

Holiday Highlights
Romania
11-19 September 2010

Guides: Simon Eaves and Attila Steiner.

Guests: Katy Williams, Dawn Chambers, Albert Sinclair, John McAlpine and Margaret Murphy

Day 1: We all meet at the airport in good time so after a quick coffee we check in and before we know it we are on the plane and on our way to Romania. The flight is good and we are almost on time as we land. Attila is there to meet us with a smile and we are soon in the van and on the road heading North-west towards the Southern Carpathian Mountains and to our hotel in the hills for the next few nights.

Once out of the urban areas around Bucharest the countryside opens out to wide flat agricultural land then gradually the scenery becomes more and more scenic as we get closer to the mountains. As dusk begins to fall we spot a few bats low over the road, they look quite large and Attila thinks they will be Noctules.

As darkness falls we are nearing the hotel and we pass through one last little rural village then hit a bumpy dirt track road up a steep hill that winds through some woodland. The warm glow of the hotel lights greets us in the pitch black of night. After a nice meal and a quick chat about tomorrow we head to bed looking forward to the views Attila has described to be revealed in the morning.

Day 2: The dawn breaks cool and bright with the sunlight streaming across the valley lighting up the surrounding mountains in an orange glow, the scenery is as stunning as we had imagined. Simon and Albert are up early and on a short wander along the road they have seen Black Redstarts, Jays and several Magpies. Dawn catches them up just as they find a Nuthatch in a small orchard along with a little flock of Fieldfares munching on the windfall apples. Another Black Redstart sings from the top of a church spire and three Great Spotted Woodpeckers land in some dead trees.

Back at the hotel Attila is by the door with Katy and John and they spot a Nutcracker flying high along the hillside, it perches briefly but by the time Simon gets the scope up it disappears over the hill.

After breakfast we head out in the van. A Whinchat and a Tree Pipit on the fence line just outside the hotel are a nice start before we have even driven a hundred yards! We drive down the bumpy road for only about a mile and we are at the entrance to a wide gorge that winds up through the forest and its here that we set off for a walk.

A Dipper zips by low over the almost dry river bed and a Grey Wagtail follows soon afterwards alighting on the side of the riverbank. We have not walked far when the woodland is suddenly alive with small birds. Marsh and Willow Tits show well and a couple of Crested Tits come into the open in a little clump of trees.

We keep our eyes skyward for things flying over the gorge and see a Sparrowhawk and a couple of Ravens. Simon glimpses a falcon which is probably a Peregrine but it does not re-appear. A little further on the gorge opens out a little and in a sunny clearing we scan the cliff faces that surround us in search of Wallcreepers. It's late in the season and they have probably left the area but we search nevertheless. Dozens of Migrant Hawker Dragonflies are darting around the clearing in front of us as we relax in the sunshine.

Time is pressing on and we are heading back to the hotel for lunch so we wander back down the gorge. Simon spots a Dunnock which isn't a common bird round here. Not far from the van we spot a Red Squirrel running along the forest floor. It obligingly runs out onto an open branch for us all to see. A Migrant Hawker also perches on a branch for us to see it well in the scope.

After lunch back at the hotel and a little rest we head out again in the van. We make a quick stop at an old quarry area beside the road to look for butterflies but despite the sunshine there are very few on the wing. A single Chalkhill Blue is all we find but it is very pretty nevertheless.

We drive on quite a way to a wide valley with open grassland and scattered trees. From the van we spot several Red-backed Shrikes and a flock of Long-tailed Tits several of which are of the white headed form. A dirt track leads off the road from here and not far along it we stop for a scan. Some Bee-eaters are hawking from the power lines and a Great Grey Shrike is perched on the power pole nearby. A couple of Red-backed Shrikes show very well in the open and look great in the scope.

We drive on a short way but stop when we spot a couple of small raptors perched in a tree. Jumping out for a closer look we see that they are

Hobbies, three of them and they look nice in the telescopes. Albert spots a larger raptor perched on a low fence line only a couple of hundred metres away, it's a Lesser Spotted Eagle! It is a stunning view in the scopes and we can't quite believe it's this close. We watch it for a while as it moves from one fence to another then it eventually flaps off low over the fields on its huge droopy wings.

