

Holiday Highlights
Bulgaria
28 May – 5 June 2010

Guide: Mark Denman and Attila Steiner

Guests: Colin & Melanie Grant, Max & Christine Maughan, Wayne & Val Colson, Sheila Rodgers and Andrew Dodd

DAY 1: We all rendezvous at Gatwick and after a slight delay we jet off to Varna where we are met by Attila our guide and Zoltan our driver for the week. With fleeting glimpses of Bee-eaters, Shrikes and Golden Orioles from the van we don't need much persuasion when Attila suggests stopping off to look for some waders. Unfortunately, with the water levels so high there is no exposed mud, but we do enjoy the Ferruginous Ducks and a surprise Red-crested Pochard. Wayne finds our first White Stork and then a smart male Marsh Harrier that is being mobbed by two Collared Pratincoles! Great Reed Warblers deliver their croaky song from the reed-beds and our first butterflies include Small Heath, Common Blue and Spotted Fritillary. Max ID's some Dark Spread-wings for us and a Syrian Woodpecker calls but refuses to show itself.

Once settled into the hotel, some of us meet on the balcony for a little pre-dinner birding and with Black-headed Buntings, 'Balkan' Yellow Wagtails, Bee-eaters, Hobby, Golden Oriole and Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes on show we tuck into dinner, excited by the prospect of our first full day tomorrow.

DAY 2: Our first full day dawns bright and sunny and after breakfast we head down to the beach to search an extensive area of reed-bed that separates Lake Durankulak from the Black Sea. We pause en-route to admire a pair of Golden Orioles and a little group of Turtle Doves and on climbing out of the van the first bird we hear is the deep croaky voice of Great Reed Warbler, a sound that would stay with us all day.

One of the first birds we see is a Caspian Tern that powers its way through, and is followed not long after by a first summer Red-footed Falcon that temporarily confuses us! It's a little windy this morning which is not really conducive to finding one of our main target species, Paddyfield Warbler, but turning our attention to the reed-beds we're delighted when Attila picks one out singing, and even more delighted when it 'shimmies' to the top of the reeds and sits in full view! At the western edge of its range this is a great

bird to get, and we get very good views of this bird and several others over the next hour or so.

While here we also get brief flight views of Garganey, Little Bittern and Squacco Heron, and the seven Rose-coloured Starlings are an encouraging sign for later on! A little flock of Whiskered Terns dance over the reed-beds and Attila draws our attention to two groups of Glossy Ibis making their way north. A Marsh Harrier disturbs a large group of Night Herons and Andrew spots a couple of Great Crested Grebes flying over the Black Sea. A single White Pelican is a nice find, but pride of place this morning has to go to the Slender-billed Gull that Attila picks out. As we walk back to the van we see a couple of Common Terns over the beach and a nice group of Caspian Terns pass, a little closer this time.

Deciding to move round to the other side of Lake Durankulak we've hardly got going before having to stop to admire more Golden Orioles, Woodchat Shrike and some Tree Sparrows, there are just birds everywhere you look! We find a nice spot for lunch and start finding new birds immediately. A brilliant Roller shares some wires with some Starlings and on a piece of wet meadow we find Great and Little Egret, more Glossy Ibis and Wayne picks out a Northern Wheatear and a rather more interesting Isabelline Wheatear! This is a good spot for butterflies and we're soon adding to our tally with Cardinal, Queen of Spain and Knapweed Fritillary, Meadow Brown, Clouded Yellow and Brown Argus.

After lunch we go for a little stroll, disturbing three Wood Sandpipers that eventually return to the area of damp mud that they share with some goats and sheep and Val finds a nice Yellow Wagtail of the 'dombrowskii' race that breeds a little further north in Romania. A dashing Collared Pratincole passes by and a couple of Snipe 'zig-zag' their way through the cloudless blue sky. We've been hearing Cuckoos all day and finally manage to see one here, and Max finds a couple of handsome Norfolk Hawkers, their big green eyes very distinctive. A Large Copper is very popular, especially with Colin and we all lament the fact that it no longer breeds in Britain.

A Tawny Pipit poses on overhead wires and although we can hear Savi's Warbler 'reeling' away it's a little distant so we decide to drive to another reed-bed. Unfortunately 'the powers that be' have decided to erect a fence to keep hunters out (and people that want to see Savi's Warblers) so we have to make do with a very elusive Barred Warbler, whilst listening to Nightingale and Blackcap. Max finds a nice Glanville Fritillary here and we add White-legged Damselfly to our growing list of Odonata.

