

## ROMANIA

2-11 SEPTEMBER 2012

### BIRDS AND BEARS' WITH ECOTOURS WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS – TRIP REPORT

**Trip Members (from the Wokingham and Bracknell RSPB Local Group):** Tony & Wendy Hayward, Mike and Jenny Hillman, Judith Clark, Sue Farrington, Tricia Frith, Anne Hawkins, Stephen Day, Ursula Aggett, Gerry Bryant, Ruth Day, Patrick Crowley

**Leader:** Balazs Szigeti of Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

**Driver:** Tibor Peczeli

#### Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2012 ('First Taste of Romania')

We left Heathrow at 08:20 on a Air Tarom flight to Bucuresti (Bucharest), arriving safely at 13:50, and met Balazs and Tibor with their bus and trailer. After negotiating our way out of Bucuresti, we set off across a long flat plain of mainly agricultural land with relatively few birds except a possible **Marsh Harrier**. Eventually we could see the beginnings of the mountains in the distance and before too long were following the River Prahova into the hills. We stopped at a petrol station in Sinaia for a break, and Balazs quickly picked up our first **Black Redstart**, along with **White Wagtails**, and other members of the group found a flock of adult and immature **Serins** feeding in a weedy field next to the garage.

We arrived in the small town of Zarnesti (pronounced Zarnesht), in Transylvania, and took a dirt track out of the town, and then up an extremely windy and steep dirt track up through dense beech, oak and fir forest wondering where we were going! Eventually the track levelled off and we emerged into an open and undulating hilly landscape with scattered farms and houses with wonderful views of mountains all around, and stopped at our accommodation at the Villa Hermani, a large guesthouse run by a German couple Hermann and Katherina Kurmes, in the village of Magura, in the Piatra Craiului National Park, at 1020 m above sea level. The guesthouse was very comfortable with plentiful hot water, and ample local food. Local beer (Ursus) was only 4 Lei a bottle (80p!).

#### Monday 3rd September 2012 ('Gorges and Eagles')

The day dawned fine with a clear blue sky, which continued all day giving us a fine hot day with little wind.

##### Magura

After a good breakfast we went for a walk along the track outside the hotel down to the church and back. We quickly found **Willow Warblers** and **Chiffchaffs** in the bushes and orchards, and two juvenile **Red-backed Shrikes** fly catching from bushes or fences. By the church there were several **Fieldfares** feeding on the pears, a **Spotted Flycatcher** on the fence, as well as a single **Tree Sparrow** that perched nicely for us. A pair of **Black Redstarts** performed well on the church, with

several other birds being seen. We also picked up two **Spotted Nutcrackers** rather distantly flying over the hill top, a female **Common Redstart**, and some **Alpine Swifts** high over the mountain.

### Zarnesti Gorge

At 10:00 we drove for a short distance and set off for a walk up the Zarnesti Gorge. This is an amazing chasm with very high cliffs, popular with climbers. The track winds up the gorge with a dried up stream bed alongside, with steep forest on either side as the track progresses. Birds were not plentiful, though we did see **Marsh Tit**, **Marsh Harrier** and **Alpine Swifts** overhead, as well as a **Sparrowhawk**, but the scenery was amazing. Various butterflies such as a Camberwell Beauty were seen, along with a Hummingbird Hawkmoth. A **Wren** and **Bullfinch** were seen only by our driver Tibor!

### Stramba Valley

After a late lunch at the hotel we set off for the Stramba Valley, a rather open valley with bushes and trees along a stream, and extensive forest along a ridge, and a dirt track running through the middle. Walking along the stream we found several **Wood Warblers**, **Spotted Flycatchers**, a fine male **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, and several **Long-tailed Tits** of the white headed race, as well as distant views of **Lesser Spotted Eagles**. As we drove further up the valley we found a magnificent **Lesser Spotted Eagle** perched in a tree not far from the track, giving everyone excellent views, and as it flew off it showed the typical pale markings on the wings and at the base of the tail. A few metres up the track a superb male **Red-backed Shrike** gave us close views as it perched in a bush. Then it was time to go and we got back to the hotel by 18:30.

### Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2012, ('Vampires and Bears')

Another hot sunny day! The day started with a pre-breakfast walk along the hotel track again, with five Fieldfares in the orchard this time, **Black Redstarts**, juvenile **Goldfinches**, a **Song Thrush**, and a juvenile **Red-backed Shrike**. On our way back a pair of **Marsh Harriers** was spotted flying high up over the hills, making their way south.

### Bran and Dracula's Castle (or is it?)!

After breakfast we set off for a morning with a difference, to the nearby town of Bran to see Dracula's castle. We arrived around 10:15, and parked by some superbly clean and well kept public toilets! Most of the group went straight off for a tour of the castle, which is perched high up on a rock above the town, looking the part for Dracula's castle. A young student showed the group round and gave a very informative talk about the history of the castle, and the furniture and contents. The Dracula story was written by Bram Stoker, who used the historical king Vlad the Impaler, known as Dracula, as the inspiration for his story, and visited several castles in Transylvania. Unfortunately, there is little historical evidence connecting Vlad the Impaler with Bran Castle, though he may have passed through the town. It makes a good story though!

Birdwise the morning was quiet, with **Greenfinches** in the car park, some **Siskins** in the park, and **Ravens** and **Common Buzzards** over the castle.

We took minor roads through fields and small villages back to the hotel and stopped for coffee in a field. Large numbers of **House Martins** were congregating in the area, three juvenile **Red-backed Shrikes** hunted from bushes in the field, a female **Bullfinch** flew over and a **Nutcracker** was seen flying away towards the hills.

### Stramba Valley and Bear Watching

We then went back to the hotel for a late lunch, and set off at 15:30 for the Stramba Valley again. We bumped our way along the track to an area near a shepherd's hut and sheep pens. Colchicums were in flower all over the fields and clouds of **House Martins** were flying over the wooded hills. Soon a **Hobby** came over us and circled over the woods going higher and higher until it disappeared. However, it soon flew back and landed in a tree, before taking off and flying fast and low over the trees, obviously trying to ambush a martin. It was then lost to view. Balazs and some of the group went down to the stream and managed to find a **Spotted Nutcracker** feeding in the hazels, as hazel nuts are a favourite food. We drove further up the valley and found a superb male **Cuckoo** sitting in a tree, and then a pair of **Dippers** where a bridge crossed the stream. Some of the group walked up the track to another bridge by a gate to a house in the woods. Here we found a female **Grey Wagtail**, and Balazs heard a **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, which responded to calls by flying into a tall tree in front of us and showing well.

The time had finally come for us to go up to the hide for our bear watch. We followed the ranger in his pickup for a long way up a bumpy track through the beech and oak wood, and eventually stopped around 19:00. We were told to be absolutely silent, usually a difficult thing for our group (!), and made our way into the large hide on stilts that looked out on a clearing in the forest. The ranger went out with a sack of maize, rice and nuts, and filled up troughs in various logs and hollow trunks. Within two minutes of the ranger coming back into the hide, two two-year old bears appeared and proceeded to search out the food. After a while the bears rushed off into the forest and two larger bears came in, and took over. They climbed up the stump, and reached into the hollow logs where food had been put, and pulled off the branches and stones that the ranger had put on top of the food. All this time we were agog, watching these huge animals, some only 20 metres away. Finally the two bears went off when a very large female appeared and lumbered around scavenging the remaining food. Apparently she was pregnant and would give birth in her den in January. We left at 20:30, having had a wonderful evening. However, the best was yet to come. On the way back down the track we passed the ranger's house, which had a barn next to it, with a ladder propped up to an open door into the upper storey. When Balazs shone a torch on the ladder we saw there was a young bear at the top foraging in the barn, and it looked at us every few seconds before going back into the doorway. Eventually something spooked the bear, which quickly backed down the ladder and ran off – amazing!

### Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2012 ('On the Road')

It was time to move on. After breakfast at 07:30 we left Villa Hermani at 08:45 for Mamaia, a resort on the Black Sea. We had to retrace our steps and drive back to Bucuresti, and then onto a new motorway to Mamaia.