We drive on up the valley along the dusty track to a clearing in a bit of woodland. Attila has seen White-backed Woodpecker here before so we stop for lunch and a listen. Late afternoon isn't the best time of day for birding and the forest appears quiet apart from a few Goldcrests that flit through the trees above us as we enjoy our picnic dinner.

We are on our way to a small hide in the forest this evening and after our picnic we drive a short way to meet the local guide who will lead us there. Attila does a good job of avoiding the holes and rocks along the very narrow and bumpy forest track as we drive deeper into the forest towards the hide. Suddenly a Brown Bear dashes up the wooded slope beside the track and disappears among the trees, amazing we are not even at the hide yet and we have already seen a bear!

We have driven as far as we can and from here we will walk a short way to the hide. The local guide points out a bear footprint in the soft mud right beside where we have parked the van! The hide is raised off the ground and gives a great view over a small clearing in the forest. Scattered round the open ground are hollowed out logs in which bait of corn and nuts are put and then we just wait.

Within minutes a young female Brown Bear appears wandering cautiously into the clearing and begins to feed, she is no more than twenty or so metres away. A few minutes later a bigger, older female arrives and the younger animal gives way to her. A third female of similar size to the second appears from the forest and soon all three bears are feeding in the clearing. They come and go and as the light fades it is a little tricky to see if they the same bears coming back after they wander off but just as the dusk is falling a big female enters the clearing with two small cubs that bound energetically towards the food. Brilliant! We watch them for a while before eventually it's getting too dark to see very much and we walk back to the van not quite believing what we have just seen, this will surely be a magic moment that is hard to beat.

Day 3: Another day dawns sunny and calm and after breakfast we return to the same valley as we were in yesterday afternoon to spend more time birding

in the morning when birds are more active. We stop where we saw the Bee-eaters yesterday and as we jump out there are several raptors overhead obviously on migration south. A Honey Buzzard, a Short-toed Eagle, a Marsh Harrier, a Lesser-spotted Eagle and a Common Buzzard are all circling above us, it's almost too much to take in at one go as they mingle in the sky. A Black Stork soars through quite low and gradually they all drift off south. What a great start to the day.

Several Common Redstarts flit ahead of the van and Bee-eaters glide over the woodland. From the front Attila and Simon spot a Grey-headed Woodpecker fly ahead along the road and into the trees. We glimpse it again from the van but as it moves on again we stop and jump out to try and get a better view. There must be two woodpeckers as we can hear them calling now in the trees and soon we can see them on the ground and then really well on a tree trunk. As we are watching the Grey-headed Woodpecker Attila hears a Nutcracker and it sounds really close. Simon finds it sitting in a bush and we all get scope filling views of this spotty crow.

We have lunch at the clearing where we were for dinner the day before and with the heat of the sun shining down there are lots of dragonflies around. Several Ruddy Darters and a single Banded Darter dash back and forth.

We walk from here along the track through some light woodland. A multi flowered plant growing beside the track is festooned with Peacock Butterflies and is a great photographic opportunity. A Spotted Flycatcher is flitting in the canopy along with Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff and lower down there are a couple of Marsh Tits. In a sunny clearing we find a Map Butterfly and a Silver-washed Fritillary and in the same spot a Rosalina Longhorn Beetle with electric blue body and amazingly long stripy antenna.

A drive from the valley takes us to a village where we can see Dracula's castle and we take a short walk in the touristy area of market stalls. The only wildlife here is a couple of Siskins so we soon move on, stopping a little further on to photograph the castle.

From here the road climbs into the hills and the views are spectacular. Near the top we take a walk across a wide clearing surrounded by some woodland. Several Mistle Thrushes are hopping around the short turf and a couple of Fieldfares are with them. Simon spots a Green Woodpecker and it shows quite well on the ground. A few White Wagtails flit ahead of us as we walk back to the van.

