

Final Version

Istanbul - Bulgaria - Romania

5th - 19th April 2014

Trip members: Wendy and Tony Hayward, Ruth Day, Tricia Frith, Lynn Mann, Martin Moore and Jane Sammes, Diane Timney, Bernard Jeffcoate - for fourteen days and Peter Bailey and Peter Sharpe - for eleven days.

Leader: Attila Steiner of Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

Driver: Lajos Egri

Saturday 5th April - our holiday begins

An early start and nine of us gathered at Terminal 5 for our 10.30 BA flight to Istanbul. We arrived at Ataturk Airport without incident until we got to the baggage hall where Tricia thought she had lost her case. A long wait, a visit to the lost luggage window and it appears that a "helpful" member of staff had moved it off the belt but put it where it wasn't noticed. Luggage and Tricia reunited we met Attila, our guide and Lajos our driver. With the trailer loaded we set off on the 90 min journey to the hotel which took us from the airport around the north of the city on a modern auto route, over the Bosphorus Bridge to the Asian side of Istanbul and to the suburb of Kadikoy. The auto route is a fast modern three lane dual carriageway with a frequent, express bus route down the centre which links at inter-changes to other bus services. However, in the evening rush hour the traffic was heavy and we did not travel so fast. The slower speed allowed us time to admire the flower beds along side the road. The striking designs illustrated many aspects of Turkish life and culture, from Turkish carpets, to sport, the historic buildings, bridges, wildlife and landscape.

Our driver successfully navigated his way through the narrow streets that led to the Grand AS Hotel for a quick freshen up before dinner but not before we had noticed the *Laughing Doves* on the pavement and window sills outside.

Sunday 6th April - migration in progress

An early breakfast and we set off for our first morning birdwatching though the weather wasn't too promising, overcast with a northerly wind which we feared would reduce migration. Once more we travelled the fast auto route with its stunning flowers, crossed the Bosphorus Bridge and this time headed to the northern end of the Bosphorus on the European side where it opens out into the Black Sea. At Rumeli Kavagi we found ourselves a vantage point by the side of the road protected by a barrier where we could look back across to the Asian side. Looking down to the

water amongst the large vessels we spotted groups of *Levantine Shearwaters* travelling in both directions between their breeding areas and their feeding areas. A school of *common dolphins* were also visible down below us as were *Pygmy* and *Great Cormorants*. It was hazy when we first arrived and migration was slow but as the morning progressed the birds started to appear. There were *Black Kites*, *Western Marsh Harriers*, *Steppe Buzzards*, a few eagles and 10 or more *Sparrowhawks* as well as a few *White Storks*.

The threat of rain saw us return to the bus and drive down to the ruined fort at Rumeli Feneri that guards the entrance to the Black Sea. We left the bus to explore the ruins and soon had excellent sightings of *Hoopoe*, a lifer for some of the group. There were *White Wagtail* on the rocks, with *Barn Swallow* and *Alpine Swift* overhead. As we scanned the rocks closer to the beach we could see a pair of *Shag* engaged in a courtship ritual resembling that of *Great Crested Grebe*. Around the ruined walls of the fort were *Jackdaw*, *Hooded Crow* and *Magpie*. Whilst we were watching we saw an American frigate travelling at speed into the Black Sea towards the Crimea, an unwelcome sign of the political situation. We returned to the bus and stopped at the bakers in the village to buy fresh bread for our lunch which we ate overlooking the harbour but sitting in the bus to get out of the wind.

After lunch we drove back to the viewpoint over the Bosphorus. An improvement in the weather produced better sightings including a superb male *Pallid Harrier* to add to the *Hen Harrier* and *Marsh Harrier* we had seen earlier. In the bushes by the road side were *Linnet*, *Chaffinch* and some of the group spotted a *Hawfinch*.

Monday 7th April - historic Istanbul

This non-birding day was spent enjoying the tourist side of Istanbul. We walked the few hundred yards to the pier in Kadikoy to catch the ferry across the Bosphorus to Eminonu in Old Istanbul. As we journey across we were able to identify *Lesser Black-backed*, *Yellow-legged*, *Black-headed* and *Mediterranean Gulls* and had good views of *Levantine Shearwater*. At Eminonu we caught one of the fast new trams to take us to the Hippodrome and Topkapi Palace. Public transport works on a single fare token system where a token is bought from a machine and allows you to access the ferry or the tram. On the tram one token will allow you to travel any length of journey. The trams like the fast buses we saw on our arrival are modern and frequent. There are also buses, a subway and trains with interchanges between them.

