

WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS
IN
BULGARIA
WITH
OXFORD RSPB MEMBERS GROUP
MAY 6TH – May 14TH 2014



TRIP REPORT

LEADERS: BOB BUCKLER & JORDAN (DANCHO) HIRSTOV

DAY 1 - 6TH MAY 2014

LONDON TO SOFIA – TRANSFER TO YOGADINA WITH A STOP FOR LUNCH AT PAZARDZIK

I met my new group at Gatwick at 'silly o'clock' in the morning to catch the early flight to Sofia, the Oxford RSPB member's group are regular clients and were all looking forward to a fabulous tour of this fabulous birding country.

We arrived early and our guide, driver and coach transport arrived to collect us soon afterwards. It was quite a shock to my system when I stepped off the plane, I had been used to 28C over the last few days, so 10C overcast with light rain woke me up with a jerk.

My group consisted of twelve members of the Oxford RSPB, they were eager to get out there and start birding so we set off straight away. About 2 hours into our journey we stopped to buy a picnic lunch, so far we had listed several nice species including; Montagu's Harrier, Long-legged Buzzard, Eurasian Hoopoe and lots of White Storks.



Our lunch stop was amazing we hardly had time to eat! Birds were everywhere, we amassed quite an impressive list in a short time. Calandra, Crested and Skylarks, Tree and Spanish Sparrows, Woodchat, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes, Northern Wheatear, Whinchat, Turtle Dove, Common Cuckoo and most peoples' favourite was the Black Headed Bunting.

A few raptors appeared, Common Kestrel, Long-legged Buzzard and to our great delight we found two Levant Sparrowhawks. We saw them just as we drove from the shop after

buying our picnic on the edge of town, one of them sat out in the open for us, smashing bird.

The rest of the afternoon was spent travelling south-eastward to the Western Rhodope Mountains, we followed the route of the river Vacha where a dam produces a huge system of lakes. We headed toward the Trigrad Gorge which was to be our destination tomorrow, we turned off just after Devin and followed a second gorge up to a picturesque village called Yogadina, our hotel was there. We listed several more species along the way including Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Hooded Crow and Yellow-legged Gull.

We ate a lovely early dinner at 6:30am, several of us had been up most of last night so an early one now was needed.

DAY 2 - 7TH MAY 2014

WESTERN RHODOPE MOUNTAINS - TRIGRAD GORGE EASTERN RHODOPES - WITH STOPS AT SMOYLEN - KARDZHALI – KRUMOGRAD

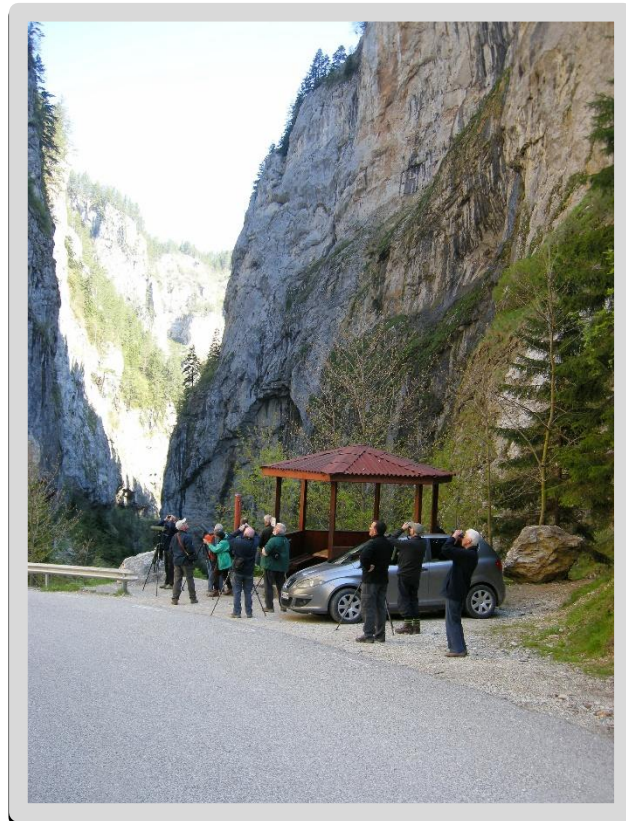
Most of the day was spent travelling from west to east through the Rhodope Mountain range, the scenery was terrific and contrasting, we started in the steep sided gorges of the west where pine forest dominate and

finished in the rolling hills of the east where open deciduous woodland and alpine meadows are found. Both sides were just as beautiful as one another in their own unique way.

