Montenegro & Albania
Saturday 14 – Sunday 22 April 2012

Trip Report

Tour Leader:
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Day 1 - 14th April
Arrival on time to Cilipi Airport, Dubrovnik (Croatia) in cool spring weather. After checking into the hotel we had a picnic lunch in the park of the hotel, where we had a few Hawfinches as well as lots of migrating Blackcaps in the bushes. Late afternoon siteseeing in the old town of Dubrovnik.

Day 2 - 15th April
Heavy rain from early morning, leaving to Montenegro at 10 am. Frequent stops in Croatia in old, abandoned orchards at Komaji, where a pair of Subalpine Warblers, Whitethroats and a Cirl Bunting singing on a top of a cypress were seen. In the wet meadows near Gruda we saw good numbers of Yellow-legged Gulls, Great Egrets and Grey Herons.

After crossing the border to Montenegro we drove around the picturesque southernmost fjord of Europe, the Kotorosko-Risanski Bay. A pair of Golden Eagles was seen while having picnic lunch. We stopped to admire the agility of Crag Martins near Risan. After leaving Kotor we headed towards Cetinje, the former capital of the country. First we climbed the cca. 1700 m high mountain on extremely winding narrow roads, on the way a pair of Short-toed Eagles and Coal Tit seen. From the sunny and warm Mediterranean spring we entered the mainland where we experienced almost winter conditions. Our next stop was at the breathtaking panoramic point near Rijeka Crnojevica just before sunset, then we headed for Virpazar the place to stay to explore Europe’s largest freshwater lake and it’s surroundings.

Day 3 - 16th April
We left Virpazar in rather rainy weather. After crossing tunnel Sorina we reached the Adriatic and turned southeast towards Albania. After Bar we chose a narrow road leading through scattered settlements, orchards and pastures to Dobra Voda where remarkable migration of Blackcaps and Winchats was on. It was raining more or less constantly, but we still saw several Golden Orioles and a Woodchat Shrike. After a long queing at the border at Sukobin we reached Albania in sunny weather. While driving on terrible roads to Skhoder we saw a nice flock of Montague’s Harriers and many hundreds of Sand Martins hunting over the River Moraca. From Skhoder we turned towards Velipolje and had our lunch at the bank of a nice marshy lake (Squacco Heron, Great Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and Marsh Harrier seen). Early afternoon we crossed the strange and exotic town of Skhoder and passed along the eastern edge of the Lake Skadar. During our numerous stops the first Black-eared Wheatear pair was seen attacking a Little Owl as well as a big flock of Spanish Sparrows, a few Crested larks, a Pied Flycatcher and a very remote little group of Dalmatian Pelicans on the lake. We went back to Montenegro at Hani Hotit and stopped at the watch tower near Tuzi, which was in a disappointing condition. In heavy rain we saw only one Dalmatian Pelican and a Red-rumped Swallow.
Day 4 - 17th April
Right after leaving the hotel we stopped not far from Virpazar harbour to look for waterfowl, where several Pygmy Cormorants, Great Crested and Little Grebes, a few Whiskered Terns were observed. While driving along the southern bank of Lake Skadar we saw a Grey Wagtail and stopped frequently in dry, bushy places in search of Sombre Tit, which was finally seen near Marstijepovici. On the southern slopes we saw Western Rock Nuthatches and a Rock Bunting. The old Sweet Chestnut forest at Gornja Briska was an unforgettable location, where Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Sombre Tit, Hawfinch and Green Woodpecker were seen. During the picnic lunch in a forest full of orchids near Ostrosi we saw a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers.

The final birdwatching site for this day was the famous saltpan system of Ulcinj. Since it was still not operating there were pans in all kinds of condition. After driving along the pools we finally walked into the middle of the saltpans to a nice hide, where we saw a nice flock of Marsh Sandpipers, Grey Plovers, Wood Sandpipers, a drake Garganey, Spoonbills, Little Stints, etc. On the way to the hide 3 Stone Curlews, a few Kentish Plovers and a flock of Short-toed Larks were seen.

After the hearty dinner in the hotel in Virpazar we were looking for Scops Owls in the park, which were seen well at last perched on the tall London Planes.

Day 5 - 18th April
After breakfast we had a short birdwatching around the hotel. At 10 am we left the harbour on a small boat to explore the lake. During the first hour of the trip not much was seen (lots of Great Crested Grebes, Cormorants and Black-headed Gulls) but on the way back on the northern part of the lake we spotted 9 Dalmatian Pelicans, a Black Tern and a few Black-necked Grebes. Raptors were also seen from the boat, a Golden Eagle and a pair of Short-toed Eagles among them. We spent the afternoon driving around Lake Skadar and seeing mostly the same array of birds as the day before.

