

Bird – Watching Holiday

To

BULGARIA

MAY 22nd – May 30th 2013



TRIP REPORT

SUMMARY

This was the second of two back-to-back tours of Bulgaria with a much smaller group than the first trip. We had a wide range of weather conditions, changing from bright sunny days, to windy cloudy days and we had a day with tremendous thunders storms and hail stone downpours. Despite this it was an excellent all round trip, with a nice group having a diverse interest in all wildlife. We saw 189 species of birds and just short of 50 species of butterflies, there were also a nice selection of mammals and wild flowers in a country abundant with beautiful scenery, superb habitats and nice sunshine most of the time.

Birding highlights included the Wallcreeper at Trigrad, the Rosy Starlings at Cape Kaliakra and sheer number of birds at Burgas. We also enjoyed the Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle, Pygmy Cormorants and the huge number of White Storks seen on migration.

WEDNESDAY MAY 22ND DAY 1 – TOUR 2

SOFIA - WESTERN RHODOPE MOUNTAINS AND THE TRIGRAD GORGE WITH STOPS ALONG THE WAY AT PAZARDZHIK (QUARRY) AND TESHEL

The first day of this second tour of Bulgaria started in central Sofia. Steve, Roz and Jim had arrived a day early, we had a couple of hours to kill this morning so we took a walk in one of the local parks called Borisovata Gradina (Boris's Garden), which, in fact, is a thickly wooded area with some open sections and lots of sports facilities embedded within it. We saw **Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, European Robin, European Greenfinch, Song Thrush, Eurasian Jay, Magpie, Common Chaffinch, Great Tit, Eurasian Nuthatch, Hooded Crow, Common Swift** and **Alpine Swift**, and we also heard **Blackcap** and **Grey Headed Woodpecker**.



Our mini-bus collected us from our hotel at 10:45. in order to get us to the airport by 11am to collect Teresa, Richard and Peter.

Jordan, our co-leader and local bird guide, joined us along the way.

By 11:30am we were all on our way to Trigrad, the sun was shining through broken cloud and everyone was in a good mood in anticipation for some super birding ahead of us. We traveled for a couple of hours making one stop for toilets etc, our journey birds so

far included: **White Stork, Northern Lapwing, Red-rumped Swallow, Raven, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Common Cuckoo** and lots of hirundines.

At Pazardzhik we stopped to buy lunch and then drove a short distance out of town to eat it. Our lunch venue was along a quiet track that led to a disused quarry, it overlooked a few miles of arable farmland and some scrubland. Over the next hour we logged several species, the colourful **Black-headed Bunting** proved to be a crowd pleaser but we also found **Crested Lark, Corn Bunting, Calandra Lark, Tree & Spanish Sparrow, Little Owl, Red-rumped Swallow** (and their nest), **Northern Wheatear, Long-legged Buzzard**, a distant **Tawny Pipit** and we heard a **Eurasian Hoopoe** calling.

From the quarry we began our journey into the Rhodope Mountains, but first we stopped to admire a **Eurasian Hoopoe** sitting on a pole 'singing' loudly. Just before we passed through Krichim we logged **European Turtle Dove** and **Isabelline Wheatear**. The long winding road climbed up into the mountains, we passed Devin (where the main production of mineral water occurs) and onto Teshel where we stopped to watch **(White-throated) Dipper**, which went onto the day list, along with **Common Raven** and **Grey Wagtail**.

The last few kilometers were delightful, we passed through breath taking scenery, steep sided gorges, limestone tunnels and a quintessential babbling brook ran alongside of the road. At Yagodina we had reached our destination and our hotel for the first night, this tranquil little 'hamlet' is set high up in the mountains in the most picturesque valley. Our last species of the day were seen around the hotel; **White Wagtail**, **Black Redstart**, **Tree Sparrow**, **Hooded Crow**, **Serin**, **Marsh Tit** and **Common Magpie**.

We ate a lovely trout dinner and drank a nice cold beer. Our log call was short as we only saw 53 species during the day.

THURSDAY MAY 23RD DAY 2 - TOUR 2

YAGODINA - TRIGRAD GORGE - PREVALA PASS - SMOYLAN - KRUMOVOGRAD VALLEY - ARDA HOTEL

A very long day today with a lot of travel and a lot of birding packed into it. We all met at 6:30am outside the hotel in Yagodina for a morning walk around the village. It was quite bright and sunny with some cloud but it was also quite windy. We quickly logged all the local species around the hotel: **Black Redstart**, **White Wagtail**, **Chaffinch**, **European Serin**, **Tree Sparrow**, **Common Magpie** and **Hooded Crow**.