We drive back to the hotel from here but just a mile before we get back we stop at the old quarry again to look for Eagle Owls at dusk. As the light fades it is getting quite chilly but we stick at it and just as the light is going an owl starts to call. We walk a little closer to where the owl is calling from. We find a Pine Hawk Moth which has decided Katy's jeans are a good place to alight! And then suddenly an Eagle Owl lands on the skyline silhouetted against the last bit of light in the sky. Well worth the wait and a great end to the day.

Day 4: Today we are driving east towards the Black Sea coast and our second hotel and it will take most of the day to get there. We have not gone that far only a few miles from the hotel when Attila brakes quite hard and pulls over, there by the roadside on top of a pole in the middle of a field is a Ural Owl sat out in broad daylight! We can't believe our eyes but we pull over and jump out for a closer look. We are at a safe distance and although it looks at us it is settled and does not respond even when we get a bit closer. We get some amazing views of this normally secretive owl.

We stop for our picnic lunch en-route at a convenient but not pretty roadside lay-by but even here there is wildlife if you look, as a Cardinal butterfly wings around the clearing.

We arrive at Hotel Splendid by about four o'clock and it is indeed quite splendid! It's a great place for the next couple of nights with some wildlife opportunities right on the doorstep as there is a huge lagoon round the back of the building. Attila wants to take us to a complex of lagoons near the Black Sea coast so we drop our cases and grab our bins for the last part of the day.

A short drive away and from an elevated roadside stop we can see over several shallow pools. We don't know which way to look as we all call different birds in all different directions! Broad-billed Sandpipers, Marsh Sandpipers, Temminck's Stints, Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints and many more waders are feeding along the muddy shorelines. Amazing! Dawn picks out our first Ferruginous Ducks of the trip and a flock of Purple Herons that fly over. There are a few Stone Curlews sleeping on the rough ground surrounding the pools and a Squacco Heron skulking in a little vegetated puddle.

We drive on to another spot seeing a couple of Great White Egrets along the way. The next lagoon is carpeted with terns resting on a sandy island, Common and Whiskered Terns and a couple of Black Terns too, it's an amazing sight when they are disturbed and all take to the air at once.

There are two Red-necked Phalaropes spinning on the water just in front of us and a few Ruff swimming around pretending to be phalaropes.

All the while there is an almost endless movement of birds across the sky with terns coming and going, flocks of Purple and Grey Herons going to roost, a flock of Spoonbills and three Black-winged Stilts. Attila finds a Slender-billed Gull on the water and our first Pygmy Cormorants that fly overhead. A Red-footed Falcon hawks over the distant fields as we wander over to another little pool. We get a nice view of a Purple Heron here and several Shoveler as they take flight. All this in the wonderful glowing evening light and as the light begins to fade we drag ourselves away from all these birds now looking forward even more to tomorrow and what it may hold in store.

Day 5: Before breakfast some of us are up early and are rewarded with really close views of three Otters on the lagoon behind the hotel, Katy even spots them from her hotel room! We watch them for ages diving for fish and munching at the surface. There are several Black-necked Grebes on the water and in the small trees several migrants are flitting around. Lesser Whitethroats and Chiffchaffs are joined by some Red-breasted Flycatchers stopping off to feed on their long migrations. A Kingfisher is the icing on the cake as it zips by before we head back in for breakfast.

We head out in the van after breakfast and do some birding from the van along the way a nice Long-legged Buzzard is the best view we have had of one so far and we find a little flock of Corn Buntings on the edge of a tiny village. A Tawny Pipit flits along the road ahead of us, posing briefly before flying off. Passing through a little rural village we get a nice view of a Hoopoe on the verge then in a roadside garden.