We first visited the Blue Mosque which is still used for worship so we were required to remove our shoes and the ladies cover their heads. The mosque is so called because of the 21,000 hand painted tiles which adorn the inner walls. They are mainly blue but also white, green and other colours. After looking at the remains of the Hippodrome and having lunch we joined the long queue to enter the Topkapi

Palace. Here we admired the interiors and the Treasury with all its jewelled contents and again admired the Turkish styles of carpet bedding. After leaving the Palace we walked down the hill to the Topkapi gardens and noted the *Rose-ringed and Alexandrine Parakeets* on the way as well as a *Syrian Woodpecker*. Here the bedding designs mainly of tulips and muscari were on a much larger scale. In the gardens there was a very large heronry which one or two people missed as they were too busy taking photos of the flower beds. We continued down the hill to the ferry and then back to our hotel.

Tuesday 8th April - storks, storks and a few eagles

The morning was bright and sunny so we returned to our view point overlooking the Bosphorus. The weather was much better and as we watched we saw wave after wave of *White Storks* coming across from Asia, when they reached the up draught on the European side they circled to gain height and then flew north towards their breeding grounds. It was estimated that we saw upwards of four thousand during the morning! Interspersed with the waves of storks were eagles, including *Short-toed, Booted, Lesser Spotted and a single Greater Spotted*. We also saw Buzzards, both *Steppe and Long-legged, Black Kites, Sparrowhawks, a Kestrel* and some of the early *Barn Swallows*. In the bushes close by were a pair of *Sardinian Warblers, Chaffinches, Chiffchaff*, and a *Wren* was heard. We drove back down to the ruined fort for our picnic lunch and kept watch whilst we ate. We saw our first tern, a *Sandwich Tern* which was appropriate, and on the rocks a *Common Sandpiper*. Another *Hoopoe* was seen and *Yellow-legged Gulls*, which were becoming quite familiar as were *Shag and Greater Cormorant*. The warmer weather brought out the butterflies and a *Hummingbird Hawk Moth*. We drove back into Istanbul passing a hovering *Common Kestrel* on the way.

We were dropped by a tram stop so that Lajos could take the minibus back to the airport to pick up the two other members of the group. The tram took the rest of us back to the Hippodrome and this time we visited the Hagia Sophia. This was built in the 6th century as a Greek Orthodox Basilica, became a Roman Catholic cathedral from 1204 to 1261, and then reverted to the orthodox church before becoming a mosque in 1453 which it remained until it finally became a museum in 1935. A fascinating building to visit as a reminder of the historical and geographical importance of Istanbul over the centuries.

We left the mosque and were tempted by the ice cream stall, where the simple purchase of a cornet was turned into performance art by the proprietor. Back to the quayside by another fast tram but before boarding the ferry we visited the Spice Market. The market was and still is the centre of the spice trade in Istanbul but some of the 85 stalls now also sell jewellery, souvenirs, dried fruit and sweets. On this ferry crossing we saw *Yellow-legged, Black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls* as well as our first *Coot* as we travelled back to the hotel.

Wednesday 9th April - trouble at the border

After a good breakfast, we said goodbye to the *House Sparrows* and *Laughing Doves* in the street as we packed the trailer and made ourselves comfortable in the minibus for our long drive to the mountains. We drove out of Istanbul in the morning rush hour and headed north west along the E80, which is the main route from Asia through Istanbul into Europe. After two hours we pulled into a layby for a coffee and comfort stop and were followed in by a convoy of tank transporters. The ladies toilets hosted nesting swallows whilst in the small garden next to the shop we saw *Corn Buntings* and heard our first *Nightingale*. Once the transporters had left we continued on our way to our lunch stop at Edirne which despite being close to the Greek and Bulgarian borders and having a lot of history is seldom visited by tourists. Sadly we didn't have time to look at its fine mosque because we were more interested in lunch. This was excellent, turkish pizzas or lahmacun, more like a flatbread filled with either meat or cheese. It was served with ayran, a salty yogurt drink, which sounded odd but went well with the pizza.