Our walk took us up a gentle slope leading out of the village, along the track we found **(Winter) Wren**, **Crag Martin**, **Red-rumped Swallow** and we heard a **Blackcap** and a **Common Cuckoo** calling. In the hedgerows and open hillsides we scanned for new species and found a **ROCK THRUSH**, unfortunately it was me that found it and by the time the next person got to the scope the bird had disappeared and wasn't found again!! Other species seen or heard in the area were: **Red Backed Shrike**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Treecreeper**, **Coal Tit**, **Eurasian Chiffchaff** and a distant **Yellowhammer** called.

After breakfast we loaded up the bus with all our luggage and set off for the long trip to the Western Rhodope Mountains but first we had a date with a **Wallcreeper** in the heart of the Trigrad Gorge. Our drive down from Yagodina through the scenic mountains was stunning we



also had several views of **Grey Wagtail**, **(White-throated) Dipper** and **Common Raven**. At the Trigrad Gorge we spent some time near the tunnel looking for the 'creeper' but all we got there was **Crag Martin**, **Black Redstart** and **Coal Tit**. We then drove up to the car park at the entrance to the 'Devil's Throat' Cave where we spent a lot of time scanning the high cliff faces of the gorge.

Just as we were starting to leave we finally caught sight of a **Wallcreeper**, it promptly disappeared into a small cave but reappeared some minutes later and showed very well, it even flew down to 5 meters from the road, how fantastic was that?

Happy as Larry we climbed back into the bus and set off for Smoylan our lunchtime destination but a very quick stop in the village of Trigrad was made first. Five minutes was all it took to locate our target species, **Pallid Swifts**, we watched them swooping down into their nest holes under the tiles of a building, we also watched a **Eurasian Hobby** hawking insects high above the village.

We next stopped at the head of the Prevala Pass up in the skiing zone where many ski lodges lay empty and pine trees covered most of the ground. As soon as we got out of the bus we located 4 **Ring Ouzels**, all on the grass near the road, great stuff. Then we spent time watching a **European Serin** before a couple of **Common Crossbills** turned up, one green one and one red one. A **Mistle Thrush** sang but did not show and a **Black Redstart** did show very well.



We arrived at Smoylan for lunch at 1:30pm and set off again at 2:30pm heading for Kadzhali. One stop for ice-cream produced a flyover **Black-crowned Night Heron**, a **Sand Martin** and a **Little Egret**.

Our afternoon birding began at 5pm near the village of Krumovograd we drove along a single metalled road with a high ridge on one side and open arable fields behind a river on the other side. It was a wonderful stop especially for raptors. We quickly found 5 **Griffon Vultures** and whilst watching them an **Egyptian Vulture** appeared and a couple of small falcons. We quickly identified one of the falcons as a **Eurasian Hobby** but the other was much darker and had longer wings. We illuminated **Red-footed Flacon** when the bird got nearer and we realised we had found an **Eleanora's Falcon**, a super find.

We scanned the steep rock faces for a **Western Rock Nuthatch**, spending over an hour looking for one without luck. In the meantime we found **European Roller**, **Red-backed** and **Woodchat Shrikes**, **Corn Bunting**, **Crag Martin**, **Common Raven**, **European Turtle Dove**, **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Chukar**, **Black Stork** and another **Eurasian Hobby**. We also heard several species: **Common Nightingale**, **Syrian Woodpecker**, **Olivaceous Warbler** and **Golden Oriole**. Many butterflies were on show with dozens of **Commas** soaking up the afternoon sun as well as **Black-veined White**, **Meadow Brown** and a couple of **Fritilleries**. Back on the bus we drove the last 30 kilometres to our hotel near Madhzarovo arriving just in time for dinner at 7:00pm.

FRIDAY MAY 24th DAY 3 – TOUR 2

HOTEL ARDA - MADZAROVO AREA ALL DAY

Our morning walk began in bright sunshine and ended in heavy rain! We could see a huge bank of cloud in the distance and loud bellows of thunder came every few minutes, this did not deter us from having a lovely hour before the rain came.