We drive on to the next village to look for Spanish Sparrows and we jump out when we spot some sparrows on a fence but they turn out to be Tree Sparrows so we get distracted by a nice Red-breasted Flycatcher in a garden. A woodpecker calls in the distance and Attila says that it is likely to be a Syrian Woodpecker here. Luckily, just as we are about to get back in the van the woodpecker loops across the sky and lands on a concrete power pole where it stays long enough for us all to see well in the scope and to see the small differences in head pattern compared to Great Spotted.

A rough track runs from here into the countryside and as the heat of the day builds up we find a flock of butterflies clustered around a little puddle in the road, they are Orbed Red under-wing Skippers and it's quite a sight. A little further along the road we stop again and here there are even more

butterflies, several Cardinals, Clouded Yellows and several fritillaries, we try and get a few photos to identify them later as there are so many of them.

We drive on along the rough road and a Spur-thighed Tortoise stops us and the car in front as it wanders along the side of the road. The girls in the car in front pick it up but don't hang onto it as it's lively enough to escape their shoe box which we see abandoned along the road! A juvenile Montagu's Harrier is nice but distant but a little further on the Roller that perches on a bush right beside the van is definitely more stunning.

Around midday we drive through a wide gorge with low cliffs on either side, this is a breeding site for Pied Wheatear and Levant's Sparrowhawk so we plan to stop here for a while. It may be too late in the year for Wheatears but we still have a chance of the hawk so we find a spot in the shade to wait. A few Soudanese are alert to us as they call in the open ground above their burrows.

Simon spots a dark phase Booted Eagle high in an almost cloudless sky and some of us manage to get onto it before it climbs out of sight. A couple of Kestrels and a pair of Long-legged Buzzards are lower down but no sign of any Sparrowhawks. We take a short walk and find some Balkan Wall Lizards and a Nosed Grasshopper along the way. It's soon time to move on after the walk and we set off for an area closer to the coast which will hopefully be a bit cooler.

On the road towards the coast Yellow Wagtails flit ahead of the van and scatter in all directions, it's amazing to see so many of these colourful little birds which are becoming so scarce back home. We stop as a flock of Ruff land in a field and we jump out for a better look at them. From a raised vantage point we are looking out over a huge expanse of reed-beds and lagoons. Our first Pelicans of the trip are swimming gracefully around the closest lagoon with one or two Pygmy Cormorants alongside and a Caspian Tern cruising back and forth. A Gull-billed Tern flies behind us hawking over the fields and Attila picks out some very distant Ruddy Shelducks to add to the tally.

We drive on a little closer to some of the other lagoons and get closer to the reed-beds. A puddle that stretches across the dirt track has two Temminck's Stints on it and we get a great view through the van window of these tiny little waders.

We stop next to one of the huge shallow lagoons which are festooned with birds stretching out into the shimmering distance. We look through the

closer waders with Marsh Sandpiper, Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit and Spotted Redshank showing well amongst a myriad of other waders. We can see both Dalmatian and White Pelicans off in the distance on a sand bar and the Ruddy Shelduck are a little closer. Marsh Harriers are quartering the reed tops and a mystery falcon zips past us, unlikely as it may seem we think it must have been an Eleonora's Falcon but it's too quick and disappears off into the haze before we can identify it. Just before we drive on again we chance on a flock of Stone Curlews as we turn the van around in the dunes, we watch them as they fly by and disappear into the sparse vegetation.

We drive a short way to another shallow lagoon, this one has a few more ducks than waders and we add Gadwall and Coot to the list. A few Whiskered Terns flap lazily over the calm shallow waters as we enjoy this lovely spot.

At the end of this road we are again quite close to the Black Sea coast and there are several trees and bushes surrounding a little car park and within seconds of getting out of the van we can tell it's quite a migrant trap. Lots of Red-breasted Flycatchers are flicking in and out of the trees perching occasionally on the iron fence just metres away. They are joined by equal numbers of Common Redstarts and Spotted Flycatchers. A little avenue of trees holds Willow and Wood Warbler along with several more Spotted and Red-breasted Flycatchers. Simon finds a nice Woodchat Shrike perched out in the open and it shows very nicely for us all to see in the scopes. Attila can hear a Pied Flycatcher calling in the trees and with some searching we eventually find it feeding from the edge of a row of trees.