A half hour drive took us to the Turkish/Bulgarian border. We were told that there might be delays but that turned out to be an understatement. First we had to leave Turkey, the difficulty here seemed to be a problem with the documentation for the trailer on their computer system which resulted in a lot of driving round in circles from one official to another. That accomplished we had to enter Bulgaria so we joined the long queue which didn't move for two hours. The private cars seemed to move but not the coaches and lorries. Eventually a delegation of coach and lorry drivers who were clearly concerned about running out of driving hours "went and had words" what was said and in what language wasn't clear but it had the desired effect and we continued on our way, over a mountain pass and across a caldera to our destination in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains; Gorne Pole, population 25.

The Wild Farm is run and owned by Nikki and Betty, their four children and extended family. It is part of a developing eco-tourism movement in this part of Bulgaria. Some of the party stayed in the main farmhouse whilst the remainder were in cottages in the village surrounded by farm animals and wild life. We had an excellent supper and looked forward to exploring this remote area. This had been a quiet day for birds, mainly fly-bys from the minibus but included *Black Stork*, *Buzzard*, *Lesser Spotted Eagle*, *Common Kestrel*, whilst *White Storks* had a nest in the centre of the village. There was a *Nightingale* singing by the farm and a *Little Owl* calling nearby.

Thursday 10th April - birding in the rain

After the brilliant forecast of yesterday we were expecting the same but woke up to find the weather wet and cold. Our first sighting was of a *Black-eared Wheatear* in the village, we then drove along the side of the river Arda which runs through a deep

volcanic caldera with lots of volcanic rocks and basalt columns. We stopped at the base of a steep cliff but the rain was now heavier and after seeing a *Black Stork* in the river we moved on stopping at a small picnic shelter. Here we could see *Whitethroat*, *Greater Cormorant*, *Grey Herons* and *Mallard*. We moved on again and stopped where there were views of a reservoir. The rain had now eased slightly so the birds were easier to see. Using the scopes produced a group of *Caspian Tern*, then *Spotted Redshank* which were joined by a *Ruff* and a *Little Stint*. A *Little Ringed Plover* was seen as were *Dunlin*, a *Wood Sandpiper* and *Yellow Wagtails*. We returned to the Wild Farm, cold and wet, for our picnic lunch. After warming up and with dry water proofs we set off in a different direction and stopped when *Yellow Wagtail* were seen quickly followed by a *Corn Bunting*. On the other side of the road was an *Ortolan Bunting* and *Spanish Sparrows*. We drove further on for a short distance and stopped once more for more *Corn Buntings*, then had good views of *Hawfinches*, a long awaited lifer for Tricia. Other birds seen in this area were *Crested Lark*, *Mistle Thrush*, *Blackbird* and *Marsh Harrier*. We heard our first *Cuckoo*, *Green Woodpecker* and *Short-toed Treecreeper* whilst *Barn* and *Red-rumped Swallows* flew overhead.

We retraced our steps to the mountain road, stopping to scan for *Blue Rock Thrush* which we eventually saw. In the same area was a distant *Golden Eagle* and a *Black Stork* hiding in a cave. A peregrine falcon was "called" but showed its true identity when it hovered, *Kestrel*.

We stopped at the rock face where we had stopped earlier in the rain and saw *Raven*, three *Griffon Vultures*, one having a thorough preen. Around the cliffs were *Crag Martins*, *Swallows* and *Alpine Swifts* and a *Sombre Tit* was enticed to show itself by Attila. We returned to the Wild Farm hoping that the weather would improve.

Friday 11th April - Vultures and birds of prey

After an early breakfast we left the farm and headed west and saw the usual passerines en-route as well as a *Hoopoe*. After crossing the dam of Studen Kladenetz reservoir we crossed a smaller bridge and several of the party saw a *Dipper* on a weir. We watched it for a few minutes before it disappeared and promised ourselves a proper look on the return journey, a lifer for Lynn. We continued our journey to our destination, a vulture feeding station. Here we set up the scopes and waited. It was fairly quiet when we arrived with just a small group of *Griffon Vultures* and three *Egyptian Vultures*, two of them being particularly amorous, together with a *Raven* and *Hooded Crows*. A *Black Kite* attempted to try his luck with the carcass but was seen off. A second group of birds joined the action and all the birds became more active and a tug of war ensued over the carcass. Whilst this was going on a fox crept in and managed to sneak away with some of the carcass. A pair of immature *White-tailed Eagles* flew in and engaged in some talon grappling and

tumbling but managed to disentangle themselves before they got too close to the ground.