We're having an early dinner tonight so we can try for Eagle Owl, but we still have time for a quick look at the Sea where Attila finds a couple of distant Black-throated Divers and Wayne finds a couple of Little-ringed Plovers on the beach. After a delicious meal its back into the van for the hour or so drive to the gorge where we have seen Eagle Owl in the past. We don't have time to stop and look at the many birds we see on the journey, although we can't resist looking at the lovely male Pied Wheatear that Attila spots from the front of the van. On site we're greeted by a cacophony of noise provided by Great Reed Warblers, Marsh Frogs and large numbers of Starlings that are coming in to roost. Other new birds here include Red-rumped Swallow, Alpine Swift and Great Tit, and on closer inspection we realise that there are many Rose-coloured Starlings amongst the flock and they look fantastic through the scopes. Andrew points out three Cuckoos sitting together in a dead tree and Attila hears a Little Crake that calls from deep in the reed-bed.

With the last embers of daylight dying away we're all thrilled when a magnificent Eagle Owl flies to the top of the ridge and poses brilliantly for the next ten minutes! With the light now nearly gone we make our way back to the van (leaving the Eagle Owl!) and reflect on what has been a remarkable days wildlife watching in Bulgaria.

DAY 3 It's another beautiful day, and after breakfast we're off again to see what exciting things we can find. Driving through a mixture of farmland and steppe grassland we pass the usual legions of Shrikes and Bee-eaters but we can't resist stopping to photograph a stunning Roller on some roadside wires. A little further on we see a small falcon hovering. It doesn't look quite right for Kestrel, and on closer inspection we're soon enjoying our second Red-footed Falcon of the holiday. Brilliant!

We take a dirt track towards the cliff top and are soon in the middle of some beautiful steppe grassland that is ablaze with colourful flowers. Calandra and Short-toed Larks show brilliantly by the side of the van, but with all these flowers and nice warm sunshine we cant wait to start some serious butterfly hunting! Meadow Browns are everywhere with Grizzled Skipper and Brown Argus also very common. Max finds our first Eastern Baton Blue and a pair of mating Yellow-banded Skippers prove very popular with the photographers amongst us. We eventually make our way to the cliff top where the views are just stunning, and with a wondrous soundtrack provided by Larks, Orioles and Nightingales we get nice views of Pied Wheatear, Tawny Pipit and four Squacco Herons that fly across the sea!

We decide to have lunch here and Attila brilliantly picks out a distant pod of Harbour Porpoise that are threading their way through some Yellow-legged Gulls. However, despite the distractions of cetaceans and things of an avian nature it is the butterflies that command our attention for the next hour or two. Silver-washed, Knapweed and Glanville Fritillaries mix with the bigger Cardinals and Colin finds a nice little group of Marbled skippers. Max's sharp eyes find Olive Skipper and Ilex Hairstreak and other butterflies here include Orange tip, Holly Blue, Green Hairstreak and a lovely Scarce Swallowtail.

After lunch we decide to move on, pausing to admire a Hoopoe that is making its way along the track in front of us. Both Calandra and Short-toed Lark show well again and before going to the headland at Kaliakra we stop to search for some warblers. Hearing a Barred Warbler singing we get out of the van and eventually get good views of this handsome bird as it sings from the top of a dead tree. A couple of Woodlarks with bills stuffed with food are sitting on the wires above us and we think we maybe too near their nest, so we move on to the site of the Eagle Owl extravaganza of the previous evening. A few Rose-coloured Starlings are still lingering and we see more Alpine Swifts and Red-rumped Swallows overhead. Attila and then Val pick up a couple of Long-legged Buzzards that cruise the ridge in front of us, much to the delight of Wayne who particularly wanted to see one. Norfolk Hawkers patrol the pathway and other interesting Odonata include Scarlet Darter, Scarce Chaser, Azure Damselfly and Black-tailed Skimmer.

The headland at Cape Kaliakra is rather busy, it being a Sunday, but that doesn't put the birds off and we get terrific views of several Pied Wheatears and Black-headed Buntings, and with Alpine Swifts overhead and Bee-eaters hawking in front of the cliffs below us there is no shortage of things to look at. It really is very hot now, so before heading back to Lake Shabla for our final session of the day we stop for a most welcome ice cream!