Wandering back to the van a raptor over the marshes catches our eye, it's a harrier and as it catches the late afternoon sun we see that it's a second year male Pallid Harrier! We watch as it slowly drifts low across the marsh away from us, it's all too brief a view for such a scarce and beautiful bird but great nevertheless.

As we drive off and head back towards the hotel we have not gone far when a Red Fox catches our eye and we get a nice view before it slinks back off into the reeds. We drive on again but again don't get far when another harrier appears heading towards us and this male instantly looks very pale and for good reason, it's a full adult male Pallid Harrier! We watch with jaws dropped as it flaps effortlessly alongside the van, his feathers glowing in the evening light. We watch it glide around the back of the van and off into the sunset what a bird and what an end to the day.

Day 6: The early risers are again rewarded with great views of Otter outside the hotel along with Black-necked Grebes and a Little Gull on the mirror calm waters of the lagoon.

Today we are heading north towards the delta but we have time along the way to go birding and we start back where we were yesterday. There is a Tawny Pipit on the roadside and still hundreds and hundreds of Yellow Wagtails where we saw them yesterday. The Pelicans are in a tight flock on the water and swimming in unison to catch fish and some Little Terns are diving into the same lagoon in search of their breakfast.

There's still a Temminck's Stint in the roadside puddle and it has been joined by a Little Ringed Plover but it's the movement at the back of the puddle that catches our eye as several Bearded Tits appear from nowhere to come down to the water to drink. We get some great views of these colourful secretive birds as they come onto the ground and out into the open. Brilliant!

We get nice views of Purple Heron and Squacco Heron as we drive on to the main shallow lagoon where we saw so much yesterday. The light is much better today and the waders are much easier to sift through, we can see nearly twenty species of wader here along with terns overhead, Bearded Tits in the reeds and three Paddy-field Warblers that appear and disappear several times along the reedy shore.

From here we head north and inland to some dry woodland, this area has Sombre Tits so we take a slow walk among the trees listening all the while. The woodland edge is alive with butterflies with the Grey Banded Grayling being one of the most impressive. Several lizards scuttle off the path and we find a Praying Mantis along the way. In the heat of the day the woodland is very quiet apart from a couple of Chiffchaffs and a Great Tit that we see.

Attila finds us a spot in the shade for lunch in another bit of woodland along the road and while we picnic we see both Syrian and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers. Another short walk in the woods is still very quiet but worth the look for the chance of Sombre Tit.

A short drive after lunch takes us up to a ruined castle and a fantastic view out over the plains towards the Danube delta and also of another bit of woodland which will be our last chance to look for Sombre Tit. The wooded hillside is a nice place to wander but all we hear are Jays and a Middle Spotted Woodpecker so we decide to move on.

We get a few more miles under our belt before we stop again not far from the end of our journey but a dry lake covered in roosting gulls draws our attention so we stop for a closer look. We walk down to the dry lake and as we do all the gulls take off, it is surely not us that has disturbed them as we are still hidden as we approach. Attila spots a Great Black-headed Gull in the swirling mass of birds and Simon gets onto one as well but as the flock begins to land again we slowly realise that in fact over half the birds are Great Black-headed Gulls! The flock comprises of 46 Great Black-headed Gulls, 20 Caspian Terns, over a hundred Caspian Gulls and a single Common Gull what a great sight.

Our last stop before reaching the Danube delta is a large shallow lake with lots of exposed mud and open water. There are Pochards and Pintail to add to our growing list of waterfowl and lots of waders along the shore including some elegant Black-winged Stilts. We almost overlook two White-tailed Eagles that are sat on two little islands on the lake, they are incredibly close and we get a great scope view of them and then we watch as they fly up and down the lake scaring every bird in sight!