After watching the action for most of the morning we started our return journey, stopping by the road side for lunch watching *Jays* as we ate. As we continued our journey down the valley we saw a *Subalpine Warbler* and a little further on an *Eastern Orphean Warbler* and *Long-tailed Tits*. We stopped again by the bridge where we had seen the *Dipper* for better views and then by a cliff for views of *Crag Martins* and *Red-rumped Swallows*. We then travelled to the Thracian cult complex near Dolna Cherkoviste which are very large rocks in which are carved trapizoidal niches which were used for rituals and burials and date back to the 6th - 9th centuries BC. We carried on to Madzharovo which had been a thriving mining town but with the closing of the mines, flats built for the miners are now mainly deserted. We crossed the river and drove through the town and then took a narrow rough road by the river through woodland before leaving the bus for a short walk. The only bird of note was a *Short-toed Treecreeper* and as it came on to rain we returned to the farm.

Saturday 12th April - Over the mountain ranges

This was a travelling day but we compiled a long list of birds. Those of the party who stayed in the main house saw *Egyptian Vultures* in the garden! After breakfast we packed the trailer once more, packed ourselves and the scopes in to the minibus ready for our journey to Burgas. We drove down to the crags on the bend of the river that we had stopped at in the rain on the first morning in this area. The *Black Stork* and *Great Cormorant* were still there and a *Black-eared Wheatear* was spotted. As the weather warmed up a large group of *Griffon Vultures* soared up from behind the cliffs and soon a *Long-legged Buzzard* showed well. Close scanning of the cliff face produced a *Blue Rock Thrush* and a *Chukar* together with the *Kestrels* that we had seen on our earlier visit. As we were leaving a *Short-toed Eagle* flew over. We continued our journey stopping for *Tawny Pipit* and had good sightings of *Cuckoo* and *Woodchat Shrike*.

Later in the morning as we stopped at a viewpoint over a plain below hoping for sightings of *Imperial Eagle* and were rewarded with good views. This stop also produced sightings of a pair of *Pallid Harriers*, *Marsh Harrier*, *Golden Eagle*, flocks of *Calandra Lark*, *Corn Bunting*, a *Hoopoe*, *Sparrowhawk* and two sub-species of *Western Yellow Wagtail*, the normal sub species for this area black headed "feldegg" and the greyer "flava" more usually seen in central Europe. With all this excitement we made this our lunch stop. We then continued on major and minor roads to the Sakar and then the Strandja mountains. We stopped at various places en route as we sighted *Skylark*, *Starling*, more *Corn Buntings*, *Spanish Sparrow*, *Whitethroat*, a very smart *Stonechat*, an *Eastern Orphean Warbler*, *Greenfinch*, *Hawfinch* and a *Mistle Thrush*.

As we approached Burgas we stopped for a view of Burgas lake where there were a large group of *Night Heron*, a single *Squacco Heron*, *Little Egret*, *Magpie*, *Coot*, *Great Crested Grebe*, *Yellow-legged and Black-headed Gulls*, *Pygmy Cormorant* and two *Marsh Harriers*. Tired after our long journey we arrived at the Marina Hotel, ate dinner and retired to bed.

Sunday 13th April - a day for waders

We drove the short distance to Atanasovsko Salt pans, set up our scopes and scanned the numerous waders there. We immediately saw *Black-tailed Godwits* and then scanned the smaller waders seeing *Marsh*, *Common* and *Curlew Sandpiper*, *Dunlin* and *Little Stint*. Further back were *Little* and *Great Egrets*, a *Spoonbill*, *Black winged Stilt* and *Avocet*. Ducks included *Mallard*, *Shoveler*, *Shelduck*, a pair of *Pintail* and *Teal*. Also there were *Curlew*, *Ruff*, *Pygmy* and *Great Cormorant*, *Spotted Redshank*, overhead was a *Buzzard* and in the reeds *Reed Warbler*, *Penduline Tit* and a *Yellow Wagtail* were seen and in the distance a *Mute Swan*.