Day 6 - 19th April
In the morning we left Virpazar in heavy rain, which lasted till mid afternoon. While we were driving into the monumental Moraca and Tara Valley we frequently stopped for birding. A Common Sandpiper was seen during lunch. We didn’t miss to visit the Moraca Monastery, where a White Wagtail was seen in the monastery’s beautiful garden. After stopping at the breathtaking vista point at Tara-bridge we drove along the steep mountain road to the plateau of Zabljak, where cold late winter weather awaited us with 1 metre of snow at some places. During the afternoon we had some fine views of Crested Tit, Firecrest, Mistle Thrush in the spruce forest in Zabljak.

Day 7 - 20th April
We started the day in Durmitor National Park, walking on a nice road through the spruce forest to Lake Crno, which was still 70% frozen. Then we visited the exhibition at the headquarters of the NP showing the natural wealth of Durmitor, then drove southeast of Zabljak towards Sedlo. We stopped at the outskirts of the fast developing ski resort where we saw our first Black Redstart. In stormy and cold wind we observed flocks of Alpine Choughs feeding on pastures with slowly melting snow. Here we witnessed the migration of good numbers of Water Pipits and a few Northern Wheatears. Since the road to Sedlo was blocked by thick snow, we turned back and went to a plateau north of Zabljak, where we stopped to look for birds from a hut sheltering us from rain. From here we had a perfect view of the Durmitor’s
massive rocks and observed Willow Tit and Mistle Thrush. During the walk in the spruce forest in Zabljak before the rich dinner we finally had good views of a Black Woodpecker.

**Day 8 - 21th April**

After leaving the hotel at 8.30 am our first stop was before the tunnel on the new road to Savnik, where Ravens were feeding on a dead fox. After the tunnel we had a short birdwatching in a hilly area which proved to be a good site for Woodlark, Hoopoe and Linnet. We spent the rest of the shiny and warm spring morning hours in the magnificent Komarnica Valley. Just at the entrance we had a perfect view of Ferruginous Duck, Wryneck and Little Grebe. While driving slowly along the strong river we saw Grey Wagtails, Sombre, Marsh and Willow Tits, Rock Bunting, Hoopoe, Turtle Dove and 3-4Short-toed Eagles.

On the way back to Kotor Bay we chose a less travelled road leading from Niksic towards Slansko Reservoir, where we saw Wood Sandpiper, different races of Yellow Wagtail, Little Ringed Plover and a colourful Red-throated Pipit. In changing weather we had a once in a lifetime experience of a double rainbow. After descending to Kotor Bay we took the ferry to Kamenari and crossed the border to Croatia. After a rather long journey we arrived to the hotel in Mlini quite late in the evening.

**Day 9 - 22th April**

After breakfast we headed for the airport of Dubrovnik.
BIRD SPECIES LISTS

GESE, SWANS & DUCKS - Anatidae
Mute Swan Cygnus olor A few seen on Lake Skadar.
Mallard Anas platyrhynchos Seen on Lake Skadar and Ulcinj Saltpans.
Northern Shoveler Anas clypeata Seen on Ulcinj Saltpans.
Garganey Anas querquedula A few Seen on Ulcinj Saltpan and near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Eurasian Teal Anas crecca Seen on Ulcinj Saltpans.
Common Pochard Aythya ferina Seen on Lake Skadar.
Ferruginous Duck Aythya nyroca Seen at the entrance to Komarnica Valley

GREBES - Podicipedidae
Great Crested Grebe Podiceps cristatus Many of them seen on Lake Skadar.
Black-necked Grebe Podiceps nigricollis A few seen on Lake Skadar.
Little Grebe Tachybaptus ruficollis A few seen on Lake Skadar.

STORKS - Ciconiidae
White Stork Ciconia ciconia A few migrating flocks and some nesting birds seen.

PELICANS - Pelecanidae
Dalmatian Pelican Pelecanus onocrotalus 9 seen during the boat trip on Lake Skadar.

IBISES & SPOONBILLS - Threskiornithidae
Eurasian Spoonbill Platalea leucorodia A larger flock seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.

HERONS & BITTERNS - Ardeidae
Grey Heron Ardea cinerea Seen regularly near wetlands.
Purple Heron Ardea purpurea 1 seen on Lake Skadar.
Great Egret Ardea alba Seen regularly near wetlands.
Little Egret Egretta garzetta A few seen in Croatia.
Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax A few seen on Lake Skadar.
Squacco Heron Ardeola ralloides A few seen on Lake Skadar.

CORMORANTS - Phalacrocoracidae
Great Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo Many seen at Lake Skadar.
Pigmy Cormorant Phalacrocorax pygmaeus Good numbers seen at Lake Skadar.