Time is ticking on and we drive on to meet George who skips the floating hotel that will be our home for the next few nights. We meet George and the crew on the little tug boat that will take us to the hotel a couple of miles downstream. We cast off and head off along the narrow channel towards the main river. We pass some Night Herons and several Squacco Herons and two Kingfishers zip off low over the water. The main river channel of the Danube is wide here and as we chug along we are surrounded by Whiskered Terns hawking in the evening sunlight. As dusk approaches we board the floating hotel which is moored on a side river and we settle into our cabins and then enjoy a lovely meal in the spacious dining room.

Day 7: Early morning is fine and forecast to be hot and sunny again but in the calm morning air it is a little foggy. The top deck though allows a good view for some pre-breakfast birding and Dawn is lucky enough to spot a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in the trees just beside the boat.

After breakfast we board the tug which will take us part of the way deeper into the delta before we jump into the smaller boats to really get into the heart of the lakes and channels that meander through the area. Kingfishers become almost countless as they fly ahead of the boat and Squacco Herons the same, around every bend in the river. Attila spots a Red-necked Grebe with a little group of Great-crested Grebes and Margaret is particularly pleased as she wanted to see this species. It is here that we leave the tug

boat and jump into two little boats with outboard motors which will allow us to venture into shallower waters.

We power up river pausing to look at a Little Grebe with chicks and a couple of Pygmy Cormorants perched in a dead tree. Again Kingfishers abound and now that we are at their level, close to the water we get some stunning views of these little aquatic gems.

Through a narrow channel in the reeds with reed stems brushing each side of the boat we wind our way to a hidden lake. The lake is covered in Ferruginous Ducks and Coot with numerous Whiskered Terns skimming overhead. There are a couple of Dalmatian Pelicans swimming further out and we get quite close before they take to the air. We stop the engines out in the middle of the lake and enjoy just the sounds of the birds. Simon spots a Grass Snake as it swims over the vegetation close to the boat just as we move on. We explore a couple more lakes hidden among the reed-beds and stop again for a hot drink from our flasks while drifting on one of the larger lakes. Pygmy Cormorants abound and Marsh frogs scuttle from the floating mats of weed as we pass by. We continue on to meet the tug boat that takes us back for lunch at the hotel.

We have a very relaxed and large lunch and then an hour or so break before we take to the water in the small boats again to explore another area and another series of lakes. A Red-footed Falcon overhead shows well and we come across several more Pelicans and Ferruginous Ducks. On one of the lakes there are lots of Marsh Terns hawking above the water and among them we pick out a couple of Black Terns and a Little Gull. It's a lovely warm afternoon and before long we are heading back to the floating hotel.

As the evening draws in before dinner Simon is out on the top deck and spots a Grey-headed Woodpecker fly in to the top of a dead tree where amazingly it stays for more than half an hour before it gets dark. Most of the group get to see this stunning bird in close up through the telescope and it makes a nice end to another amazing day.

Day 8: Pre-breakfast it's not so misty this morning and up on the top deck we spot more Grey-headed Woodpeckers, a Hobby, a Reed Warbler and we hear the brief song of a Thrush Nightingale coming from the dense vegetation beside the boat.

We move the whole hotel after breakfast a couple of miles upstream and it is nice to do some birding from the top deck while on the move. Squacco

Heron line the banks and Whiskered Terns fly by. We see a little group of Stock Doves on some power lines as we cruise on and three Spoonbills fly over. It is still quite early in the morning but it's already warm so it is very pleasant sifting through a flock of Marsh Terns to find the odd one out as Attila calls a White-winged Black Tern in a flock of about a hundred Whiskered Terns. We pick it out by looking for its dark under-wing coverts. Nice!

We moor up the hotel before departing on the little boats again. We were hoping to take a little walk along the way but it's getting really hot now and it seems a better option just to take a ride in the boats where the cooling air is much more pleasant.

A side channel takes us into the heart of the delta again through winding narrow channels in the reeds so carpeted in floating vegetation that it doesn't look like water at all. We dodge a few of the fishing nets that are strung across the channels and along the edges of the lakes but one of them catches us by surprise and wraps round the propeller! We enjoy the peace and quiet of this hidden lake while George frees us from our predicament. We are hoping to see Red-crested Pochards here but despite trying several spots we have no luck.