The late afternoon light is lovely and the Ferruginous Ducks look glorious, along with single Shoveler and Teal. Andrew picks out our only wader here as a Black-winged Stilt tries in vain to find somewhere shallow enough to land. Three Great Egrets emerge from the reeds and a quick look at the beach adds Little Tern, Little Ringed Plover and Sandwich Tern. A typically elusive Marsh Warbler gives us the run around, and with the sound of Tree Frogs filling the air we head back to The Birding Lodge for our final meal, as tomorrow we head south.

DAY 4 Van loaded, we bid Tatyana and the Branta Birding Lodge farewell and start on our journey to Burgos. We've only gone a mile or so when we pull in and have a final look for Savi's Warbler. A smart drake Garganey is nice and we finally get terrific views of several 'reeling' Savi's in the expanse of reeds below us. Max discovers some Variable Damselflies and a nice Keeled Skimmer and we're further entertained by the antics of Bee-eaters that seem to surround us wherever we go, and four Hawfinches that fly over. Our next stop is at a lovely piece of steppe grassland that although covered in flowers and wildlife is under threat from the ever growing number of wind farms that seem to be springing up in this part of Bulgaria. The two birds we're most hoping to see here are Isabelline Wheatear and Stone Curlew, and we're not disappointed, getting great views of both within five minutes of searching! There are Calandra and Short-toed Larks here as well and a very showy Tawny Pipit that song-flights right over our heads.

Heading further south we make a brief stop for Attila to buy some delicious cherries, and we have lunch by a river. Banded Demoiselles dance round the bank-side vegetation and other new Dragons here include Club-tailed Dragonfly and Broad-bodied Chaser. Wayne finds about 40! White Storks that are spiralling upwards and some of us try to photograph the House Martins as they fly towards their nests under the bridge, but only Attila and Mark see the two Kingfishers that shoot past the van.

Berger's Clouded Yellow, Eastern Bath White and Green-underside Blue are added to our butterfly list, and in a little walk after lunch (dodging Buffalo!) we see a couple of brief Honey Buzzards, our first Black Stork and hear several Grey-headed Woodpeckers that call from the dense woodland that surrounds us. Continuing our journey (making a quick stop to photograph a roadside White Stork) we visit a piece of woodland that comprises mainly of Ash and Oak. Just before we stop, some of us glimpse a male Semi-collared Flycatcher flying from the van, a bird we're all hoping to see. We get good views of Nuthatch, but birds are unquestionably easier to hear rather than see here and although we all hear Chiff-chaff, Bonelli's Warbler and a frustratingly close Semi-collared Flycatcher the highlight for most is the stunning Green Lizard that Zoltan our driver has found for us when we return to the van, he's even got the field guide out to show us!

We want to make one more stop en-route to our hotel but are besieged by a terrific thunderstorm that has us sheltering in the van for half an hour. Even though the torrential rain eases we decide to have coffee/ice cream before we walk. This little bit of woodland is considerably less dense and therefore its easier to see the many birds we can hear. A beautiful male Red-backed Shrike that sits for ages is really nice and we all connect with the

Short-toed Treecreeper that is singing near us. Wayne finds a Hawfinch and Max points us in the direction of a Lesser-spotted Woodpecker. We see another couple of Nuthatches here, and most of us connect with a handsome Middle-spotted Woodpecker. Semi-collared Flycatchers are glimpsed by some and other birds here include Green Woodpecker and Spotted Flycatcher.

With time marching on we have to get to our hotel in Sarafovo where we will be staying for the next two nights, passing salt-pans with Stilts and Avocets, and a flock of 25 Pygmy Cormorants that give us an escort for half a mile or so.

DAY5 After some rain in the night we wake to cloudy skies and a day spent exploring some lakes and salt pans in the Burgos area. Some of us are lucky enough to get very close views of an Olivaceous Warbler that sings its heart out for us right by our hotel, but unfortunately it slips back into deep cover before all of us assemble by the van.