Before we started travelling we took a pre-breakfast walk around the village of Yagodina which is such a beautiful and tranquil place. It was overcast with the temperatures around 2-5C so fleeces and jackets were called for. We saw plenty of birds most of which could have been seen in an English country garden with the exception of Black Redstart, White Wagtail, Hooded Crow, Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrow. What was also nice to see was the Bullfinch and Coal Tit, Wren, Dunnock and a Common Buzzard.

After breakfast we set off to visit the famous Trigrad Gorge giving us the only opportunity of seeing the Wallcreeper. We arrived as the sun began to illuminate one side of this awesome gorge, sheer cliffs of limestone towered above us giving us neck-ache looking for this prized bird. Lots of Crag and House Martins distracted us somewhat and for 20 minutes all we saw were the martins and a nest with 5 young Ravens bursting to get out and almost ready to fledge. Then the enigmatic prized bird appeared and showed well for a short while, time enough for us all to see it in the scope, the star bird, Wallcreeper was on the list.

As we drove back down the gorge after our wonderful encounter with the 'creeper we saw Dipper and Grey Wagtail in the river and we heard a Black Woodpecker call.



The next two hours were spent negotiating the winding roads up through the western range of the Rhodopes, we stopped in the ski resort area to look for other species. We found Goldcrest, Black Redstart, White Wagtail, Jay and three Ring Ouzels appeared briefly.

At Smoylen we had lunch on a nice terrace overlooking part of the town and when we visited a bank in the town we saw Pallid Swift, Red-rumped Swallow and a Eurasian Sparrowhawk. Back in the bus and a little later some of group saw a Black Woodpecker fly over the road as we drove through wooded hillsides.

Our next stop was in the next town called Kardzhali, we made a brief stop to stretch our legs near a reservoir and saw Pygmy Cormorant fly over. Another hour in the bus and we stopped for the last time in the hills just west of Krumovgrad. As soon as we got out of the bus we found a Goshawk circling above us and performing its flight display. Then we spent an hour finding all kinds of species which included: Golden Oriole, Woodchat and Red-backed Shrikes, Common Cuckoo, Turtle Dove and several common finches.

We finally arrived at our hotel in Krumovgrad, there wasn't time to go birding, after we had settled into our rooms we went straight down for dinner, I must say that the food in Bulgaria this year seems so much better than last year.

DAY 3 - 8th MAY 2014

EASTERN RHODOPES - KRUMOVGRAD AND MADZAROVO

What a fantastic day - a truly great birding experience in beautiful countryside and superb weather, Bulgaria lived up to its reputation today.

We started with a short walk to a local park near the hotel in Krumovgrad, it was quite misty and a little chilly, we were hoping to see Scops Owl. Our 30 minute stay produced Marsh Tit, Syrian Woodpecker and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker but all we got of the owl was a couple of calls and no sighting.



After breakfast we drove to a valley some 15 minutes away and spent the most pleasurable 3 hours birding along a quiet lane overlooking typical farmland, hill-sides and wooded hedges. The air was alive with a cacophony of bird songs, Common Cuckoos called from all directions, Golden Orioles too, Hoopoe, Nightingales, Buntings and Warblers added their voices to this avian symphony. The warblers were just great, a very showy Barred Warbler started the show, then we moved onto an Olivaceous Warbler followed by Sardinian and Orphean Warblers and finally a Common Whitethroat.

We also saw a rufous-morph Cuckoo a rare sighting and new for most of the group. On the hillside we saw two Hobbys flying around the ridge, also Turtle Doves sat on wires and lots of Lesser Grey Shrikes whizzed about trying to pair off. Red-backed Shrikes and Woodchat Shrikes sat calmly on the bushes and Corn, Cirl and Black-headed Buntings sang from various song posts, we even found a Common Nightingale singing from the power lines!

A little further along the track the hillside on our left became more rocky and steeper and the land to our right dropped away to a river and beyond lay large areas of cultivated land. On the hillside we tracked down a Chukar from its call and on the right we saw a European Roller, a Whinchat and our first Orphean Warbler.

After taking a short ride back on the bus we found ourselves stopping every few meters to look at European Rollers, they were everywhere, we often saw them perform their aerial display, rolling as they dropped from the sky like 'blue arrows'. Both White Stork and Black Stork were found on their nests and Ravens, Common Kestrels and Long-legged Buzzards soared above us.