## Journey to Mamaia

We stopped next to a cafe by a river south of Sinaia for coffee and found a flock of **House** and **Tree Sparrows**, along with a **Grey Wagtail** and **Black Redstart** down by the river. We stopped again later just east of Bucuresti at a lay-by with toilets, with some rather dubious looking characters loitering around, who tried to tell Balazs that he should not be birdwatching. This met with a rather brief response! Apart from our picnic lunch the main highlight was a juvenile **Roller** sitting on the fence and nearby bushes, dropping down into the long grass to catch insects, along with some **White Wagtails**.

Back on the road we spotted more **Rollers** on telephone wires, and **Hooded Crows** and **Rooks** in the fields, and Ruth saw our first **Bee-eaters** near where we crossed over the Danube. Eventually we reached Constanta on the coast, and then on to Mamaia a short distance further on. Mamaia was Romania's equivalent to Blackpool, with holidaymakers galore, and a cable car along the front and over the hotels. However, the rooms in the Hotel Victoria, where we were staying, were comfortable, and food was good, and the beer was still only 6 Lei (£1.20) a bottle.

Ruth went for a walk across the street from the hotel and found a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** and a **Red-rumped Swallow**.

## Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012 ('Miami by the Black Sea')

It was another bright sunny and very warm day, with the temperature climbing to 27 deg C in the afternoon.

I went for a pre-breakfast walk across the street along the edge of the lagoon inland, found a **Little Gull** and a **Northern Wheatear**.

## North of Mamaia

After breakfast we set off north, making our way out of Mamaia on small roads, on to a potholed tarmac road, and we eventually turned off onto a dirt track. The whole area was very open, with few trees and a mixture of weedy stubbles, fields which had not been cropped and land which was not farmed at all. Shepherds herded their flocks of sheep, cattle or goats through the weedy fields, mopping up after the harvest. As we went along there were **Bee-eaters** all over the place, with a constant stream of **House Martins**, **Sand Martins** and **Swallows** heading south. Several large raptors appeared and were identified as a **Marsh Harrier**, **Honey Buzzard** and juvenile **Montagu's Harrier**. There were many juvenile **Red-backed Shrikes**, two juvenile **Lesser Grey Shrikes**, regular **Whinchats** and **Northern Wheatears**, several bright yellow *Flava* type **Yellow Wagtails** and **Crested Larks**, and Tibor spotted a **Little Owl** on some farm buildings. On a small island in the river nearby there was a **Black Tern**, **Whiskered Tern** and an adult **Mediterranean Gull**. We went back on to the tarmac road and came across several **Long-legged Buzzards** in varied plumages, either flying or sitting on the ground.

## Tirgusor

We then turned off the tarmac road again and headed towards the village of Tirusor, again going on to bumpy dirt roads. We stopped for coffee and **Bee-eaters** skimmed the ground and **Rollers** were regular on telephone wires. Ruth spotted our only **Stone Curlew** of the trip, very close to the bus, which was trying hard not to be seen. We found our first Sousliks of the trip, small ground squirrels which popped their heads out of their holes in the ground, or scampered away from us. We stopped by some derelict military buildings where **Bee-eaters** perched extremely close to the bus, giving an amazing photo opportunity.

Later we reached a cross roads by some scrubby woodland where there was a sign to a monastery, where we stopped for our picnic lunch. Immediately Balazs heard calls from **Red-breasted Flycatchers**, and after some effort we all got good views of several of these engaging little birds, all in non-breeding plumage of course. There were plenty of **Spotted Flycatchers** too, as well as **Blackcaps**, and a **Common Whitethroat**. Just along the road by a small bridge over a stream we found two **Lesser Whitethroats**, a skulking **Sedge Warbler**, a **Hobby** fly-catching, both **Common** and **Green Sandpipers**, and a **Roller**. A **Lesser Spotted Eagle** circled briefly and a **Whinchat** crept along the water's edge. What a place!

### Cheia Gorge

The next stop was Cheia Gorge, a scenic area of limestone cliffs and outcrops. Unfortunately the target Pied Wheatears had gone, with only **Northern Wheatears** and **Whinchats** to be seen. However, we had a nice pale phase **Booted Eagle** fly over, and a female **Marsh Harrier** and several **Long-legged Buzzards** appeared.