HAWKS, EAGLES & allies - Accipitridae
European Honey Buzzard Pernis apivorus 1 seen near Virpazar.
Western Marsh Harrier Circus aeruginosus Common near wetlands, reedbeds.
Montague’s Harrier Circus pygargus A migrating flock seen in Albania.
Eurasian Sparrowhawk Accipiter nisus A few seen.
Common Buzzard Buteo buteo Common, seen on most days
Golden Eagle Aquila chrysaetos A pair seen at Kotor Bay.
Short-toed eagle Circaetus gallicus A pair seen above Kotor Bay and another near Virpazar.

FALCONS & allies - Falconidae
Common Kestrel Falco tinnunculus Regularly seen.

RAILS, CRAKES & COOTS - Rallidae
Eurasian Coot Fulica atra Common on Lake Skadar.

Thick-knees - Burhinidae
Stone Curlew Burhinus oedicnemus 4 seen on Ulcinj Saltpans

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS - Charadriidae
Northern Lapwing Vanellus vanellus Seen every day in good numbers near wetlands.
Kentish Plover Charadrius alexandrinus A few seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius A few seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Grey Plover Pluvialis squatarola A few seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.

SANDPIPERS, SNIPES & allies - Scolopacidae
Common Snipe Gallinago gallinago A few seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Spotted Redshank Tringa erythropus A few seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Common Redshank Tringa totanus A few seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Common Greenshank Tringa nebularia A few seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola Common near wetlands.
Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos Seen at the canals near Ulcinj Saltpans.
Marsh Sandpiper Tringa stagnatilis A flock of 20 seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Dunlin Calidris alpina Good numbers seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Ruff Philomachus pugnax Seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Little Stint Calidris minuta A few seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS - Laridae
Black-headed Gull Chroicocephalus ridibundus Common on Lake Skadar.
Yellow-legged Gull Larus michahellis Common on Lake Skadar.
Common Tern Sterna hirundo A few seen on Lake Skadar.
Whiskered Tern Chlidonias hybrida Common on Lake Skadar.
Black Tern Chlidonias niger 2-3 seen on Lake Skadar.

PIGEONS & DOVES - Columbidae
Rock Dove Columba livia The feral form common, seen every day. Also some wild birds in the mountains above Lake Skadar.
Common Wood Pigeon Columba palumbus Common, seen every day.
European Turtle Dove Streptopelia turtur A few seen in Komarnica Valley.
Eurasian Collared Dove Streptopelia decaocto Seen almost daily in towns.

CUCKOOS - Cuculidae
Common Cuckoo Cuculus canorus Heard and seen a few times.

OWLS – Strigidae
Little Owl Athene noctua 1 seen in Albania.
Scops Owl Otus scops Heard and seen in Virpazar and Dubrovnik.

SWIFTS - Apodidae
Common Swift Apus apus Common along the Adriatic.

HOOPOESE - Upupidae
Eurasian Hoopoe Upupa epops 2 seen in Komarnica Valley.

WOODPECKERS - Picidae
Eurasian Wryneck Jynx torquilla Seen in Komarnica Valley.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Dendrocopos minor 1 pair seen in the mountains near Lake Skadar.
Great Spotted Woodpecker Dendrocopos major Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Black Woodpecker Dryocopus martius 1 seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Green Woodpecker Picus viridis Heard in the mountains near Lake Skadar.

SHRIKES - Laniidae
Woodchat Shrike Lanius senator Seen on pastures near Bar.

OLD WORLD ORIOLES – Oriolidae
Eurasian Golden Oriole Oriolus oriolus A few seen on migration near Bar.

CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES - Corvidae
Eurasian Jay Garrulus glandarius Common, seen on most days.
Eurasian Magpie Pica pica Seen on most days.
Western Jackdaw Coloeus monedula Common in villages and towns.
Rook Corvus frugilegus Seen few times during the trip.
Hooded Crow Corvus cornix Common, seen on most days.
Northern Raven Corvus corax Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Alpine Chough Pyrrhocorax graculus Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

TITS & CHICKADEES - Paridae
Marsh Tit Poecile palustris Seen and heard in Komarnica-valley.
Willow Tit Poecile montanus Seen in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Coal Tit Periparus ater Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
European Crested Tit Lophophanes cristatus Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Sombre Tit Poecile lugubris Seen twice, first in the mountains around Lake Skadar then in Komarnica Valley.
Great Tit Parus major Common, seen every day.
Eurasian Blue Tit Cyanistes caeruleus Common, seen most days.

PENDULINE TITS - Remizidae
Eurasian Penduline Tit Remiz pendulinus Heard at Lake Skadar.