We finished off our morning by the side of a gorge with tall pinnacles of rock either side of the road. There we found Black-eared Wheatear, White Wagtail and our target species the Rock Nuthatch which showed very well. Well what a blast and I haven't mentioned a lot of species of butterflies that we saw including Black Veined White, Spotted Fritillary, Green Hairstreak and Brown Argus.

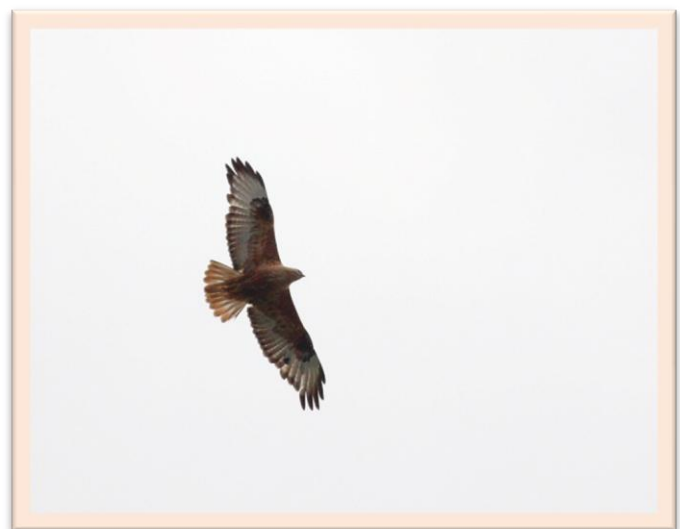
We then drove to Madzarovo where we sat down to lunch at the visitor's centre adjacent to the Vulture feeding station, along the way we stopped to look at vultures in the sky, both Griffon and Egyptian Vultures were seen as well as more Black Storks. During one of our stops we found Ortolan Bunting singing and Blue Rock Thrush landed next to it whilst we were watching.

After lunch a short walk in an oak woodland produced good views of Hawfinch, Red-backed Shrike and we heard Song Thrush and Bonelli's Warbler without seeing either of them.
LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD – JORDAN HIRSTOV

Next we drove across the river to an ancient crater, it was a few miles across and the valley was surrounded by the towering remnants of volcanic rock. We walked in the basin for an hour or so, which gave us the opportunity to watch the vultures at their nests and also drifting along the cliff face.

In the oak woodland we saw our first Subalpine Warbler and got great views of many other birds. Along the rock face we found Rock Bunting which was our fifth different bunting of the day and we saw a Camberwell Beauty butterfly as well as Balkan Green Lizard and several other interesting insects.

It was now 6pm so we jumped back onto the bus for the 30 minute ride back to the hotel, we had a short time to get ready for dinner which was enjoyed at 7:30pm.



DAY 4 - 9TH MAY 2014

TRANSFER FROM EASTERN RHODOPES TO BURGOS VIA SAKER HILLS

Well you can't be in paradise every day, finally our bubble burst and so did the clouds! Yes it rained on our parade today but only in the afternoon.

We met at 7am for a walk around the hotel grounds, we never added any new species but we got great views of a lot of others. A Little Owl sat in the hotel chimney outlet, whilst a Barred Warbler showed well in the scrub. Bird song was as prolific as ever, Common Nightingales, Black Headed Buntings, Olivaceous Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Hoopoe, Turtle Dove and the ever present Common Cuckoo gave it large.

Our first stop after breakfast was near a reservoir just east of Mardjarovo, we stood on a hillside overlooking the water and the distant hills looked promising for raptors. Three Short-toed Eagles circled above us, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures drifted over the hills and we had super views of Hawfinches in the bushes just below us. An Olive-tree Warbler sang in the distance but we never got to see it. Just after we left we saw our first Black Kite of the trip, it was standing in the road eating a road-kill of some description.

The next time we stopped was to look for Masked Shrike and Olive Tree Warbler, both of which failed to show during our search, we did hear Olive Tree Warbler but that was all we got from it. We did see Woodlark, Spotted Flycatcher, Mistle Thrush, Ortolan Bunting, Tree Pipit and Eurasian Sparrowhawk. We also got unbelievable views of a male Golden Oriole that sat out in the open, likewise with a Common Cuckoo.

As we got back to the bus we finally found the Masked Shrike, this little beauty sat right out for us, just lovely.