As we are heading back an Osprey appears overhead circling quite low it's a great view for us all before we head back for lunch at the hotel. Lunch is another feast of locally caught fish and afterwards we relax in the shade on the middle deck while still being able to bird. Dawn spots a White Stork which is following a flock of White Pelicans and we watch them soar higher and drift off into the distance. Simon picks out a couple of distant White-tailed Eagles and a large flock of circling Pelicans which we watch in the scope.

By mid-afternoon the temperature has dropped a little and we have one last chance to go out in the little boats. On the first big open lake we get to there are huge numbers of Coot and Ferruginous Ducks along with a few Great-crested Grebes and a single Red-necked Grebe. There are big numbers of Pygmy and Great Cormorants here and many of them are sat in the dead trees surrounding the lake and when sat side by side we can really appreciate the size difference.

Several Marsh Harriers are hunting over the reed beds as we travel on and on the next lake we add Goldeneye to our list but still no sign of the elusive Red-crested Pochard. Never mind the birds, this place is stunning as we skim

across the surface of one of the large lakes with the sun low in the sky and the amazing reflections, it's an incredible place to be.

After dinner we run through the days checklist and chat about all our favourite bits as well because tomorrow we will not really have chance to do this. There are several responses for species of the trip from Yellow Wagtail to Pallid Harrier but Hoopoe and Bearded Tit both get two votes each making them joint winners. The range of answers for place of the trip reflects the fact that we visit so many different habitats on this trip but the areas around the mountain hotel just edge ahead in the votes. There is an outright, almost clean sweep of votes for the Brown Bear cubs as Magic Moment which is understandable as it was an unforgettable part of the trip.

Day 9: The hotel is on the move before breakfast to get us closer to the van as today we must make our way back to the airport. It's another lovely morning and as the sun climbs into the sky we do our last delta birding from the top deck on the move. Lots of Pygmy Cormorants are flying over on their way out to the lakes from their roost sites. Simon picks out a Glossy Ibis as it wings by and a flock of 30 Spoonbills that fly over in formation.

We have breakfast once we are moored and then jump aboard the little boats one last time to take us ashore to the van. We say our goodbyes and thanks to George and set out on the drive to the airport. We have a long drive but also a couple of opportunities for some birding.

At the lake just a couple of miles along the road we get some nice close views of Ruff and Wood Sandpiper before continuing our journey. Attila knows one more bit of woodland we could try to see Sombre Tit and an hour or so later we are searching again for this elusive little bird. There are lots of birds around where we stop with Great Spotted Woodpeckers in the trees and Chaffinches everywhere. A couple of Hawfinches give nice views at the top of some trees. But we run out of time and the tit has eluded us as we must press on.

A Black Stork circling by the road is pretty much the last bird of the trip before we stop for lunch and then hit the urban area of Bucharest. The traffic is not too bad and we make it to the airport in good time. We say our last goodbyes to Attila and thank him for a great holiday. The flight is delayed quite a bit but we have lots of great memories to take home with us from such a varied holiday.

Bird of the Trip: Bearded Tit and Hoopoe

Place of the Trip: Surroundings of the Mountain Hotel.

Magic Moments: The appearance of the Brown Bear cubs at the hide.

