

Romania

23 August – 1 September 2013

Day 1 – Friday 23rd August

On the Road to Zarnesti

Ten of us - 6 Americans and 4 Brits - were met at the Bucharest airport by Balazs Szigeti, our bird guide, and Tibor, our driver. Some of us knew Tibor from a Hungary bird trip and were delighted to see him again.

We immediately headed northwest on the road to Zarnesti. Before sundown we stopped for a coffee break - Balazs was our barista - in a field after Ploiesti. Soon we spied a Lesser Spotted Eagle on migration. There were also Common Buzzards and Common Kestrels. We saw Rooks, Jackdaws and Common Starlings flocking beyond a field of sheep and goats. Some of us spotted a Western Great Egret and a Grey Heron as we passed roadside pools. As we passed through Zarnesti, some saw the ubiquitous Mallard.

We checked in to the comfortable Villa Hermani and sat down to a dinner reflecting the German background of the owner.

Day 2 – Saturday 24th August

Our first full day began with swooping House Martins who shared our same villa. A Black Redstart was in the garden. Then we drove to the Zarnesti Gorge and spent the morning walking up the broad, gravel pathway that wound through the gorge of limestone. Every curve brought new vistas. Birds along the way were Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Northern Goshawk, Common Buzzard, Alpine Swift and even one Common Swift. There were Grey and White Wagtails in the stream that gurgled along our path. We were treated to a good view of the Eurasian Treecreeper. On top of one of the cliffs we saw three Chamois.

After a mid-afternoon meal at our villa, we birded our way to the bear hide. A bit of rain brought the birds out: Icterine Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Marsh Tit, Coal Tit, Fieldfare, Eurasian Nuthatch, Goldcrest, Red-backed Shrike, Eurasian Jay and Magpie, Common Chaffinch, European Goldfinch, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer.

We saw a Red Deer and a Roe Deer which puzzled us all with its donkey-like face. But, alas, we were not so lucky with the bears. The first folk in the hide saw one bear. The rest of us saw none in 2 1/2 hours of silent waiting. One Wood Pigeon treated us to a show by eating some of the grain left for the bears. On the way out of the hide, a few of us caught sight of a Tawny Owl in our guide's torch beam. As we returned to our hotel, Tibor offered us homemade palinka from his father.

Day 3 – Sunday 25th August

Sunday morning we awoke to a beautiful day. We drove to Bran where some of us toured Bran Castle, the home of queen Maria of Romania in the early twentieth century. It is a prime example of medieval architecture and the owners like to tout it as "Dracula's castle." The rest of

the group birded in the garden and saw a Long-tailed Tit and European Siskin. The extraordinary surprise of the morning was when Balazs spotted two Skuas flying over the mountain above the castle. Here we were far from open sea, but it is migration time.

In the afternoon we birded in some meadows where Romanian families were having late summer picnics. A Crested Tit was worth the walk. In a nearby forest we got excellent views of the Greater Spotted Woodpecker. Speaking of woodpeckers, Balazs was successful in calling a Black Woodpecker out of the woods edging the meadow. Other birds in the forest were a European Robin, Mistle Thrush, Common Whitethroat, Eurasian Nuthatch, Goldcrest, Red Crossbill and a Hawfinch. One of the biggest treats of the day was a Ural Owl who flew in front of our van on a mountain road. We followed it into the woods, and one of us caught a brief view.

We returned to our villa and were treated to a wonderful dinner of roast pork and all the trimmings.

Day 4 – Monday 26th August

Monday morning we packed the van and headed out of beautiful Transylvania and across the flat plains of Eastern Romania to the Black Sea Coast. Some of us reveled in taking off our hiking boots and wading in the lovely warm waters of the sea at a sandy beach at Mangalia. Across the road we found a pool filled with birds..Little Grebe, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Little Egret, Great Cormorant, Common Pochard, Common Moorhen, Black-winged Stilt, Eurasian Coot, Grey Plover, Kentish Plover, Common Ringed Plover, Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Temmick's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Black-headed Gull, Caspian Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Little Gull, Gull-billed Tern.

Our accommodations for the next three nights was a beach front hotel in Mamamia. Dinner on the terrace that evening featured grilled vegetables and chicken. When the magnificent chocolate dessert was served, we sang happy birthday to one of our group members.

Day 5 – Tuesday 27th August

Tuesday we awoke to rain that soon gave way to a beautiful day. We spent the morning birding the shores of Lake Techirghiol. Black-necked Grebe, Grey Plover, Kentish Plover, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Temmick's Stint, Mediterranean Gull, Little Gull were seen. Perched on the high cliff, we were able to look down on the shore birds and see them quite closely. We were startled also to see a tall man covered with black mud from head to toe standing in a spread eagle position reminiscent of Leonardo Da Vinci's man in the circle illustrating the Golden Ratio. Later we saw another man totally nude returning from a swim. Oh well...

In the afternoon we drove quite far to a deserted wasteland near a Communist- era industrial plant. Hard walking over cracked earth produced a marsh filled with birds. The bird of the day was the Marsh Sandpiper. White Storks, Grey Herons, Little Egrets, Northern Lapwings, Black-tailed Godwits, a few Garganey and one Northern Shoveler made for quite a colorful picture. Yellow Wagtails flitted about. Lesser Grey Shrikes were spied regularly as were Eurasian Bee-eaters and Rollers. A couple of Common Snipe and a batch of Glossy Ibis flew over.