### Istria

From the Cheia Gorge we moved on to the lakes at Istria. We drove off the main road down a dirt track to a derelict building near some smart looking blue 'beach huts' inside a fence. Close by were several small bays with shallow water, with many waders feeding along the water's edge. Amongst them were a **Little Stint** and two **Temminck's Stints**, feeding side-by-side. There were many **Ruff**, **Little Ringed Plovers**, **Spotted Redshanks**, half a dozen **Black-winged Stilts**, a few **Snipe** uncharacteristically out in the open, a **Wood Sandpiper**, and two **Greenshank**. Out on the water were many duck including an eclipse **Garganey**, many **Teal** and **Mallard**, and a group of **Ferruginous Ducks** far out in the middle. Additionally we saw a juvenile **Little Gull** and several **Whiskered Terns** feeding over the water. Finally we were lucky enough to see a late **Paddyfield Warbler** at the base of the reeds, and retired to the hotel, 'birded out' and fit only for a good meal and several beers!

### **Friday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2012 ('Woods and Waders')**

The day started grey and windy, but gradually cleared through the morning and by lunchtime the sun came out and the wind subsided.

### Babadag Woods

After an early breakfast we headed north to the Babadag woods. As we came near, we turned off the road and drove up a dirt track to the edge of the woods, hoping to find a way through to the

other side. We couldn't find a way through, but did have good views of several **Sombre Tits**, as well as brief view of a **Turtle Dove** in flight and **Brown Hare** running through the field. The real highlight was the large green **Praying Mantis** which clamped itself to Judith's leg, providing close photo opportunities!

We then drove back onto the main road and made the long detour around Babadag town and through the little village of Visterna, into a wide ride through the woods. We stopped and went for a walk into the open beech and oak woodland to look for woodpeckers. After finding **Spotted Flycatchers** and **Red-breasted Flycatchers**, Balazs skilfully found a **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** which responded to tape and showed well. After a picnic lunch we carried on driving along the ride and eventually emerged on the south side of the woods and drove on the dirt track along the woodland edge and then down through the fields, over the railway and back to the main road. Along the way we had a **Roller** close to the bus, a **Common Buzzard** and a covey of 12 **Grey Partridges**.

### Lake Sinoie

We then headed back south and stopped at Lake Sinoie around 16:00. There were a lot of birds on the water and around the edge, and through our scopes we found at least six **Marsh Sandpipers**, looking like small greenshanks with whitish heads and a rapid feeding action, **Spotted Redshanks**, **Common Redshanks**, several **Grey Plovers** and a number of **Black-tailed Godwits**. There was also a **Great White Egret**, several **Little Egrets** and a **Grey Heron**. There were large number of ducks, including at least six **Ruddy Shelduck** (truly wild ones) alongside **Common Shelduck**, many **Gadwall**, **Shoveler**, and **Mallard**. A **White Pelican** flew over us, and two female **Marsh Harriers** hunted over the reeds.

### Istria

We moved on to the lake at Istria, but this time further up the road, so the view was different. There were many waders, including 10+ juvenile **Little Stints**, a **Temminck's Stint**, 10+ **Wood Sandpipers** which called constantly, 20+ **Ruff**, an adult **Curlew Sandpiper**, 6+ **Spotted Redshanks**, and several **Little Ringed** and **Ringed Plovers**. There were also two adult and two 2<sup>nd</sup> winter **Mediterranean Gulls**, and a two bright yellow and two juvenile *Flava* type **Yellow Wagtails**.

### Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012 ('Phalaropes, Roundabouts and Castles')

Another warm and sunny day. We left Mamaia at 09:00 to spend the day travelling to Tulcea.

### Vadu

We arrived at Vadu at 10:00. The site consists of a huge area of reeds and dykes, with large pools surrounded with high banks, and scrubby open areas with shallow pools that were dried up with the drought, the whole area bordering the sea. There was a large derelict factory left from the communist days, by the entrance to the site, and an old concrete barn, with a small house built into it by some locals!