As we drove further eastward we could see the clouds in the distance and we knew we were in for a wet afternoon. We bought picnic lunch supplies in Topolovgrad and ate it just outside the town on a hillside which is a regular raptor watch-point. Along the track towards the summit of the hill we saw Siskin, Isabelline Wheatear, Stonechat (our first of the trip), Woodchat Shrike and lots of Spanish Sparrows.

During lunch we found our target species the Eastern Imperial Eagle, this magnificent beauty drifted over us several times as if scanning our lunch in the hope of nicking some! Next a Honey Buzzard circled right above us, it was followed by two Red-footed Falcons, how good was that? In the scrub an Orphean Warbler flitted about and another Olive Tree Warbler sang distantly. It was then that it started to rain, so we quickly abandoned our lunch break and jumped into the bus.

We drove for another hour before turning off into an oak woodland near a country park called Bozura. The rain came down but it did not stop my intrepid group, we walked along a couple of sheltered tracks before finding our first Common Redstart, then a Spotted Flycatcher and we got onto a Great Spotted Woodpecker in flight, we had seen a Green Woodpecker minutes before from the bus.

After a while our guide Dancho led us to a Black Woodpecker nesting hole that he knew of, within a few minutes an adult bird sat peeking out of the entrance hole, fantastic. On our way back towards the car we found Eurasian Nuthatch, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Jay and our first Greenfinches, whoopee!

The rain came down with a vengeance as we drove the last 30km to Burgos, along the way we saw another Lesser Spotted Eagle, another Eastern Imperial Eagle - this was a first-year bird perched on a pylon, we also saw Grey Heron, Glossy Ibis, Great Cormorant and lots of Yellow-legged Gulls as we drove through Burgos.

We arrived at our hotel around 7pm which was a little late, but we all enjoyed a super dinner and an early night.

DAY 5 – 10TH MAY 2014

BOURGAS WETLANDS INCLUDING PODA NATURE RESERVE AND SALT PANS

70% chance of precipitation translates to raining most of the day which is exactly what we got. But despite the rain we had a fantastic day's birding and saw some wonderful species, over 75 different birds without travelling more than 10 miles along the Black Sea coastline.

Burgos is not the most picturesque of places to visit but the bird-life is magnificent, we saw species ranging in size from the pelican '**whose beak will hold more food than his belican**' to the diminutive Little Stint '**whose identity is revealed by its lack of immensity**'. However it was the terns that really made the day, we saw 7 species, here they are listed in order of size not of appreciation:

Little Tern

Black Tern

White-winged Black Tern

Whiskered Tern

Common Tern

Sandwich Tern

Caspian Tern

Quite often we would see 3 or 4 species of tern sitting side by side, it was great to see them in such numbers and in summer plumage too. One lake held over 100 Black Terns, with 20+ White-winged Terns mingled in with them. On the same lake there was an estimated 1000 Sand Martins, plus: Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, a Little Crake, Purple Heron, Night Heron, Little Bittern, Pygmy Cormorant, Great Reed Warbler and lots more flying over or sitting on the water.

We got soaked during our first stop and less soaked during our second stop and so the day went on until it finally stopped raining at about 4pm.

The large Burgos Lake held Dalmatian Pelicans, Whiskered, Little, Common and Black Terns, also Great Crested and Little Grebes, Gadwall, Common Pochard and Shoveler. We also saw our first Little Bittern, a couple of Night Herons, Mute Swans and Great Cormorants.

The next pool held the most species and the highest numbers, Sand Martins covered the surface whilst Common Swifts clouded the sky, ducks were dotted all over the place and Great Reed Warblers tried to drown out the traffic noise.

We found a quiet haven at the far side of the lake where we enjoyed watching Squacco Herons, Pygmy Cormorants, Purple Herons and a Little Bittern. Savi's Warbler 'reeled' from the reed-beds, common Cuckoos sat out in the open as did Bee-eaters, Great Reed Warblers and Common Terns. In fact I can't remember seeing both Common Terns and Black-headed Gulls sitting on power lines before now?

After lunch we visited the Poda Nature Reserve Centre where a secluded path led us alongside reed-fringed pools and open water, this is where the Common Tern colonies were and where we had super views of several different terns. We also saw a few waders, Wood Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Common Snipe, Black-winged Stilt, Ruff, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Common Ringed Plover, Dunlin and Curlew Sandpiper. Black-necked Grebes sat out on the bay whilst a host of species loafed on a sand bar.