As usual, bird song rang out from every direction, from the hotel entrance we quickly found **Turtle Dove, European Greenfinch, Corn Bunting Black-headed Bunting, European Goldfinch and Eurasian Tree Sparrow. (Western) Jackdaw, a Grey Heron, Black Stork and a Common Raven** flew over us. As our walk began a **Eurasian Hoopoe** started to call, a few Bee-eaters landed on the telephone wires and a **Common Cuckoo** called out. We located a **Barred Warbler** from its song and a couple of **Red-backed Shrikes** showed well. Then we found a **Rosy Starling** perched in a

distant bush with a couple of **Common Starlings**, what a beauty that one is! A **European Roller** flew over us as we began our walk back and we had good close views of **Eurasian Tree and Spanish Sparrows**. The thunderstorm moved away and it did not rain.

At 8:45am, after breakfast, we all climbed into the bus for the 40 minute drive to the volcanic basin around Madzarovo where we spent the rest of the morning. Our walk began in some open scrub where we had a panoramic view of the old volcano ridge and the basin which is now an oak forest. A **Woodlark** was first on the list, a **Red-backed Shrike** chased it off into a tree, we also got good views of it on the ground. A **Hawfinch** then delighted us with its appearance nearby and another **Barred Warbler** showed intermittently. Many butterflies were on show too with Black-veined White, Latticed Brown, Large Skipper, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Knapweed Fritillary and Clouded Yellow to name but a few.

We walked along the road towards the cliff face of the volcanic rim where we had brief views of both **Lesser and Middle Spotted Woodpecker. Griffon and Egyptian Vultures** circled above with **Peregrine Falcon and Honey Buzzard**. On the cliff face we found **Blue Rock Thrush, Ortolan and Rock Buntings, Crag Martin and Black-eared Wheatear**. It was now getting quite warm and humid as another great bank of cloud headed towards us, thunder and lightning pursued us as we drove off to lunch.

Lunch was extended by an hour as we waited for the hail and rain storm to subside and just after it stopped we located a nest of the **Golden Oriole**, the female bird was sitting and the male was in close attendance. We then drove the short distance to the Arda valley on the east side of the town of Madzarovo. Our afternoon walk improved with time as did the weather. Soon we were watching **Bonelli's Warbler, Cirl Bunting, Lesser Whitethroat** and many of the species seen earlier. We also got good views of **Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Golden Oriole, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Grey Wagtail, Little Ringed Plover, Crag Martin and Red-rumped**

Swallow. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nest hole provided some entertainment as a Short-toed Treecreeper tried several times to enter the hole and the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker poked its head out and pecked at the creeper, a funny sight.

We were hoping for a sighting of Golden Eagle but I think the weather put paid to that but we did see Peregrine Falcon, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Steppe Buzzard, Honey Buzzard, Griffon Vulture and another Common Buzzard.

We jumped back into the bus at 5pm and set off for our hotel, on the way back we stopped to look at Common Whitethroat and a Little Owl.

Our 'Owl & Nightjar walk' was unsuccessful, it was too windy and not one bird turned up! We did see lots of Fire Flies though, a fascinating sight.

SATURDAY MAY 25th DAY 4 – TOUR 2

ARDA HOTEL TO BURGAS VIA TOPOLOVGRAD WITH STOPS IN THE SAKAR HILLS, SREDETS AND BURGAS SALT PANS.

This transit day saw us travel some 200 kilometers to the east of the country to the Black Sea Coast at Burgas. It wasn't a long way but on the poor Bulgarian roads it took us all day.

We never went for an early birding walk, so we set off at 7:45am after an early breakfast, several species were seen from the car park and along the approach track to the hotel. **European Turtle Dove, Common Nightingale, Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Cuckoo, Golden Oriole, Spanish Sparrow, Olivaceous Warbler, Red Backed Shrike** and several others were all seen or heard near the hotel. A **Little Owl** sat in the chimney of the main hotel block.

The first part of the journey passed with only a few bird sightings as we drove through thick mist that only cleared after we had climbed out of the volcanic crater on the east side of Madzarovo. We then started to see **White Storks, Black-headed and Corn Buntings and Red-backed Shrikes**.