As usual, there were many juvenile **Red-backed Shrikes**, **Bee-eaters** and several female **Marsh Harriers** hunting. Two juvenile **Montagu's Harriers** passed over showing well, and we found a **Common Sandpiper** and **Greenshank**. The highlight however, was two smart juvenile **Red-necked Phalaropes** which spun round on one of the lakes showing very well. As we walked around this lake a **Purple Heron** flew lazily over the reeds, and Balazs flushed a male **Golden Oriole**, which no one else saw as we didn't keep up with him! After a while we drove on along a dirt track until we got to a small 'roundabout' with some small bushes in the centre of it. We stopped the van and found that this tiny area provided amazing interest as we found two **Red-breasted Flycatchers**, a **Spotted Flycatcher**, a **Lesser Whitethroat**, a juvenile **Common Whitethroat**, a pair of **Common Redstarts** and a pair of **Blackcaps**!

### Istria

We then drove on to Istria for a final visit to the area with the beach huts. This time we were able to identify several marsh terns as **Whiskered Terns**. On the water there were four **Garganeys** in non-breeding plumage, and along the muddy edge there were many **Little Stints** and **Ruff**, several **Little Ringed Plovers**, **Wood Sandpipers** and **Spotted Redshanks**, and two **Avocets** waded in the water. A **Night Heron** flew into the reeds, and a pale phase **Booted Eagle** drifted over. The icing on the cake though was a massive flock of **Sand** and **House Martins** over the lake.

As we drove off from Istria, there were three **Long-legged Buzzards** circling over the fields alongside the road.

### Enisala Castle

Further up the coast we stopped at Enisala Castle, dating back to the 13/14<sup>th</sup> century, which has extensive views over the coast and Lake Razim, on the southern edge of the delta. From the road up to the castle we had distant views of a **Squacco Heron** and **Purple Heron** flying, and a **Great White Egret**.

From Enisala Castle we drove up to Tulcea (pronounced 'Tool-cha'), where we boarded our floating hotel for three nights in the Danube Delta, and met Eugene Petrescu, our guide for the three days, and Lenuta, our smart and very capable waitress. The boat stayed put overnight and we had our first dinner on board.

### Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2012 ('Up the creek with a hotel')

Despite a disco in the town which had a thudding bass until quite late we mostly slept well. Several of us went on top deck early to see the sunrise. Unfortunately there were clouds in the way, but it was interesting seeing life on and around the river start up in the morning. Because of low water levels in the delta, the hotel would be unable to go into the smaller channels, so we boarded a smaller boat, while the floating hotel was towed to where we would stay the night. We set off in an easterly direction up the wide river with occasional sightings of **Kingfishers**, juvenile **Night Herons** and **Little Egrets**.

After a while we turned left up a narrower channel, with lots of fisherman on either bank, which was fringed with tall willows. Soon we were regularly seeing **Night Herons** (mainly juveniles) on

the edges, with **Great White Egrets** perched in trees, and the occasional **Hobby** going over. As we went further the most common heron became the **Squacco**. A **Honey Buzzard** gave good views as it circled over the river, and we had our first sighting of a juvenile **White-tailed Eagle** perched in a distant tree. As the morning went on we saw more eagles, with one juvenile circling over the boat giving close views, and in the afternoon we even had six juvenile **White-tailed Eagles** overhead, visible in one binocular view! **Marsh Harriers** were regular too, but we only saw one **Red-footed Falcon**, a female going over, and brief views of two **Levant Sparrowhawks** looking like falcons. An **Osprey** was also seen as well a **Common Sparrowhawk**. As we motored slowly along a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** appeared in the nearby reeds, and several **Bee-eaters** and **Rollers** were also seen. From mid-morning small groups of **Black Storks** regularly drifted over, as well as large groups of **White Pelicans**. Three single **Dalmatian Pelicans** were also seen overhead. Surprisingly (to us) only one **White Stork** was seen. Apparently they migrate much early than their black cousins. We soon got used to the **Pygmy Cormorants** which swam or perched along all the waterways.

At one point we went close to a very shallow lake, and found a **Black-necked Grebe** in non-breeding plumage, as well as more **Great White Egrets**, and some **Spotted Redshanks**. Further on Eugene spotted a superb **Black Woodpecker**, perched high up a dead tree. They stopped the boat and we watched as the bird slowly worked its way around the trunk of the tree, showing really well, with three photographers lining up like Usain Bolt! Other birds seen were six **Black-tailed Godwits**, a brief view of a **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, and eventually several **Little Bitterns** skulking along the edges. Eventually we met up with the floating hotel at 15:30, an hour late as we were held up waiting for large boats to come up the waterway, with the water level so low.