LARKS - Alaudidae
Eurasian Skylark Alauda arvensis Common on pastures and grasslands.
Crested Lark Galerida cristata A few seen along the road in Albania.
Short-toed Lark Calandrella brachydactyla A flock of about 15 seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
SWALLOWS & MARTINS - Hirundinidae
Crag Martin Ptyonoprogne rupestris Seen at Kotor Bay.
Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica Common, seen most days.
Common House Martin Delichon urbicum Common, seen most days.
Red-rumped Swallow Hirundo daurica One bird seen at Tuzi birdhide, Lake Skadar.
Sand Martin Riparia riparia Several hundreds seen in Albania hunting above River Moraca.

LONG-TAILED TITS AND BUSHTITS - Aegithalidae
Long-tailed Tit Aegithalos caudatus Seen and heard at several places.

OLD WORLD WARBLERS - Sylviidae
Willow Warbler Phylloscopus trochilus Common, seen and heard every day.
Common Chiffchaff Phylloscopus collybita Common, seen and heard most days.
Wood Warbler Phylloscopus sibilatrix Seen and heard a few times.
Great Reed Warbler Acrocephalus arundinaceus Seen and heard in Albania.
Sedge Warbler Acrocephalus schoenobaenus Seen and heard in Albania.
Eurasian Blackcap Sylvia atricapilla Very common, seen or heard every day.
Lesser Whitethroat Sylvia curruca Seen or heard most days.
Common Whitethroat Sylvia communis Common, seen on most days.
Subalpine Warbler Sylvia cantillans Common along the Adriatic.
Sardinian Warbler Sylvia melanocephala 1 bird seen near Dubrovnik on the last day.

CRESTS & KINGLETS - Regulidae
Firecrest Regulus ignicapillus Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

WRENS - Troglodytidae
Eurasian Wren Troglodytes troglodytes Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

NUTHATCHES & WALLCREEPER - Sittidae
Eurasian Nuthatch Sitta europaea Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Western Rock Nuthatch Sitta neumayer A few seen in the mountains around Lake Skadar.

STARLINGS - Sturnidae
Common Starling Sturnus vulgaris Common, seen every day.

THRUSHES - Turdidae
Common Blackbird Turdus merula Seen or heard most days.
Fieldfare Turdus pilaris A few seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Song Thrush Turdus philomelos Fairly common.
Mistle Thrush Turdus viscivorus A few seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

OLD WORLD CHATS & FLYCATCHERS - Muscicapidae
European Robin Erithacus rubecula Seen or heard most days.
Common Nightingale Luscinia megarhynchos Heard and seen a few times during the trip.
Black Redstart Phoenicurus ochruros A few seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Blue Rock Thrush Monticola solitarius One singing male seen at the end of the trip in Croatia.
Whinchat Saxicola rubetra Seen during migration near Bar.
Northern Wheatear Oenanthe oenanthe A few seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Black-eared Wheatear Oenanthe hispanica Seen in Albania.
Spotted Flycatcher Muscicapa striata Seen or heard a few times during the trip.
European Pied Flycatcher Ficedula hypoleuca 1 bird seen in Albania.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS & allies - Passeridae
House Sparrow Passer domesticus Common, seen most days.
Spanish Sparrow Passer hispaniolensis Seen several times at the airport and Albania.
Eurasian Tree Sparrow Passer montanus Seen a few times.

WAGTAILS & PIPITS - Motacillidae
Western Yellow Wagtail Motacilla flava Seen a few times.
White Wagtail Motacilla alba Seen at Moraca Monastery.
Grey Wagtail Motacilla cinerea Seen in the mountains around Lake Skadar and Komarnica Valley.
Meadow Pipit Anthus pratensis Seen on most days.
Water Pipit Anthus spinola Good numbers seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.
Red-throated Pipit Anthus cervinus Seen at Lake Slansko.

FINCHES & allies - Fringillidae
Common Chaffinch Fringilla coelebs Common, seen every day.
European Serin Serinus serinus Seen a few times.
European Greenfinch Chloris chloris Common, seen most days.
European Goldfinch Carduelis carduelis Common, seen every day.
Common Linnet Carduelis cannabina Seen or heard a few times.
Hawfinch Coccothraustes coccothraustes Good numbers heard and seen.

BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS & allies - Emberizidae
Yellowhammer Emberiza citrinella Seen a few times.
Common Reed Bunting Emberiza schoeniclus Seen at Ulcinj Saltpans.
Rock Bunting Emberiza cia Seen in Komarnica Valley and in the mountains around Lake Skadar.
Cirl Bunting Emberiza cirlus Seen at several places near Lake Skadar and Dalmatia.
Corn Bunting Miliaria calandra Common, seen most days.