Our first official stop was at a traditional site for **Olive Tree Warbler** but we must have seen 30 other species in a very short space of time as well. The site was an Oak Woodland on a gently sloping hillside, bird song appeared to be coming from every bush. **Cirl Bunting, Common Nightingale, Masked Shrike,**

Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Hoopoe, Common Cuckoo, European Bee-eater, Woodchat Shrike and the **Olive Tree Warbler** were all heard within a few minutes. It took us quite a while before we all saw the OTW and even then it was only fleeting views as it moved from song post to song post, but we were all happy with what we got. In the sky, during the hour we stayed there, we saw: **Common Raven, Black Stork, White Stork, Common Buzzard and Long-legged Buzzard**.

We bought our lunch in Topolovgrad and drove a short distance out of town to eat it. The site we chose was a good site to look for **Imperial Eagle** and before the bus had come to a complete stop we had seen one drifting high above us. During our lunch hour we saw one or two more **Imperial Eagles** drifting over on a regular basis, sometimes quite low, and we also saw a **Booted Eagle** and a **Short-toed Eagle**. On the ground and in the open scrub we found **Short-toed Lark**, **Northern Wheatear** and lots of **Isabelline Wheatears**.

Next we stopped in an oak woodland not too far from Burgas, we were hoping to see **Semi-collared Flycatcher** at a nest site. Unfortunately for us the site was completely surrounded by people having a Saturday Market!! Cars were parked right next to the nest hole and not a bird was in sight. We walked for a while trying to get away from the crowd. We did see some interesting species, **Common Redstart**, a stunning male showing a very large white wing bar, it was of the eastern race *Samamisicus*, we also saw **Song Thrush**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Short-toed Treecreeper** and several common woodland species. The nest hole of a **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** was very active and provided some good bird watching.

Lastly we visited the Salt Pans on the northern edge of the bay of Burgas. It wasn't brimming with birds but we added about 20 new species to our trip list, the new species included about 20 **Dalmatian Pelicans**, 9 **Eurasian Spoonbills**, **Little Egret**, **Common Shelduck**, **Kentish** and **Common Ringed Plover**, **Pied Avocet**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Common, Caspian, Little and Sandwich Terns**, **Yellow Wagtail** of the Eastern race *Feldegg* and a few **Gadwall**. A pair of **Penduline Tits** fed in a tree just behind us and the male showed particularly well, the entire group had great views.

We called it a day around 6pm and finished our journey to the hotel which was a few minutes away, we had seen 95 species despite being in the bus for most of the journey. A really nice dinner finished the day off with a lovely cold beer, aah!

SUNDAY MAY 26th DAY 5 - TOUR 2

BURGAS AREA ALL DAY - BURGAS LAKE - MANDRA LAKE - PODA PROJECT - BURGAS SALINAS

We awoke to a beautiful morning, clear blue sky and no wind, perfect. Our walk before breakfast produced a few new sightings but it was just a pleasure to be out there. We walked along the shoreline in the wooded scrub between the hotel-strip and the beach it was buzzing with birds. A very showy **Olivaceous Warbler** was very nice to see, a group of **Golden Orioles** showed now and then and a **Common Whitethroat** sang from the scrub. We tracked down a drumming **Syrian Woodpecker** but only got a fleeting glimpse of it



as it flew off. A **Blackcap** showed well and a **Cetti's Warbler** didn't. Our visit to the Burgas Lake was superb, it was like a mirror and it was covered in birds. The most spectacular sight was a feeding frenzy by a huge flock of **Great Cormorants**, a couple hundred of them gathered close together swimming in unison and diving for fish. This movement attracted many gulls, terns and Pelicans. Over the hour we were there the numbers built up and eventually there were about a 1000 birds feeding together, incredible.

We also counted over 300 **Great crested Grebes**, many of which were pairing off and performing their courtship ritual. Both the **White** and the **Dalmatian Pelicans** impressed the group with their size and their elegance in flight, we also had good views of **Little Bittern**, **Squacco Heron**, **Little Egret**, **Night Heron**, **Great Reed Warbler** and a **Penduline Tit**. Many migrating **White Storks** were passing overhead, we counted over a thousand in that first hour.

Our second stop at Burgas Lake produced more birds, **Common**, **Whiskered**, **Little** and **Sandwich Terns** were all seen well and a few **Black-headed** and **Mediterranean Gulls** sat nearby.