BIRDS

Little Grebe
Great Crested Grebe
Red-necked Grebe
Black-necked Grebe
Great Cormorant
Pygmy Cormorant
White Pelican
Dalmatian Pelican
Little Bittern
Black-crowned Night Heron
Squacco Heron
Little Egret
Great White Egret
Grey Heron
Purple Heron
Black Stork
White Stork
Glossy Ibis
Eurasian Spoonbill
Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Common Shelduck
Ruddy Shelduck
Goldeneye
Gadwall
Common Teal
Mallard
Pintail
Garganey
Northern Shoveler
Common Pochard
Ferruginous Duck
Tufted Duck
Honey Buzzard
White-tailed Eagle
Short-toed Eagle
Marsh Harrier
Montague's Harrier
Pallid Harrier
Sparrowhawk
Common Buzzard
Long-legged Buzzard
Lesser Spotted Eagle
Booted Eagle
Osprey
Common Kestrel
Red-footed Falcon
Eleanora's Falcon
Hobby
Pheasant
Common Moorhen
Eurasian Coot
Black-winged Stilt
Pied Avocet
Stone-curlew
Little Ringed Plover
Common Ringed Plover
Northern Lapwing
Little Stint
Temminck's Stint
Dunlin
Curlew Sandpiper
Broad-billed Sandpiper
Ruff
Common Snipe
Black-tailed Godwit
Eurasian Curlew
Whimbrel
Spotted Redshank
Common Redshank
Marsh Sandpiper
Greenshank
Green Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Mediterranean Gull
Little Gull
Great Black-headed Gull
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Yellow-legged Gull
Slender-billed Gull
Red-necked Phalarope
Caspian Gull
Little Tern
Sandwich Tern
Gull-billed Tern
Common Tern
Caspian Tern
Whiskered Tern
Black Tern
White-winged Tern
Feral Rock Dove
Stock Dove
Wood Pigeon
Collared Dove
Turtle Dove
Cuckoo
Eagle Owl
Ural Owl
Kingfisher
European Bee-eater
Roller
Hoopoe
Grey-headed Woodpecker
Green Woodpecker
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Syrian Woodpecker
Middle Spotted Woodpecker
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Skylark
Crested Lark
Woodlark
Barn Swallow
Sand Martin
House Martin
Tawny Pipit
Tree Pipit
Yellow Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
White Wagtail
Winter Wren
Dunnock
Dipper
Robin
Thrush Nightingale
Black Redstart
Common Redstart
Whinchat
Northern Wheatear
Nightjar
Blackbird
Fieldfare
Mistle Thrush
Song Thrush
Reed Warbler
Paddyfield Warbler
Great Reed Warbler
Blackcap
Lesser Whitethroat
Wood Warbler
Chiffchaff
Willow Warbler
Goldcrest
Spotted Flycatcher
Red-breasted Flycatcher
Pied Flycatcher
Bearded Tit
Penduline Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Marsh Tit
Willow Tit
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Crested Tit
Nuthatch
Trecreeper
Short-toed Trecreeper
Red-backed Shrike
Great Grey Shrike
Woodchat Shrike
Jay
Nutcracker
Magpie

Jackdaw
Rook
Hooded Crow
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Spanish Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Chaffinch
Goldfinch
Linnet
Siskin
Hawfinch
Yellowhammer
Reed Bunting
Corn Bunting

MAMMALS

Red Squirrel
Brown Bear
Noctule
Red Fox
Soulslik
Otter
Weasel

INSECTS

Rosalia Longhorn Beetle
Pine Hawkmoth
Spurge Hawkmoth
Hummingbird Hawkmoth
Nosed Grasshopper
Praying Mantis

AMPHIBIANS

Common Toad
Eastern Tree Frog
Marsh Frog

REPTILES

Balkan Wall Lizard
Grass Snake
Spur-thighed Tortoise

BUTTERFLIES

Common Blue
Cardinal
Speckled Wood
Comma
Red Admiral
Tortoiseshell
Chalkhill Blue
Peacock
Clouded Yellow
Large White
Small white
Map
Silver-washed Fritillary
Meadow Brown
Orbed Red Under-wing
Skipper
Lesser Purple Emperor
Knapweed Fritillary
Dingy Skipper
Glanville Fritillary
Grizzled Skipper
Queen of Spain Fritillary
Adonis Blue
Dappled white
Green Veined White
Bergers Clouded Yellow
Small Copper
Chapmans Blue
Brown Argus
Grayling
Grey-banded Grayling

DRAGONFLIES

Migrant Hawker
Ruddy Darter
Banded Darter
Common Darter
Southern Darter
Eastern Willow Spread-wing
Blue Emperor