At dinner in the evening we celebrated a belated birthday of one of our party. By the time we got to our checklist we were really having a good time.

Day 6 – Wednesday 28th August

Wednesday began cloudy but became sunny almost immediately. We drove to a section of huge fields and rolling hills by a gravel pit. A dark wheatear appeared right away but it took a digital picture to correctly identify the bird as a Black-eared Wheatear. We began to see lots of raptors. The prize of the day was a Saker Falcon eating a magpie in the middle of a plowed field. We looked down upon it and got excellent views. There were also Short toed , Booted and Imperial Eagles. Always a number of buzzards and kestrels were flying about with an occasional Marsh Harrier. The migration was definitely on! When a Roller was sighted on a rock, one of our Americans quipped, "Rock and Roll-er!" After a picnic lunch in a shady copse filled with Red-throated Flycatchers and Common Redstarts, we were able to call out three Syrian Woodpeckers. Then we drove to a beautiful limestone formation called Cheia Dobrogei. The floor of the gorge was like a golf course with Susliks' holes everywhere. The little furry animals kept popping up with curiosity. After a bumpy drive through a village and a wind farm with 100's of wind turbines, we arrived at a shallow lake filled with shore birds, Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Marsh Sandpipers etc. Those with scopes had a great time. It was interesting to see one Hobby successfully raise up the hundreds of birds feeding there.

Day 7 – Thursday 29th August

Thursday we headed north to Tuleca stopping to bird along the way. We returned to the last lake we had stopped at the night before. There were not as many birds but still there were huge flocks. It was easier to see single species. There were Marsh Sandpipers, Dunlins, Grey Plover, Black-winged Stilts, Avocets. At another stop we were able to see the Eurasian Spoonbill. We stopped on a bridge to look down in the marsh to see a Bittern and and a Purple Heron. After driving through a beautiful landscape of tree-lined highways, villages of thatched roof houses with detailed facial boards along the eaves and an occasional horse drawn wagon, we arrived in the city of Tulcea where we boarded the Floating Hotel. We were pulled out by a tug boat into the Danube and into a quiet tributary and anchored to the trees alongside. The late afternoon was spent swimming, identifying birds that passed by, and enjoying a beer. After a magnificent dinner of Danube catfish, we were treated to a lecture by Daniel about the Danube Delta and its ever changing channels.

Day 8 – Friday 30th August

Friday morning we boarded a smaller boat and went into to a number of smaller channels where we saw almost every water bird imaginable..Red-necked and Great-crested Grebes, Little Bittern, Grey and Purple Herons, Little Egrets, Black and White Storks, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Pygmy and Great Cormorants, Mute Swan, Common Shelduck, Mallard, Eurasian Teal. We also saw many raptors including Short-toed Eagles, Western Marsh Harriers, Common Buzzards, Booted Eagle, Common Kestrel, Eurasian Hobby. Also noted was a Eurasian Stone-curlew. Black-necked Stilt, Avocet, Common Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Common and Spotted Redshanks, Temmick's Stint, Dunlin were seen in the marshes. Gulls included Black-headed, Yellow-legged and mighty Pallas's. Cspian and Cmmon Trns presented themselves. Common Kingfishers were regularly spaced right and left every few feet along the channel.

After a long ride back to our floating hotel, we had a tasteful and filling lunch and boarded the smaller boat for more birding. The treat of the afternoon was a long look at a Little Crake family who posed lengthily in the golden sun of late afternoon.

Day 9 – Saturday 31st August

Saturday morning we had an excellent look at Dalmatian Pelicans. One fished in the water very near us, the other rose up into the sky illustrating the grey of its underwings. We also got a few passerines on the willows overhanging the smaller canals. Long-tailed Tit, Common Reed Warbler and Great Reed Warbler were particularly appreciated.

We enjoyed a leisurely afternoon on board our floating hotel and a filling final dinner complete with birthday cake and champagne.

Day 10 – Sunday 1st September

Sunday morning our floating hotel was pulled back to its dock in Tulcea and we boarded our bus for Bucharest. We made one stop in an idyllic meadow with beautiful oak trees nicely spaced. A Sombre Tit showed itself nicely. Walking back to the bus, Balazs played Mozart's Requiem as we looked through the scope at a Whinchat.

Then we dashed south to the airport to put some friends on a plane back to Heathrow. All the Americans headed to the city for stays of various lengths.

We had a wonderful trip seeing many birds of Eastern Europe and making new friends. Our guide and driver did everything possible to make this a memorable holiday for us all.

Species list

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Boatulus stellaris</i>
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>
Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>

Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>
Eastern Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Little Crane	<i>Porzana parva</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
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>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Broad-billed Sandpiper	<i>Limicola falcinellus</i>
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>

Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Pallas's Gull	<i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>
Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>
Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
European Roller	<i>Coracias garullus</i>
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>
Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>

Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>
Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>
European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europea</i>
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>

Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>

Other species

Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
Edible Dormouse	<i>Glis glis</i>
European Sousek	<i>Spermophilus citellus</i>
Muskrat	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>
Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>
Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>
Spur-thighed Tortoise	<i>Testudo graeca</i>
European Pond Terrapin	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>
Grass Snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>