We drove a little further south to look at the reed-fringed Madra Lake from the roadside, it was fairly desolate but we picked out a few species. **Garganey**, **Ferruginous Duck**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Common Pochard**, **Mallard** and **Gadwall** were dotted about around the fringes. Several **Glossy Ibis** flew in and began feeding in the reeds, we got good views of **Purple Heron** as at least 4 flew over and a single **Great White Egret** did the same as we were about to leave. **Marsh Harriers** quartered the reeds and the pylons were covered in **Great Cormorant** nests, I have never seen this before, what a noisy, smelly, mess!

We ate our picnic lunch round at the back of the Madra Lake, it was fairly quiet bird wise but we added **Honey Buzzard** and a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** to our list.

The Poda Project is a government backed conservation effort, it has a base on the edge of the Burgas Bay and a large visitor's centre was built on the southern shore. We visited the site and sat on their raised terrace watching over the small pools and vast reed beds. From there we found a perched **White-tailed Eagle**, it was very distant but unmistakable.

For the last part of the afternoon we re-visited the salt pans on the north side off the shore but found even less birds there than yesterday so we drove to the most northern section of the pans which took us a little way inland. It was a good move as we found a flock of some 20 **Collared Pratincoles**, we had great views of them perched and in flight. We also found a small flock of **Rosy Starlings**, a **Common Cuckoo** and many **Marsh Harriers**.

It was now 5pm so we decided to call it a day and set off back to hotel for any early shower.

MONDAY MAY 27th DAY 6 – TOUR 2

BURGAS - POMORIE SALT PANS - DIULIMISTI PASS - BALCHIK - CHABLA – KRAPETS

Another day of transit saw us traveling up the west coast of the Black Sea passed Varna and on up towards the border with Romania. We made frequent stops and had a very successful day, the weather was again superb, clear sky with a nice cooling breeze.

There wasn't an official morning walk but some of the group went out, they came back with reports of several sightings, none of which were new for the trip but some good ones anyway. **Syrian Woodpecker** was seen again as was **Common Nightingale**, **Golden Oriole**, **Common Whitethroat** and **Olivaceous Warbler**.

At 8:30am we were on the road heading northward towards Varna, after about 20 minutes on the road we stopped just north of Pomorie. A wide expanse of salt pans stretched either side of the main road north of the town and it was there that we made a short stop. A couple of **European Rollers** seen on the wires went quickly onto the sightings list as did **Pied Avocet**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Common Shelduck**, **Little Egret** and **Common Tern**. Whilst we were there a couple of **Great White Egrets** dropped in, **Gull-billed Terns** joined **Common Terns** feeding over the water.

A large flock of migrating **White Pelicans** circled on the thermals, **Common Kestrels** hovered and a **Marsh Harrier** quartered the fields nearby. The only wader seen there was a **Little Ringed Plover**!



We turned off the coast road and headed westward inland to visit the Diulimiski Pass which is famous for migrating raptors etc. Our first stop at the beginning of the pass was magical. We saw some great species in a short space of time and enjoyed the lovely spectacle of a **European Bee-eater** colony. Here is a list of what we saw in 30 minutes:

1. Isabelline Wheatear
2. Northern Wheatear
3. Bee-eater
4. Roller
5. Hoopoe
6. Golden Oriole
7. Crested Lark
8. Spanish Sparrow
9. Common Cuckoo
10. Common Buzzard



11. Barred Warbler
12. Common Whitethroat
13. Little Ringed Plover
14. Red-rumped Swallow
15. Barn Swallow
16. Common Swift
17. House Martin
18. Sand Martin
19. Corn Bunting
20. Black-headed Bunting
21. Red Backed Shrike
22. Woodchat Shrike
23. Black Stork

It was amazing really, all those birds in a matter of minutes, just shows you how good Bulgaria is.

At the peak of the pass we stopped to look for raptors, finding **Steppe Buzzard, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard** and **Common Kestrel**. In the scrub we found a lovely male **Ortolan Bunting** singing, also **Eurasian Linnets, Common Skylarks, Hawfinch** and lots of **Red-backed Shrikes**. As we drove back down to the coast road we drove through some open oak woodland and it was there that Iordan, our Bulgarian guide, spotted a **Wryneck** sitting in a tree. Fantastic, we reversed to the spot and we all had great views of this elusive species.

We enjoyed a lovely lunch in a roadside restaurant before driving through Varna and on towards the Cape of Kaliakra. On the way we stopped at some cliffs near Balchik to look for an **Eagle Owl**. Again our guide Iordan came up trumps as he found an adult bird perched nicely on the cliff face.