We then moved on to Burgas lake where we saw large numbers of *Great Crested Grebe* and a *single Black-necked Grebe*. *Gadwall* were there and *Garganey* in the far distance. We drove on and stopped suddenly when we saw pylons covered in cormorant's nests, 10- 15 on a single pylon. Whilst there we also saw *Marsh Harrier*, *Common Swift* and as we were leaving a group of *Collared Pratincole*. We stopped for lunch by Mandra Lake where among some now familiar birds we saw our first *Little Grebe*. After lunch we drove back to Burgas Lake by a different route and stopped where the road crossed a low dam. Here we watched *Corn Buntings* and a *Woodchat Shrike* as well *Marsh Harrier* and *Lapwing*. Crossing over the road Jane saw birds flying under a bridge and we realised that we had three then a fourth *Glossy Ibis* with a *Wood Sandpiper* close by as well as a *Black-winged Stilt*. Soon a *White Stork* came out of the reeds and had a bath. In the background were more *Little Egret* whilst a *Crested Lark* topped a near by low mound.

We moved on to Pomorie Lake to view the gulls and terns and saw *Sandwich Terns*, *Mediterranean Gulls*, a *Yellow-legged Gull*. In the other direction were *Whimbrel*, *Slender-billed Gulls* and amongst more *Sandwich Terns*, a *single Whiskered Tern*. Checking the nearby salt pans we saw a group of *Little Ringed Plover* on the first, and then on a second pan two *Black-winged Stilts*, a *Marsh Sandpiper*, a *Spotted Redshank*, a *Ruff* and *Pied Avocets*.

Monday 14th April - on the road again

Travelling from Burgas to Sinoe we made our first stop in a woodland which was very productive as we noted *Middle* and *Greater Spotted Woodpecker*, saw *Semi-collared Flycatcher*, *Yellowhammer*, *Treecreeper*, *Nuthatch*, *Chaffinch*, *Greenfinch*,

Goldfinch and *Tree and House Sparrows* as well as hearing *Blue Tit* and *Great Tit*. *Grizzled Skipper* and *Orange-tip Butterfly* were added to the butterfly sightings list. We got very muddy so meticulously cleaned our shoes watched over by Lajos's zealous eye concerned about his till then pristine minibus. We stopped for lunch amongst the pylons at Cape Kaliakra and immediately saw *Starling*, *Corn Bunting*, *Skylarks*, *Short-toed Larks* and *Isabelline Wheatear* amongst some stunning wild flowers.

We drove a short distance to the cliffs at Tyulenovo an example of steppe scenery. There were more amazing wild flowers here which the interpretation board told us were purple and yellow irises and paeonia tenuifolia. Amongst the wildflowers we saw a *Swallowtail Butterfly* emerging from its cocoon. The birds here included *Starling*, *Isabelline* and *Northern Wheatear*, *Calandra Lark*, *Shag* and surprisingly a *Night Heron* which had arrived exhausted from over the sea and lay flat in the grass. We were relieved to see that after a short rest it was well enough to stand up. We drove on to Durankulak Lake passing two very close *Squacco Herons* in a ditch with a *Kingfisher* close by and a *Purple Heron* flying over. This lake is the wintering site for the majority of the world's Red-breasted Geese but they had left for their breeding grounds in arctic Siberia. There is a visitor's centre which overlooks the sea with the lake and marsh behind and this produced *Purple Heron*, *Ferruginous Duck*, *Little Grebe*, the sound of a *Moorhen*, a brilliant *Citrine Wagtail* and several *White Wagtails* plus a *Pygmy Cormorant*.

From here it was a short drive to the Bulgarian/Romanian border which we crossed with ease as both countries are in the EU and then drove direct to our accommodation in Sinoe. The Grindul Lupilor Guest House is relatively new and very welcoming.