After a late lunch, we went off again in the small boat at 17:00, going south of the main river this time, with regular sightings of **Whiskered Terns**, and three **Caspian Terns** appearing as well. Another juvenile **White-tailed Eagle** circled over us and we had more sightings of **Hobbies** fly-catching in the evening. We went up a side channel and reached a drying lake, where we were rewarded with good views of 50+ **White Pelicans** sitting on the mud, and many **Pygmy Cormorants**, as well as **Great White** and **Little Egrets**, many **Night** and **Squacco Herons**, **Common Snipe**, **Wood** and **Green Sandpipers**, **Ruff**, **Whiskered Terns** and a **European Mink**. This latter animal is declining all over Europe, and is not the danger to wildlife that the American Mink is. As the light was beginning to fade we motored back to the hotel, with occasional **Hobbies** hawking flies overhead.

### **Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012 ('To the left of the moon is a buzzard')**

The day started cooler, but soon warmed up with a clear blue sky, with some cloud appearing in the afternoon.

Before breakfast I was on the top deck and heard a **Hobby** calling from the trees, possibly to some juveniles, and an adult raced across the river and drove off another bird. Another early sighting was by Mike Hillman who saw a **Little Crake** next to the boat as he was taking a shower! After breakfast we again set off in the smaller boat and trundled along small reed fringed waterways. Early on Balazs heard some calls, and lured out two juvenile **Penduline Tits** which showed well,



followed rapidly by two **Bearded Tits** which flew over the reeds but didn't show after that. A small flock of **Ferruginous Ducks** came over, showing their horizontal wing bars that that show up so well in flight. Again **Squacco Herons** were seen very regularly, and **Night Herons** were common wherever there were trees. A female **Red-footed Falcon** drifted over the boat but didn't stop, but we had good views of two adult **White-tailed Eagles** circling, with several juveniles seen later on. A **Little Bittern** was seen briefly, but this was made up for by a number of juvenile and adult **Purple Herons**; it was obviously better habitat for them. As usual there were plenty of **Great White Egrets** and **Little Egrets** on the muddy edges or perched in trees, and regular flocks of **Black Storks** drifted over or circled in the thermals. Late in the morning we turned off and went slowly up a very weedy and shallow looking channel, with trees brushing our heads. At the end the channel the boat emerged into a large lake which was nearly dry so we had to stop. While swatting the numerous mosquitoes, we were treated to the spectacle of large numbers of **Glossy Ibises** feeding on the weedy mud. Unexpectedly a male **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** showed well on a willow close by. When we got back to the main channel the crewman amused us by 'fishing' for frogs with a red plastic bottle top, which the frogs eagerly jumped out of the water for, with cameras snapping! Back on the main river we found a group of 29 **Caspian Terns** (!) on the edge with gulls, as well as some **Black-tailed Godwits**, three **Greenshanks** and many **Whiskered Terns** dipping down to the water, some still in almost full breeding plumage. As we proceeded two **Ospreys** appeared over the river ahead, with one of them fishing. We then visited another very shallow lake where fishermen were examining their nets, placed horizontally in the weedy areas. Here we found a juvenile **Little Crake** which showed very well right out in the open. On another lake with rather deeper water, Eugene found three **Red-necked Grebes** in 'in-between' plumage, our only sightings on the trip. There were a number of **White Pelicans** on the water nearby, as well as one **Dalmatian Pelican**. As usual **Pygmy Cormorants** were everywhere, and some **Common Terns** plunged into the water and two **Green Sandpipers** flew off.

After another late lunch we stayed on the hotel as it was towed up a main branch of the river, and watched from the top deck, which gave us a different and more expansive view of the whole landscape. Again **Black Storks** circled overhead, several **Hobbies** were seen and a **Grey-headed Woodpecker** showed well on a dead riverside tree. We then 'parked' up for the evening on a quiet part of the river, but not far from Tulcea for our last evening together.

### Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2012

Next morning dawned with something unfamiliar – fog! While this was very scenic, with lots of photos being taken, it delayed our arrival in Tulcea as we were not allowed to move until the river authorities gave permission, although we did have a more leisurely breakfast!