Our visit to the Psuedo Steppe near the Cape of Kaliakra also proved successful too! Our target birds were **Tawny Pipit** and **Stone Curlew**, we got both in a short period of time. The **Stone Curlews** showed well, they were a pair and we had inadvertently driven them off their nest as we nearly trod on a couple of eggs, we quickly retreated from the area. The **Tawny Pipit** also showed very well for us as did **Short-toed Lark, Calandra Lark, Crested Lark** and a **Eurasian Hoopoe**.

We drove through a series of small villages on the way to our hotel, along the way we found a small flock of **Rosy Starlings** bathing in a roadside puddle, how fantastic was that. The birds flew up into some bushes to preen before flying off, great views were had by all of us. After that we found a couple more groups of them.

Lastly we drove down a small track to a site where a couple of **Demoiselle Cranes** had been seen in recent days. Unfortunately for us they did not appear but we did see our first **Stonechat** plus **Yellow Wagtails, European Rollers, European Bee-eaters, European Turtle Dove, Black-headed Bunting** and a few common species.

We finally made it to our hotel at 7pm, after checking in and a short break we settled down to eat a lovely dinner in the restaurant that overlooks the beach, lovely.

TUESDAY MAY 28th DAY 7 – TOUR 2

KRAPETS - DURANKULAK MARSHES - SHABLA LAKE - CAPE KALIAKRA & QUARRY

Our last full day on the coast was certainly full! We started at 6:30am with a walk along the track next to the hotel. Jordan was out a little before most of us and he got some superb views of a **Marsh Warbler** as it sang in the scrub next to the hotel. Of course when the rest of us got out there the bird had flown!

The rest of the walk was punctuated with stops to look at some good species: **Golden Oriole, European Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Barred Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Black-headed Bunting** and the best was saved until last, a lovely male **Pied Wheatear** appeared and sang to us as we returned the hotel for breakfast.

Breakfast was late so we had to sit and wait on the terrace where we could sea-watch, this turned up two new species for us, a **European Shag** and a **Black-throated Diver**. **A large Falcon was also spotted, it was far out and flying close to the water's surface, it had a very brown back and wings, we thought it might be a Saker, but couldn't be sure from that distance.**

Our first stop after breakfast was at the Marshland near Durankulak, the sky was bright with fluffy white clouds but it was very breezy. On the approach track we stopped to look at a falcon perched on the wires, it was a **Red-footed Falcon**, the first for the two trips this spring, hoorah!

At the main reed beds we spent a lot of our time searching for **Paddyfield Warbler**, the local celebrity. The wind wasn't helping much, but after a few fleeting glimpses we eventually had some great views of perched birds. In the meantime we saw many of the very loud **Great Reed Warblers** and a **Common Cuckoo** perched out in the open at the back of the reed bed. The open pools held a few **Ferruginous Ducks, Common Coot** and **Mallard**. Another prized sighting was the **Pygmy Cormorant**, two flew over us showing very well in the morning sunshine. Other good sightings included 7 **Squacco Herons, Purple Heron, Little Egret, Marsh Harrier** and a couple of **Bearded Tits**.

On the road to Shabla Lake we stopped to admire a **European Roller** which was perched on the wires just off the road, splendid! At Shabla our main efforts were directed in and around the large pools found there. From the elevated platform we saw a good number of species with **Black-winged Stilts, Pied Avocets, Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, Common Shelduck, Common Tern, Mute Swan** and **Little Egret** being the most common. However, we did also see: **Grey Plover, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Little Gull, Reed Bunting** and a singing **Savi's Warbler** eventually gave us some good views.

From Shabla we drove round to the Cape Kaliakra some 40 minutes away where we spent a couple of hours walking to the point through the old castle ruins. We found several **Pied**



Wheatears, a **Northern Wheatear**, **White Wagtails**, some obliging **European Bee-eaters** and a **Eurasian Hoopoe** flew back and forth carrying food. A flock of some 50 **Rosy Starlings** flew down to the point and back again but they never stopped. We spent quite some time watching the antics of the Bottle Nosed Dolphins and the Harbour Porpoises, they were fishing down below us, many **Yellow-legged Gulls** were following them hoping to pick up scraps.