At our first stop we encounter our first Pelicans, a group of eleven Dalmatian's that look splendid through the scopes, if a little scruffy! About 20 or so Spoonbills are tucked away in a corner and the only other waders are lots of Avocets and Stilts. On the Tern rafts are a few Common Terns amongst the throng of Sandwich Terns, and one or two Little and Whiskered Terns hawk over the large area of water before us. We find a single drake Gadwall and a couple of distant Caspian Terns, and new butterflies here are Black and Green-veined Whites. A skulking Cetti's Warbler is typically elusive, but a couple of Penduline Tits are far more obliging, as is the Little Bittern that flies right past the petrol station!

Our next stop at Lake Burgos gives us the opportunity to compare both Pelican species that sit around on various concrete blocks in the water. Little Bittern and Night Heron give us flypast views and amongst the rafts of Pochard and Great Crested Grebes we find quite a few Gadwall. Max finds Keeled Skimmer and Large Skipper here and we also get brief views of Squacco Heron and a splendid perched Little Bittern.

Moving on we move to a site that was very good for butterflies and dragonflies last year and on climbing out of the van we realise that this was no fluke. There are hundreds of Black-veined Whites on the wing, a few Eastern Festoons and beautiful Marbled Fritillaries. With two types of Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Scarlet Darters and White-tailed Skimmers a plenty there is much for the Odonata fanciers amongst us as well. It's difficult to know where to look with so much going on but Andrew finds

our first Eagle of the week, a splendid adult White-tailed and this is soon followed by the second when a Lesser-spotted Eagle cruises overhead. Several Honey Buzzards drift past and we see more Spoonbills, White Storks, Night Herons and an unusually co-operative Golden Oriole.

At our lunch stop just down the road we find a fantastic Large Whip Snake that is still alive, but obviously injured by a passing car - shame. Amongst a passing group of White Storks we see a second Lesser-spotted Eagle and another Honey Buzzard. New butterflies here include Grecian Copper, Oriental Marbled Skipper, and Small Skipper and bird interest includes Glossy Ibis, Olivaceous Warbler, Whitethroat and various Shrikes, although unfortunately only Mark sees the male Masked Shrike that puts in a very brief appearance.

We decide to spend some of the afternoon on a piece of raised land above Lake Atanasovsko. Wayne spots a Little Owl sitting very close to the rough track we're driving down and with a bit of manoeuvring we're able to get some good photos of this really fierce looking little predator. Attila and Mark get a brief view of a very 'interesting' falcon, but it disappears out of view too quickly for a definite ID though the 'gut feeling' was that it looked good for Eleonora's Falcon! Other less contentious birds of prey here include Kestrels, lots of Marsh Harriers and a beautiful Long-legged Buzzard that puts on a great show. Isabelline Wheatears sing their sweet song from overhead wires and a couple of Rollers pose for us. As always there are many butterflies and dragonflies to keep us busy, but we turn our attention to birds as the lake below is stuffed with them!

There are dozens of Egrets and Herons, big numbers of Pelicans, and the usual mix of Avocets and Stilts. It's all a little distant but we do pick out a few Ruddy Shelduck, Wigeon and some waders, Black-tailed Godwit, a Spotted Redshank and three Marsh Sandpipers (honest Wayne!!!) Pride of place here though must go to the beautiful White-winged Black Tern that Christine brilliantly picks out amongst the many Whiskered Terns.

We want to check the gull roost before going back to the hotel so with time marching on we head back to the van, only distracted by a few butterflies! There are lots of duck on one of the roadside pools and although on first glance they all seem to be Pochard we do find both drake Red-crested Pochard and Garganey amongst them. The gulls are a mixture of Yellow-legged and Caspian and we go through the main structural differences between them, although admittedly its not easy, so with dinner time fast approaching and our trip to the Eastern Rhodope Mountains tomorrow we head back to the hotel after another super day.

DAY 6 We're heading up into the mountains today but can't resist checking the local salt-pans one last time. Yesterday's assortment of Pelicans and Spoonbills are still present and 25 summer plumaged Black-tailed Godwits are a nice bonus. Andrew finds a lone Redshank amongst them and Christine picks up two very distant Kentish Plover. A little further on we try to creep up on some very close White Pelicans but they're soon on to us and start swimming away. We see more Little Bitterns and Night Herons here but try as we might it seems that Pygmy Cormorant is going to evade us and we're going to have to make do with the flight views of two days ago.