Out on a rocky spit alongside a row of wooden posts we found Mediterranean Gull, Caspian and Sandwich Terns, Oystercatcher and many more of the terns mentioned above.

Finally we arrived at the salt pans, the rain had ceased at last but the light was very bad. Waders were in good numbers, Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stint and Dunlin numbered the most but we did see Spotted Redshank, Pied Avocet, Grey Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover and Common Ringed Plover

It was now 5pm and the light was fading so we decided to call it a day, it took just 20 minutes to get back to the hotel giving us plenty of time to relax before dinner.

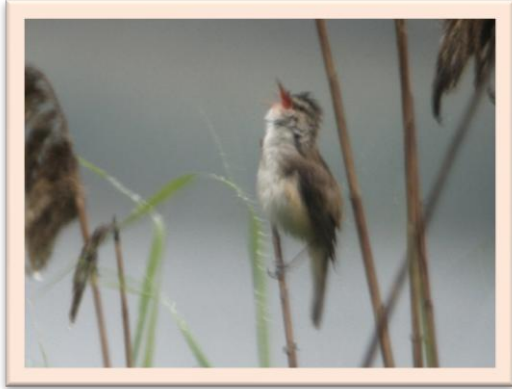
Our bird log revealed that we had seen over 75 species which was a great total considering the inclement weather conditions.



DAY 6 - 11TH MAY 2014

TRANSFER FROM BOURGAS TO THE NORTHEAST COAST - WITH STOPS AT POMORIE SALT PANS - EASTERN BALKAN MOUNTAINS - GORITSA OAK WOODLAND - BALCHIK AND KRAPETS.

The good weather returned today at last, it was dry when we went out for a pre-breakfast walk. The bird life wasn't great but we had good views of Olivaceous Warbler, our first Blackcap was seen and we had glimpses of Golden Oriole. A Black Throated Diver was seen distantly on the sea.



After loading up the bus once more we set off, heading northwards towards Varna, our plan was to visit a few places along the way and arrive at Krapets, some 80km north of Varna, in the early evening.

Our first stop was just outside of Bourgas where the salt-pans end and swampy ground with overgrown pools is found. We had hoped for views of a recently sighted Short-eared Owl but it did not show. We did see several White Pelicans high in the sky, they were migrating north along the coast. In the pools and meadows we found Squacco Heron, Garganey, Whiskered Terns and many egrets, ducks and herons which we had already seen elsewhere on the tour, our first Water Rail was heard frequently and the low fog-horn like call of the Yellow-bellied Toad sounded as though there were lots of Great Bitterns out there.

As we got back to the bus the second of our target species showed up as half a dozen Collared Pratincoles took to the sky and began hawking insects high above the marsh, nice birds, a Marsh Harrier was also seen up there.

At Pomorie we stopped to look at the salt pans from the new reserve and visitor's centre, it was very good there, the light was exceptionally good too. Several wader species were seen well these included: Kentish Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Pied Avocet and a few Black-winged Stilts. Terns and gulls sat on posts, a Mediterranean Gull was nice to see and a Slender-billed Gull was even better. Distant White Pelicans could be seen loafing on a distant sand-bar and our second Black-throated Dover showed very well in the morning light.

Moving on we travelled further north and turned inland to cross the Balkan Mountains, this is as far east as they go and were just rolling hills rather than mountains. As we gained height we stopped in an open ravine to bird the scrub area, Bee-eaters were attending their nest holes and a pair of Hoopoes had taken over one of them. A small hamster-like mammal was found in the grass, it was our first sighting of a Souslik, just before that we saw hundreds of White Pelicans rising on the thermals in order to cross the mountains, there must have been over a thousand of them in three separate groups.

We also saw Cirl Bunting, Black-headed Bunting, Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes, Golden Oriole, Turtle Dove, Hawfinch, Common Buzzard and a Marsh Harrier.

Another stop on the top of the mountains produced our first Linnets, also Corn Bunting, Skylark, Whinchat, Ortolan Bunting, Yellowhammer and Lesser Grey Shrike. Several Buzzards appeared over the ridges and we found one with the distinctive markings of the sub-species, the Steppe Buzzard.

We drove down the north side of the Mountains and stopped for lunch near a town called Goritsa and just afterwards we returned to visit the oak woods on the mountain slopes, this is an area known for sightings of Semi-collared



Flycatcher. It didn't take long before we were watching a pair of these lovely Flycatchers and during our search we found Spotted Flycatcher, Eurasian Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker and we heard a Green Woodpecker. one unusual sighting was of a Yellowhammer in the middle of the wood, none of us expected that.