From the Cape we drove a short distance to the Kaliakra Valley where our last birding of the day consisted of a nice walk to the cove and up into the valley. A reed fringed pool held many **Great Reed Warblers**, they were singing, what a din! A pair of **Pied Wheatears** gave great views and further up the valley we saw **Golden Oriole**, **Common Cuckoo**, **Little Grebe** and a **Calandra Lark** sang high above us, but not much else.

We climbed into the bus for the last time and headed off to the hotel, but before we got there we made one unscheduled stop to watch a flock of **Rosy Starlings**!! At last we had found a feeding flock, they were eating Cherries and perching nicely on the trees and on the ground just a few meters from the bus, excellent. We watched them for a while and ended up getting back late for dinner but hey, ho, everyone enjoyed watching the beautiful Rosy Starlings.

WEDNESDAY MAY 29th DAY 8 - TOUR 2

KRAPETS TO CENTRAL BALKAN MOUNTAINS ABOVE TROYAN WITH ONE BIRDING STOP ALONG THE WAY

Our last full day in Bulgaria was spent mainly traveling from the coast of the Black Sea to the Central Balkan Mountains some 150 kilometers from Sofia.

We left early and the drive was very pleasant and with not much traffic on the road we made good time. We made 3-4 stops for birding, breakfast, lunch and coffee.

Along the way we saw a few interesting species: **Black Storks** (20+ in a field), **White Storks**, **Wood Pigeon** (our first for the trip), **Common Raven**, **Lesser Grey Shrike** and many other common species.

We made one birding stop somewhere near Provadia about an hour out of Varna where we ate our boxed breakfast. We stopped right near a cliff face where a well known pair of **Golden Eagles** nest, sure enough we could plainly see a bird on the nest, great result for the group, it was really great that a pair of eagles had chosen such an obliging nest site. At the same time we saw

Hawfinch, **Red-backed Shrike**, **Golden Oriole**, **Spanish Sparrow** and **European Turtle Dove**.



At 3pm we arrived at our hotel in the mountains, we quickly dropped off our luggage and got ready for a walk around the hotel grounds. Unfortunately for us it was extremely windy and consequently not many birds showed. We only saw Common **Chaffinch**, **Common Redstart**, **White Wagtail** and we heard **European Robin**, **Blackcap** and we also saw another **Wood Pigeon**.

We decided to drive up to the peak of the mountains, some 2000 meters above sea level, and again the wind was a major hindrance. We managed to get to the sheltered side of the mountain and found a few species there: A couple of **Eurasian Linnets** flew around us, a **Blackcap** sang and showed well, a **Common Crossbill** sat on a pine tree and stared at us.

We then found a **Water Pipit** and as we followed this bird when it flew up the hillside we found a pair of **Whinchats**. A **Ring Ouzel** sang from the scrub whilst a second one was seen by just 3 of the group. We also heard a **Dunnock** singing.

Lastly we drove back to the hotel and 3 of us went down to look for woodpeckers without success, however we did see a **Eurasian Bullfinch** right outside the hotel, a lovely bird to finish off our list for the day.



Our total list for the tour amounted to 188 species, a great list with some super birds on it. The group were undecided about a bird of the trip, with **Rosy Starling** and **Wallcreeper** getting equal votes.

THURSDAY MAY 30th DAY 9 – TOUR 2

CENTRAL BALKAN MOUNTAINS TO SOFIA AIRPORT

OUR FINAL DAY

Nothing much to report for today really. We all got up early, packed and were on the bus by 6:30am. A little birding in the car park before we set off produced a male **Eurasian Bullfinch** (finally all the group got to see one - especially Jim from the US). Birds seen on the journey were few and far between as everyone was very sleepy, but we did find a new species for the trip in the shape of a **Yellowhammer**. That was number 191.

Our departure from Sofia was more or less on time and that concluded our fantastic Tour of beautiful Bulgaria.