Leaving Burgas, and as we travel through a mixture of farmland and woodland, a passing Black Kite is new for the trip. We want to try to get to an Imperial Eagle site for lunch, but driving on through heavy rain the prospects of seeing any raptors, let alone an Eagle don't look good. Thankfully however there seem to be some patches of blue sky up ahead and with the sun now shining we decide to have a ten minute leg stretch, ten minutes that would turn into well over an hour!

We've not been out of the van long when Attila points out a nice pale Booted Eagle right above us and this is soon followed by Short-toed and Lesser-spotted Eagles, Common, Honey and Long-legged Buzzards but Wayne's mystery 'accipiter' sadly remains that. Despite all the raptor interest we turn our attention to insects with Twin-spot Fritillary, Silver-studded Blue and a brilliant Scarlet Darter.

A short walk down to the river proves to be one of the highlights of the week for many with the discovery of a stunning Freyer's Purple Emperor amongst Adonis Blue, Marbled Fritillary and Large Coppers. A small Pincertail is a nice find, but the main prize is the discovery of several Odalisques, Europe's biggest Damsel and a magnificent creature.

Dragging ourselves away we move on to a spot for lunch that overlooks an Imperial Eagle territory. We see Lesser-spotted Eagle straight away along with a few Honey Buzzards but it is the distinctive 'croaky' song of an Olive-tree Warbler from the slope below us that grabs our attention and with a bit of perseverance we all manage to get pretty good views of this big warbler, although we're not helped by a Woodchat Shrike that seems intent on chasing it away!

As with everywhere we go there are hundreds of butterflies on the wing and new ones here are the much sought after Mazarine Blue, Heath Fritillary, Marbled White and Sloe Hairstreak. We can hear a Cirl Bunting singing, and while searching for it Attila finds a stunning male Masked Shrike on the edge

of some conifers and although it dives into the trees fairly quickly it thankfully returns to what is obviously a favourite perch and we all get good views of this handsome Shrike.

We then move on to a spot nearer the Eastern Imperial Eagle site and almost immediately pick up an interesting looking Eagle over a far ridge. It's rather distant so we clamber back into the van and try to get a bit closer. Driving down into a little village we pick it up again almost overhead and this time there is no doubt that we are looking at a magnificent adult Eastern Imperial Eagle, we can even see its golden nape feathers when it banks, fantastic! Jumping back into the van we follow it further down the road, eventually managing to get scope views for all of this very special bird, a new species for all in the group!

Driving on towards our hotel we pass more Lesser-spotted and Short-toed Eagles, Honey Buzzards and many other birds that five days ago would have had us screeching to a halt! We decide to have one final stop at an area that has been good for Masked Shrike in the past. First bird we see is a very smart Black-eared Wheatear that sadly doesn't linger, but the male Masked Shrike that is in almost the same spot as last year is far more obliging. A couple of Honey Buzzards pass low overhead and another Black-eared Wheatear shows briefly, and thanks to Christine's photos we identify two new butterflies, Lattice Brown and Amanda's Blue.

We see a few Griffon Vultures and a young Egyptian Vulture as we make our way through the breathtaking scenery and after dinner Mark, Max and Christine get a brief view of a Scops Owl that is calling right next to the hotel. What a day it's been!

DAY 7 It's a beautiful day in the mountains and we're off to a Vulture feeding station this morning. We've got a little bit of time so we make a brief stop to search for Rock Nuthatch. Although we have no luck with the Nuthatches we manage to see a beautiful Subalpine Warbler, our first Crag Martins and a very brief Blue Rock Thrush. A Lattice Brown butterfly takes a bit of a shine to Christine and lands on her shirt, but with a deadline to meet it's back into the van and on with our journey through some gorgeous scenery.

We make our rendezvous bang on time and follow an 'interesting' gentleman up an extremely bumpy track to very near the viewpoint. We all seem to still have all our teeth so we continue on foot, spotting Egyptian and Griffon Vultures circling over a near hillside. From the viewpoint we can also see several Black Kites and Ravens squabbling over the remains of the

carcass. There are many butterflies here including Small Tortoiseshell and Hungarian Skipper, and there is great excitement when the falcon we are watching banks and reveals its identity as a splendid pale Eleonora's Falcon and we are thrilled when it is joined by at least two others. The next addition to our raptor list is perhaps the best of all, an adult Golden Eagle that shows brilliantly in the telescopes, even being mobbed by one of the Eleonora's Falcons at one point, a magic moment contender if ever there was one! Garden Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat are new here and we decide to have lunch back at the van, an area that looks very good for Sylvia Warblers. This proves to be the case with several Subalpine Warblers singing from the thick cover and the discovery of a Sardinian Warbler by Andrew. Best of all though is the singing Eastern Orphean Warbler that delivers its impressive song while darting from bush to bush proving very tricky to see well! There are lots of Silver-studded Blues here but we all really enjoy the Southern White Admiral that glides past and the lovely Purple Shot Copper.

