LAKE  
KALIAKRA CAPE AND STEPPE**

**TUES 19<sup>TH</sup>**

**TRANSFER FROM KRAPETS TO VARNA AIRPORT FLIGHT TO SOFIA THEN  
ONTO LONDON**

SPECIES		Scientific Name	DATE SEEN									
			11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
1	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>					√		√			
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>					√			√		
3	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>					√		√	√		
4	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>					√		√			
5	Yelkouan Shearwater	<i>Puffinus yelkouan</i>									√	
6	White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>					√					
7	Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>					√	√				
8	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√			
9	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>									√	
10	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>		√			√					
11	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			√	√	√	√			√	
12	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>					√				√	
13	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>					√	√			√	
14	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		√		√	√	√	√	√	√	
15	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>					√				√	
16	Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>					√	√	√	√	√	
17	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>									√	
18	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			√	√	√					
19	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			
20	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>					√					
21	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>					√					
22	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>					√	√				
23	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>				√	√	√			√	
24	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>					√	√	√	√	√	
25	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>				√	√					
26	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>					√	√	√	√	√	
27	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>					√	√			√	
28	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>					√				√	
29	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>									√	
30	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>					√					
31	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>					√					
32	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>					√				√	
33	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>			√	√						
34	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>			√	√						
35	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		√	√	√	√			√	√	
36	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>			√	√				√		
37	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>				√	√					
38	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>					√					
39	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				√					√	
40	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
41	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>			√							
42	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		√	√		√					
43	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
44	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	√		√	√						
45	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>		√	√		√	√				
46	Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>					√					



47	Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>				√							
48	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				√							
49	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>				√	√						
50	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
51	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	√							√	√		
52	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>				√			√		√		
53	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				√	√						
54	Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>				√							
55	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix</i>										√	
56	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	H						H				
57	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>								√			
58	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				√		√	√		√		
59	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>						√			√		
60	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>						√	√				
61	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>						√		√			
62	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>						√	√	√			
63	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>										√	
64	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>						√	√	√			
65	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>						√					
66	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>								√			
67	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>						√		√			
68	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			H	√	√			√	√		
69	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>									√		
70	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>							√				
71	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>								√			
72	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>								√			
73	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>						√	√				
74	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>								√			
75	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>						√		√			
76	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>								√			
77	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>						√					
78	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>						√	√	√	√		
79	Broad-billed Sandpiper	<i>Limicola falcinellus</i>								√			
80	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>								√			
81	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
82	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>						√	√	√			
83	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>							√	√			
84	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>							√				
85	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>						√				√	
86	White-winged Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>						√				√	
87	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>						√		√			
88	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>						√					
89	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>						√	√	√	√		
90	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>						√		√			
91	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>						√		√	√		
92	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
93	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>				√	√		√				
94	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	√		√	√				√	√		
95	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
96	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	H	H	√	√	√	√	H	√	√		



147	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				√						
148	Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>		√								
149	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	√	√	√	√		√	√	√		
150	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		H				H	√	H		
151	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		√		√						
152	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>									√	
153	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>						H	H	√		
154	River Warbler	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>						H	√		H	
155	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				√	√				√	
156	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>					√	H			√	
157	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais pallida</i>			√	H	√	√	√	√		
158	Olive-tree Warbler	<i>Hippolais olivetorum</i>				√						
159	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>								√		
160	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>							√		√	
161	Eurasian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H		H		√	H			
162	Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>			√							
163	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		√	√			√	√	√		
164	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	√		√	√	√	H			√	
165	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>		√			√				√	
166	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>			√	H					√	
167	Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia crassirostris</i>			√	√						
168	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>			√							
169	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>			√	√						
170	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>		H								
171	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			√			√	√	√		
172	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>						√				
173	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva parva</i>									√	
174	Semi-collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula semitorquata</i>						√				
175	Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>						√	√			
176	Sombre Tit	<i>Parus lugubris</i>			√	√						
177	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		√								
178	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
179	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>		√	√	√		√			√	
180	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>						√	√			
181	Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>			√							
182	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>		√								
183	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>						√	√			
184	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	√		√	√	√			√	√	
185	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		√								
186	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				√						
187	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>			√	√						
188	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>			√	H						
189	Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
190	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		√	H	√		√	√			
191	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		√								
192	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
193	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
194	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	√								√	
195	European Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		H								
196	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothrauste</i>		√		√	√	√				