Species recorded

A = Tour 1 13th – 21st May 2013

B = Tour 2 22nd – 30th May 2013

H = heard only

SPECIES		Scientific Name		
	SPECIES	Scientific name	A	B
1	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	✓	✓
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓
3	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓
4	Yelkouan Shearwater	<i>Puffinus yelkouan</i>	✓	
5	White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	✓	✓
6	Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	✓	✓
7	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓
8	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓
9	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>	✓	✓
10	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓
11	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	✓	✓
12	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	✓	✓
13	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓
14	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	✓	✓
15	Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓	✓
16	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	✓	✓

17	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	✓	✓
18	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓
19	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓	✓
20	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓	✓
21	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓
22	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	✓
23	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	✓	
24	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓	✓
25	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
26	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓
27	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	✓	✓
28	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓
29	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓
30	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	✓	✓
31	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	✓	✓
32	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓
33	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		✓
34	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓
35	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	✓	✓
36	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓
37	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	✓	✓
38	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓
39	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓
40	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓
41	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	✓	✓
42	Steppe Buzzard	<i>Buteo vulpinus</i>	✓	✓
43	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	✓	✓
44	Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	✓	✓
45	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	✓	✓
46	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓
47	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓
48	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>		✓
49	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	✓	✓
50	Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>		✓
51	Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>		?
52	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓	✓
53	Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>		✓
54	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	H	
55	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	
56	Demoiselle Crane	<i>Grus virgo</i>	✓	
57	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓
58	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
59	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓
60	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓
61	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓
62	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>	✓	✓
63	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	✓	✓

64	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓
65	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓
66	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓
67	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓	✓
68	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	✓	✓
69	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓	
70	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>		✓
71	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓
72	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	✓	
73	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	✓	✓
74	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	✓	
75	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓
76	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	✓	
77	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	✓	✓
78	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓
79	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>	✓	
80	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	✓	✓
81	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	✓	✓
82	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	✓	
83	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	✓	✓
84	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>		✓
85	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓
86	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	✓	✓
87	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	✓	✓
88	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓
89	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
90	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	✓	✓
91	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓
92	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓	✓
93	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	✓	
94	Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	✓	H
95	Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	✓	✓
96	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H	
97	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	✓	✓
98	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	✓	✓
99	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓	✓
100	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓
101	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓	
102	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓	✓
103	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	✓	✓
104	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓
105	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		✓
106	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	✓	✓
107	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	✓	✓
108	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	✓	✓
109	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓
110	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	✓	
111	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	H	✓

112	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	✓	
113	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	✓	✓
114	Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	✓	✓
115	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓
116	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	✓	✓
117	Common Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓
118	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓
119	Crag Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>	✓	✓
120	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓
121	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	✓	✓
122	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓
123	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>	✓	✓
124	Pied/White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓
125	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓
126	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	✓	✓
127	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		H
128	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	✓	✓
129	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	✓	✓
130	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	✓	✓
131	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓
132	Masked Shrike	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>	✓	✓
133	(White-throated) Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	✓	✓
134	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
135	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	H	✓
136	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
137	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	✓	✓
138	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓
139	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	✓	✓
140	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	✓	✓
141	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata rubicola</i>	✓	✓
142	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓
143	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	✓	✓
144	Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	✓	✓
145	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	✓	✓
146	Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>		✓
147	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	✓	✓
148	Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	✓	✓
149	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
150	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓
151	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	H
152	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	✓	✓
153	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H
154	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	H	✓
155	Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	✓	✓
156	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓	H
157	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	✓	✓
158	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	✓	✓
159	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais pallida</i>	✓	✓

160	Olive-tree Warbler	<i>Hippolais olivetorum</i>	✓	✓
161	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>	✓	
162	Eurasian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	H	H
163	Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	✓	✓
164	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓
165	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	✓	
166	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	✓	✓
167	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	✓	✓
168	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	✓	✓
169	Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia crassirostris</i>	✓	✓
170	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	✓	✓
171	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	H	
172	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓	✓
173	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva parva</i>	✓	✓
174	Semi-collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula semitorquata</i>	✓	✓
175	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	H	✓
176	Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	✓	✓
177	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>		✓
178	Sombre Tit	<i>Parus lugubris</i>	✓	✓
179	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓
180	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
181	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
182	Wood Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓
183	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	✓	✓
184	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	H	
185	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	✓	✓
186	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	✓	✓
187	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	✓
188	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	✓	✓
189	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	✓	✓
190	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	✓	✓
191	Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>	✓	✓
192	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓
193	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
194	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓
195	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓
196	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
197	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	✓	✓
198	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓
199	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	✓
200	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothrauste</i>	✓	✓
201	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
202	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓	✓
203	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓
204	Rose-coloured Starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>	✓	✓
205	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓
206	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	✓	✓
207	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓

208	European Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
209	(Western) Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓
210	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	
211	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓
212	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓
	<i>TOTAL</i>		19 5	19 1