Our next stop is a bridge overlooking the River Krimovista and Val immediately picks out a dashing Kingfisher that sadly melts away without anyone else seeing it. We also see Roller and Shot-toed Eagle here and Attila finds another Freyer's Purple Emperor.

From another spectacular viewpoint overlooking the river Arda we pick out a Rock Bunting singing high above us and the sharp eyes of Wayne find a Peregrine preening. Red-rumped Swallows and Crag Martins cruise past at eye level, some very close, and we also find a distant male Black-eared Wheatear. Wayne then points out a much closer Wheatear, a scaly Juvenile and we hear Ortolan and Cirl Bunting singing but fail to locate them. Krueper's Small White and Lesser-spotted Fritillary are new here and we get better views of the impressive Eastern Frestoon.

We decide to drop down to the river below and the slightly cooler temperature that awaits us is most welcome. A handsome Black Stork looks fabulous as it hunts in the river, an amazing combination of reds and iridescent green - surely no other bird is sold so short by its name!

A Grey Wagtail flies across the river but rather surprisingly the only birds of prey we see hear are Buzzards. We find a tree that is alive with Lattice Brown butterflies and also see another Freyer's Purple Emperor. Other new butterflies here are Niobe Fritillary and an exquisite Little Tiger Blue found by Christine.

We've just got time to visit our first stop of the morning as Attila thinks it would be a good time to look for Chukar. After a little 'encouragement'

a bird starts calling from across the valley and in next to no time Max brilliantly spots it amongst the boulders and scrub. We all manage views of this handsome Partridge through the scopes, but then the simultaneous discovery of Sombre Tit, Golden Eagle and Short-toed Eagle has us struggling to know where to look next!

DAY8

It's our final day of this wonderful holiday and once again we're blessed with glorious weather. Max and Christine have a close encounter with a Wryneck before breakfast and the photographers amongst us enjoy the butterflies in the hotel gardens, including a lovely Southern White Admiral and a Humming Bird Hawkmoth.

We're going to spend the morning in a stunning river valley that can be very good for Levant Sparrowhawk. Driving down on a bumpy track through some Oak woodland we make an impromptu stop when we hear a Bonelli's Warbler singing. They have a tendency to stay in the canopy which makes it a difficult bird to see and this is not helped by the Long-tailed Tits that keep distracting us. We do all manage to see this smart Warbler and also connect with Middle and Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers.

The intention now is to go straight to the Levant site but we can't resist stopping when we come across a bush covered with dozens of Fritillaries. Silver-washed, Marbled, Niobe and Lesser-spotted are the most numerous with a few Heath and Glanville thrown in for good measure - incredible!

Van parked, we start scanning the woodland and ridges before us, but aside from Common Buzzard there are very few raptors on the wing. The butterflies here are just too numerous to mention, but notable was the Southern Comma seen by Max and Christine, a fantastic fresh Blue Argos that Attila was lucky to find and a big emergence of the slightly odd looking Nettle-tree butterfly.

Those who stuck to the task of raptor scanning were rewarded with fantastic views of a pair of Golden Eagles that spiral higher and higher until they almost disappear and the awesome spectacle of at least seven Eleonora's Falcons hunting over a distant ridge. We get great views of Sombre Tits here and Wayne finds a pair of Peregrine that are hunting behind us. Sheltering from the now very hot sun, Val and Melanie share a magic moment together watching Woodchat Shrike hunting. Colin enjoys the best views of Cirl Bunting he's had for years and over lunch the highlights include a new dragonfly, Eastern Spectre, Short-toed Eagles and better views of the Peregrines, and a pair of mating Mazarine Blues found by Sheila.