We continued our walk and found a pair of Red-backed Shrikes just before we encountered our second target species the Middle Spotted Woodpecker, it showed for several minutes and well enough for all of us to see it in the scope.

After passing through Varna we turned off the main road to visit Balchik where we knew of a site for Eagle Owl, just before we got there we stopped to look at a bird-of-prey circling over the road, it turned out to be a Booted Eagle, another first for the trip. Whilst watching the eagle two Homey Buzzards appeared and then two more eagles came into view. A Lesser Spotted Eagle was identified and the other one turned out to be the much bigger Eastern Imperial Eagle, our third for the trip, fantastic.

The Balchik Eagle Owl was all present and correct, so after a quick look we moved on, a couple of Pied Wheatears were seen from the bus as drove further north. Our route was chosen to take in the coastal roads hoping to see Red-footed Falcons on the wires, however none were found. But many other birds were seen, dozens of Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes joined numerous Rollers, Bee-eaters, Yellow Wagtails, larks and Buntings, all of which were seen along the way.

We arrived at our hotel in Krapets at 7pm which was a little later than anticipated, the hotel is situated right on the beach, so we ate our dinner overlooking the gentle waves, how nice to finish the day like that!

DAY 7 - 12TH MAY 2014

DURANKULAK MARSHES - SHABLA LAKE - KALIAKRA CAPE AND KALIAKRA STEPPE

We got up nice and early to explore the waste ground and cliffs which are adjacent to the hotel, unfortunately it was quite windy so many birds were keen to keep their heads down. Despite the weather we saw a good selection of migrants and breeding species, several warblers put in an appearance, we saw both Common and Lesser Whitethroat, also Barred and Garden Warblers as well as Blackcap, Black Redstart, Common Cuckoo, Golden Oriole, Red-backed Shrike and White Wagtail. We heard a Marsh Warbler and when we first got out and a Thrush Nightingale was seen by just one participant so we never counted it on the main trip list.

After a lovely breakfast we drove to Durankulak marshes, a protected area near the border with Romania, it is the main wintering grounds for Red Breasted Geese. As we approached the entrance we passed the first lagoon and above it we saw a White-tailed Eagle drifting over, the bird was very distant but you could easily see the immensity of it when several Magpies tried to harass it, what a great find. We also saw Marsh Harrier and a small flock of White Pelicans.

The reserve backs onto the beach and it was from this direction that we walked into the area. From a vantage point on some sand dunes we could see small lagoons behind a vast reed bed. The wind was quite bad and made it feel quite cold, from the car we saw both Spanish and Tree Sparrows and a pair of Pied Wheatears fed on the beach with a host of Barn Swallows, they were all eating a swarm of grounded black flies, easy pickings for them.

The lagoons held a lot of Ferruginous Ducks, Mute Swans, Squacco Herons, Common Coot and a Grey Heron flew over. The reeds were alive with bird song but not much could be seen, just the occasional Great Reed Warbler showed, then the White Tailed Eagle showed up again, this time it was much closer and we got some excellent views of it, a magnificent bird.

As we walked further along the Black Sea shore-line we found Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Little Ringed Plover, Black Terns flew by and lots of Yellow Wagtails flitted about, these were the *Feldegg* sub-species. Then we saw a Savi's Warbler singing out in the open, followed by a short view of a pair of Bearded Tits and then a Reed Bunting sat out to sing.



Back in the car park we found some bushes that offered shelter to the birds, there we found 4 Red-breasted Flycatchers, a couple of Spotted Flycatchers and a second Thrush Nightingale. Just before we left we watched both Yellow Wagtail and Black-headed Bunting bathing in a puddle.

On the road again, we drove south back to the Shabla Lakes some 20 minutes away, we stopped to buy our picnic supplies before settling down in a sheltered spot near the beach to eat it. During lunch we saw Common Kestrel and a Hobby circle above us.

Our walk took us passed a thick hedgerow and a wood where several birds were seen, more Flycatchers appeared and another Thrush Nightingale sat out long enough to get good in-the-scope views. Then as we turned a corner another Thrush Nightingale began to sing from the bushes, we couldn't find it but it was nice to hear the song, a Common Nightingale was also singing and we could compare the two.