We said goodbye and thanks to Eugene and Lenuta, and left Tulcea for a detour out to a shallow lake at Murighiol, close to the southern edge of the delta. Here we found our only **Pintail** of the trip, in eclipse plumage, a **Black-winged Stilt**, six **Black-necked Grebes**, some **Common Terns**, three **Caspian Terns**, some **Ruff** and a number of **Marsh Harriers** that patrolled over the reedbeds, as well as a **Roller** on the telephone wires. Additionally a huge adult **White-tailed Eagle** sat on a tiny island in the middle of the lake. Eventually it flew lazily off and landed on top of a nearby pylon.

Time was pressing and we drove on to the small and poor village of Plopu in the hope of seeing Red-footed Falcons that often roost in the nearby wood. Unfortunately, apart from two very brief possible sightings we failed on these birds and had to drive back to Tulcea and get on the road to Bucuresti. We went a slight different route, again passing mainly through the very open steppe farming landscape, but many of the roads near the villages were lined with walnut trees, and the locals were out with long sticks and sacks collecting them, and teenagers were trying to wave us down to sell them from the roadside.

Not long after passing over a long bridge over the Danube, there was a large flat area on either side of the road, with rough grazing and reedbeds, and Balazs spotted some **Collared Pratincoles** hawking over the fields. Tibor managed to get the bus off the road and we watched about half a dozen birds flying low and acrobatically, showing quite well although at some distance. One of these birds turned out to be a scarce **Black-winged Pratincole**, with darker upperparts and no white on the underwing. This was a great end to the birding, but as time was pressing we had to leave and Tibor had to put his foot down to make sure we reached the airport in plenty of time.

Our thanks go to Balazs and Tibor, who worked tirelessly to look after us, help us all see as many birds and animals as possible, and keep us fed, watered and entertained!

#### BIRD LIST

		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix Perdix</i>						12	6			
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>							1			
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>							*	*	*	
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>						*	*	*	*	
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>										
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>										
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>						*	*	*		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>										5
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>					*	*	*	*		
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>					1		*	*		
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>					*	*		*	*	
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>						*		*		
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>					*				*	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>							3	*	*	
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>									3	
Great-crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>								*	*	
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>								1		5+
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>								*	*	*
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>								1		1
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>									*	
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>								3+		
Black-crowned Night-heron	<i>Nictycorax nycticorax</i>							1	*	*	
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>							1	*	*	1

Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>						1	*	*	*	*
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea pulpurea</i>							2	*	*	
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>									1	
Western Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>							2	*	*	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>					*	2		*	*	
White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>						1	*	*	*	*
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>							*	*	*	*
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo Pymeus</i>								*	*	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>					*		*	*	*	*
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>								1	2	
European Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>					1			1		
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>					1					
Western Marsh-harrier	<i>Circus aeruginisus</i>	1	2			*	6	*	*	*	*
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygurus</i>					1	2				
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	2	1					*	*	1	
Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>								2		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	3				*	2	*	*	*	
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>					*	3	*		1	
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>	3				1					
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>					1		1			
Common Kestrel	<i>Folco tinnunculus</i>		1			*	*	*	*	*	*
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>								1	1	
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1	1			1	1		*	*	*
Little Crake	<i>Porzana parva</i>									2	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					*	*		*	*	*
Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>							*	*	*	*
Eurasian Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichnemus</i>				1						
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>					*					1
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>							2			
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>					*	*	*	*	*	*
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>							2			
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>							*			
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dibius</i>					*	*	*			
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					*	*	1	*	*	
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>							*		*	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>							*			
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>					*	*	*	*	*	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>					*	*	*	*		
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringaa stagnatilis</i>							3			
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>					*		1	*	*	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>					1			1	*	
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringaa Glareola</i>					1	12	*	1		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>					1		*		*	
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>					1	*	*			
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>					1	1	1			





Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		H	H								
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		*	*	*		*		*	1		
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	*										
European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>			1								
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>			*								
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		1	1								
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	*	*	*				*	*			
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	1	*									
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>							1				

\* number of birds seen but not counted

H bird heard but not seen