It really is rather hot now and we decide to try for the Levant's a little later. For a change of scene we visit a reservoir that is fringed by reed-beds and see and hear both Great Reed and Olivaceous Warblers. Max finds another species for our impressive Odonata list, Dainty Bluet, but apart from finding some Amethyst amongst the scree there doesn't seem to be much going on here, so the suggestion that we go and find an ice-cream is met with a resounding - YES!

Suitably refreshed we make a stop at a raptor viewpoint and boy is it good! Golden, Short-toed and Lesser-spotted Eagles, Common and Long-legged, Honey Buzzards, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Kestrel and Peregrine and if this was not enough a gorgeous pale Eleonora's Falcon drifts past giving us our best views of this distinctive falcon. Max finds a little colony of Essex Skippers and we also see Olive-tree Warbler and Eastern Orphean Warbler here - Raptor-tastic!

Before heading back to the Levant site we have another scan from the spectacular viewpoint over the Arda river. A couple of Black-eared Wheatears are nice, as is the Rock Bunting and Blue Rock Thrushes that seem to be in exactly the same places, but we only manage to hear Ortolan Bunting and the elusive Rock Nuthatch. The track down to the Levant spot yields Little Ringed Plover and three Woodlark and we hear a Black Woodpecker drumming, but try as we might the Levant Sparrowhawk eludes us, though a pair of Golden Eagles and another Masked Shrike provide a fitting and exciting conclusion to this wonderful holiday.

After dinner we discuss our choices for species, place and magic moment and Masked Shrike proves popular, as does Rose-coloured Starling and Long-legged Buzzard. Though the beautiful grasslands near the coast were popular, the clear winner for place are the spectacular Eastern Rhodope Mountains. And finally, magic moments! so many for all of us of course but the clear favourite was the Eagle Owl.

Many thanks again to Attila for finding us so much fantastic wildlife, to Zoltan for driving safely, and to all in the group. Your enthusiasm and expertise made this one of my most memorable trips, hope to see you all again soon.

BIRDS

Black-throated Diver
Great Crested Grebe
White Pelican
Dalmatian Pelican
Great Cormorant
Pygmy Cormorant
Little Bittern
Night Heron
Squacco Heron
Little Egret
Great Egret
Grey Heron
Purple Heron
White Stork
Black Stork
Glossy Ibis
Spoonbill
Mute Swan
Ruddy Shelduck
Shelduck
Mallard
Gadwall
Wigeon
Garganey
Teal
Shoveler
Red-crested Pochard
Ferruginous Duck
Pochard
Griffon Vulture
Egyptian Vulture
Honey Buzzard
Black Kite
Golden Eagle
Eastern Imperial Eagle
Lesser Spotted Eagle
Booted Eagle
Short-toed Eagle
White-tailed Eagle
Marsh Harrier
Long-legged Buzzard
Common Buzzard
Goshawk(Attila)
Sparrowhawk
Kestrel
Red-footed Falcon
Hobby
Eleonora's Falcon
Perigrine
Chukar
Quail (heard)
Water Rail (heard)
Little Crake (heard)
Moorhen

Coot
Oystercatcher
Avocet
Black-winged Stilt
Stone Curlew
Collared Pratincole
Lapwing
Little Ringed Plover
Kentish Plover
Common Snipe
Common Redshank
Spotted Redshank
Marsh Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Green Sandpiper (heard)
Black-tailed Godwit
Black-headed Gull
Slender-billed Gull
Mediterranean Gull
Yellow-legged Gull
Caspian Gull
Caspian Tern
Little Tern
White-winged Tern
Whiskered Tern
Sandwich Tern
Common Tern
Feral Pigeon
Wood Pigeon
Collared Dove
Turtle Dove
Cuckoo
Eagle Owl
Scops Owl
Little Owl
Tawny Owl (heard)
Common Swift
Alpine Swift
Hoopoe
Kingfisher
Bee-eater
Roller
Wryneck
Black Woodpecker (heard)
Middle Spotted Woodpecker
Syrian Woodpecker
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Green Woodpecker (heard)
Grey-headed Woodpecker(heard)
Calandra Lark
Skylark
Woodlark
Crested Lark
Short-toed Lark