Further down the track, which led to the Shabla Lake, we found a couple of Blackcaps another Garden Warbler and a Willow Warbler. At the lake we stood on a raised viewing platform and listed several species, a pair of Eurasian Teal were new for us. We also saw a good number of terns, with Black, Whiskered and Common on show.

We then spent an hour or so on the bus driving round to the famous Cape of Kaliakra where we spent the rest of the afternoon. The scrub on the Cape was dripping with Shrikes, mainly Red-backed but we also saw several Lesser Grey Shrikes. The wind had subsided and the sun came out so it was a very pleasant afternoon. We strolled down to the Cape Point and along the way Pied and Northern Wheatears vied with one another to get into our cameras, Bee-eaters sat on the wires and the sky was full of martins and swallows. At the point we saw a dozen European Shag of the Mediterranean race *desmarestii* and a Lesser Black-backed Gull was new for us.

Lastly we walked out onto the 'steppe' near the Cape to look for steppe species, we quickly found a number of Larks including Short-toed Lark which was new for us, a couple of Hoopoes fed on the short turf and Isabelline Wheatears sang and displayed from small bushes. We then found our main target bird the Stone Curlew, one showed very well before flying off.

Our day concluded with the hour drive back to the hotel arriving with just enough time to shower before dinner. It had been a day of mixed weather and mixed fortunes but we all enjoyed it.

DAY 8 - 13TH MAY 2014

KRAPETS TO THE CENTRAL BALKANS NEAR TROYAN

Another transfer day and this was a long one - we got up early and took our breakfast with us, we planned to travel 450km towards Sofia with a diversion into the Central Balkan Mountains.

We set off at 6:30am and spent the next two hours travelling down through Varna and then out westward towards Sofia.



We stopped a short while afterward Varna to look for Golden Eagle at a known nest site. The eagle wasn't there but we did list a few species as we ate our breakfast. Local pairs of Common Buzzard and Common Kestrel circled around us whilst much higher up migrating Lesser Spotted Eagles and Honey Buzzards drifted over. We saw Common Whitethroat, Linnets, Hoopoe, Golden Oriole and we heard a Song Thrush just before we left.



The rest of the morning and most of the afternoon was spent travelling, we eventually arrived at our hotel around 3:30pm. The weather had changed from bright sunny skies to dull overcast conditions with the threat of rain.

Our late afternoon birding walk was spoilt by the weather, we managed to see Eurasian Nuthatch, Great Tit and a European Robin before it started to rain. We had hoped for White-backed Woodpecker but none was seen or heard. A Black Woodpecker was seen by a couple of the group but nothing more happened so we abandoned the walk.

Later at dinner the rain came down heavily whilst we enjoyed our last evening meal together, we read the short bird log afterwards.

Our final tally for the trip was 191 species, with another nine 'heard only' giving us a grand total of 200 species.

The group all expressed their happiness with the trip and gave generous tips to our local guide Dancho and our excellent drive, Martin.

Tomorrow we depart early for the airport, the weather forecast is pants so I don't anticipate much birding.

DAY 9 – 14TH MAY 2014

CENTRAL BALKAN MOUNTAINS TO SOFIA

Unfortunately as predicted it was raining hard and blowing a gale when we emerged from the hotel at 6:30am. So any plans to go birding were curtailed, instead we jumped onto the bus and set off for Sofia. We drove through thick cloud, mist and rain for most of the first two hours then as we dropped down from the mountains the sky cleared and it stopped raining.



Our carry-out breakfast from the hotel was eaten in a road-side café where a nice cup of coffee was well appreciated. Our only birding of the morning was done from the bus when we had to stop at one of the road checks, this took 30 minutes and luckily we could see some open farmland from the bus. We noted up to 6 Red-backed Shrikes, a single Lesser Grey Shrike, Common Kestrel, Corn Bunting, Goldfinch and a perched Long-legged Buzzard, a White Stork was also seen to fly over.

Back on the road we finished the trip to Sofia airport noting: Whinchat, Common Cuckoo, Rook, Hooded Crow, Common Buzzard and Crested Lark along the way.

Sadly the group departed and left myself, Dancho and Martin the driver in the rain outside the departure building. It had been a great trip with some memorable sightings, we visited some truly amazing places and enjoyed the beautiful scenery of this unique Balkan State.

We had a few hours now to spare before the next group arrived, I think I may have a lie down to recuperate!!

LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED BETWEEN MAY 6TH – 23RD 2014

TOUR 1 6TH - 14TH MAY 2014

TOUR 2 15TH - 23RD MAY 2014

	<i>SPECIES</i>	<i>SCIENTIFIC NAME</i>	Tour 1	Tour 2
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.	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.	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓
21.	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	✓
22.	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓	✓
23.	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
24.	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	✓	✓
25.	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	
26.	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas cercre</i>	✓	
27.	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓
28.	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Nitta rufina</i>		✓
29.	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	✓	✓
30.	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓
31.	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	✓	✓
32.	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	✓	✓
33.	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓
34.	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	✓	✓
35.	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	✓	✓
36.	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	✓	
37.	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓
38.	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>	✓	✓
39.	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓
40.	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	✓	
41.	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓
42.	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	✓	✓
43.	Steppe Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo rufinus</i>	✓	✓
44.	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	✓	✓
45.	Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</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.	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓	✓
51.	Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	✓	✓
52.	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	H	✓
53.	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	H	
54.	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H	
55.	Little Crake	<i>Porzana parva</i>	✓	
56.	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓
57.	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
58.	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓
59.	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓	✓
60.	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓
61.	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	✓	✓
62.	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	✓	✓
63.	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓
64.	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	✓	✓
65.	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓
66.	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓	✓
67.	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	✓	✓
68.	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		✓
69.	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	✓	✓
70.	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	
71.	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	✓	
72.	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓	✓
73.	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	
74.	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	✓	
75.	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	✓	✓
76.	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓	
77.	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	✓	✓
78.	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	✓	✓
79.	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓
80.	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓
81.	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>		✓
82.	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	✓	✓

83.	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓
84.	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>	✓	
85.	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	✓	✓
86.	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	✓	✓
87.	White-winged Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	✓	
88.	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	✓	
89.	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	✓	✓
90.	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓
91.	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	✓	✓
92.	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	✓	✓
93.	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓
94.	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓
95.	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
96.	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	✓	✓
97.	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓
98.	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓	✓
99.	Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	✓	✓
100.	Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	✓	✓
101.	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	✓	✓
102.	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	✓	✓
103.	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓	✓
104.	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓
105.	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓	✓
106.	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	✓	✓
107.	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓
108.	Wryneck	<i>Jinx torquilla</i>		H
109.	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	✓	✓
110.	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	✓	✓
111.	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	✓	✓
112.	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓
113.	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	✓	✓
114.	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	✓
115.	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	✓	✓
116.	Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	✓	✓

117.	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓
118.	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	✓	✓
119.	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓
120.	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓
121.	Crag Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>	✓	✓
122.	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓
123.	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	✓	✓
124.	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓
125.	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	✓	✓
126.	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓
127.	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓	✓
128.	Pied/White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</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.	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	✓	✓
134.	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	
135.	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
136.	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
137.	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	✓	
138.	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	✓	✓
139.	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓
140.	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	✓	✓
141.	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	✓	✓
142.	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata rubicola</i>	✓	✓
143.	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓
144.	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	✓	✓
145.	Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	✓	✓
146.	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	✓	✓
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>	✓	✓

151.	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓
152.	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	✓	✓
153.	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓
154.	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	✓	✓
155.	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓	✓
156.	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	✓	
157.	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	✓	✓
158.	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais pallida</i>	✓	✓
159.	Olive-tree Warbler	<i>Hippolais olivetorum</i>	✓	✓
160.	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>		✓
161.	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓
162.	Eurasian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓
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.	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	
171.	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	✓	✓
172.	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>		✓
173.	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓
174.	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓	✓
175.	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva parva</i>	✓	
176.	Semi-collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula semitorquata</i>	✓	✓
177.	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓
178.	Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	✓	✓
179.	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>		✓
180.	Sombre Tit	<i>Parus lugubris</i>		✓
181.	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓
182.	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
183.	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
184.	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓

185.	Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>	✓	✓
186.	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	✓	✓
187.	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓
188.	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	✓	
189.	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	✓	✓
190.	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	✓
191.	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	✓	✓
192.	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	✓	✓
193.	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	✓	✓
194.	Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>	✓	✓
195.	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓
196.	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
197.	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓
198.	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓
199.	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
200.	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	✓	✓
201.	European Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	✓
202.	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothrauste</i>	✓	✓
203.	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
204.	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓	✓
205.	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓
206.	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓
207.	Rose-coloured Starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>		✓
208.	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	✓	✓
209.	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓
210.	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
211.	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓
212.	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓
213.	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓
214.	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓
TOTALS			201	191