Crag Martin
Swallow
Red-rumped Swallow
House Martin
Sand Martin
Tawny Pipit
White Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Yellow Wagtail (feldegg)
Yellow Wagtail (dumbrowskii)
Robin
Nightingale
Northern Wheatear
Black-eared Wheatear
Pied Wheatear
Isabelline Wheatear
Stonechat
Blue Rock Thrush
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Blackbird
Savi's Warbler
Great Reed Warbler
Reed Warbler
Marsh Warbler
Paddyfield Warbler
Cetti's Warbler
Olive-tree Warbler
Olivaceous Warbler
Barred Warbler
Eastern Orphean Warbler
Garden Warbler (Mark)
Blackcap
Sardinian Warbler
Subalpine Warbler
Whitethroat
Lesser Whitethroat
Eastern Bonelli's Warbler
Chiffchaff
Semi-collared Flycatcher
Spotted Flycatcher (heard)
Long-tailed Tit
Penduline Tit
Blue Tit
Sombre Tit
Great Tit
Nuthatch
Rock Nuthatch (heard)
Short-toed Treecreeper
Red-backed Shrike
Woodchat Shrike
Lesser Grey Shrike
Masked Shrike
Jay
Magpie

Raven
Hooded Crow
Jackdaw
Starling
Rose-coloured Starling
Golden Oriole
House Sparrow
Spanish Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Chaffinch
Goldfinch
Greenfinch
Linnet
Hawfinch
Reed Bunting
Corn Bunting
Cirl Bunting
Ortolan Bunting (heard)
Black-headed Bunting
Rock Bunting.

MAMMALS

Souslik
Eastern Hedgehog
Harbour Porpoise
Fallow Deer
Coypu
Red Squirrel

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

European Pond Terrapin
Balkan Wall Lizard
Balkan Green Lizard
Green Lizard
Grass Snake (dead)
Large Whip Snake
Marsh Frog
Fire-bellied Toad (heard)
Yellow-bellied Toad
Green Toad
Balkan Stream Frog
Spur-thighed Tortoise
Tree Frog (heard)
Legless Lizard

BUTTERFLIES

Persian Skipper
Orbed Red under-wing Skipper
(Hungarian)
Large Skipper
Essex Skipper
Small Skipper

Marbled Skipper
Oriental Marbled Skipper
Mallow Skipper
Yellow-banded Skipper
Grizzled Skipper
Olive Skipper
Large Grizzled Skipper
Scarce Swallowtail
Eastern Festoon
Brimstone
Clouded yellow
Berger's Clouded Yellow
Black-veined White
Large White
Green-veined White
Kreuper's Small White
Small White
Orange tip
Eastern Dappled white
Eastern Bath White
Sloe Hairstreak
Ilex hairstreak
Green hairstreak
Small Copper
Large Copper
Purple-shot Copper
Grecian Copper
Little tiger Blue
Blue Argus
Brown Argus
Holly Blue
Green-underside Blue
Mazarine Blue
Common Blue
Amanda's Blue
Chapman's Blue
Eastern Baton Blue
Adonis Blue
Silver-studded Blue
Nettle Tree Butterfly
Freyer's Purple Emperor
Southern White Admiral
Comma
Southern Comma
Painted Lady
Red Admiral
Small Tortoiseshell
Cardinal
Silver-washed Fritillary
Queen of Spain Fritillary
High Brown Fritillary
Niobe Fritillary

Twin-spot Fritillary
Marbled Fritillary
Glanville Fritillary
Knapweed Fritillary
Lesser Spotted Fritillary
Spotted Fritillary
Heath Fritillary
Lattice Brown
Wall Brown
Marbled White
Meadow Brown
Small Heath

DRAGONFLIES

Banded Demoiselle
Odalisque
Blue-tailed Damselfly
White Legged Damselfly
Azure Damselfly
Variable Damselfly
Dark Spread-wing
Migrant Spread-wing
Ornate Bluet
Dainty Bluet
Emperor Dragonfly
Lesser Emperor Dragonfly
Scarlet Darter
Red-veined Darter
Southern Darter
Ruddy Darter
Black-tailed Skimmer
White-tailed Skimmer
Keeled Skimmer
Norfolk Hawker
Blue-eyed Hawker
Turkish Golden-ringed Dragonfly
Blue-eyed Golden-ringed Dragonfly
Small Pincertail
Eastern Spectre
Club-tailed Dragonfly
Broad-bodied Chaser
Scarce Chaser

MOTHS

Six spot Burnet
Yellow shell Moth
Forrester Moth
Hummingbird Hawkmoth
Common Carpet
Green Oak tortrix
Foxmoth