Tuesday 15th April - our first pelicans

We left our hotel after breakfast and travelled the short distance from the guest house to a track that skirted the inland lakes and reed beds that lined the coast. We stopped to scan for water birds and this produced an extensive list including *Mute Swan*, *Squacco* and *Purple Heron*, *Great* and *Little Egrets*, *Gadwall*, *Great Crested Grebe*, *Pochard*, in the reeds were a *Whinchat* and a *Kingfisher* and flying over were *Marsh Harrier*, a group of *White and Dalmatian Pelicans*, another of *Collared Pratincoles*, a *Kestrel* and a *Black Tern*. On the grass bank behind us *Sousliks* were running around. We moved on to another location where they had been harvesting the reeds over winter and saw *Northern Wheatear*, a beautiful *Yellow Wagtail* and a *Wood Sandpiper*.

We then changed location to have our lunch and chose the courtyard outside the museum and hotel at Histria. On the way we saw a *Grey Partridge* and Lajos spotted a *European Pond Terrapin*. We did not have time to explore the ruins, but Histria is

the site of a large Roman city and the oldest inhabited site in Romania. It was on the coast but the lagoons have now silted up. Whilst there we had excellent views of *Pied Flycatcher* as well as a *Hoopoe*, *Greylag Geese* and a *Gull-billed Tern*.

Another change of scene as we drove over to Cheia Gorge, a scenic area of limestone cliffs and outcrops where we climbed to the top of one of the rocks. We saw *Black Redstart*, as well as *Stonechat* and a possible *Black-eared Wheatear* and more *Souslik*. From there we made our last stop at Vadu where we scanned the pools and were rewarded with a long list of birds. There were *Common Redshank*, *Little Ringed Plover*, *Pied Avocet*, *Black-winged Stilt*, *Garganey*, *Red-crested Pochard* and *Mallard*. Then we moved the bus past the ruins of President Ceausescu's sand extracting plant, an expensive folly that never came into production. However, the former settling ponds make for good bird habitats and we had excellent views of *Savi's Warbler*, *Collared Pratincole*, *Black Tern* and *Wigeon* and as the finale saw a *Kingfisher* plunge diving into the water. The end of another productive day. We returned to our guest house for supper with thoughts of the Danube Delta to come.

Wednesday 16th June - to the Delta

We left our guest house at Sinoe and made two short walks on the edge of the woodlands at Babadag. Here we had hoped to find woodpecker but none were found only *Magpie* and *Jay*. We moved on and up to the medieval Enisala Fortress where we had excellent views of the surrounding marshes below and saw a *Spoonbill* and a *Booted Eagle*. A group of *Linnets* were in the bushes by the road. We circled the town of Enisala a couple of times so that Lajos could change his currency to buy fuel. Having achieved that we continued our journey and stopped by Murighiol Lake. By one of the sluices a poignant reminder of the dangers of water as we looked at two crosses in memory of teenage boys who had died there on the same day. We saw *Starling*, *Cuckoo*, *Collared Dove*, *Sand Martin*, *House Sparrow*, *Hooded Crow*, *Barn Swallow*, *White Pelican*, *Ferruginous Duck*, *Great Crested Grebe*, *Shelduck*, *Mute Swan*, *Purple Heron*, *Kestrel*, *Common Sandpiper*, *Caspian Tern*, *Great Cormorant*, *Black-headed Gull*, *Grey Heron* and *White-tailed Eagle* before we reached Tulcea. Here we met our guide for the Delta, Eugene. Lenuta our hostess greeted us as we boarded the boat with sweetmeats and schnapps, some of the group remembered her from a previous trip. The boat towed by its tender and also towing the small launch we would use for our birding trips set off down the main navigation channel so that we could moor for the night further into the Delta. Meanwhile, we settled into our cabins, changed and looked forward to dinner.

Thursday 17th June - birding in the delta

After breakfast we transferred to the small launch with cameras, binoculars, and scopes and settled ourselves into its plastic chairs. We wrapped up warm as it was

much cooler on the boat. The birds were there in abundance and quite close. There were *White Wagtail* on the bank, *Squacco Herons*, *Little Egrets* and *Grey Heron* lining the water's edge, whilst in the reed was a *Kingfisher*. As we moved on down the channel there was a large group of *Black-tailed Godwit* in breeding plumage with their orange/rufous colouring. The other species that we do not see in numbers in the UK are *Garganey* and they were very abundant in the Delta as were *Pygmy* and *Great Cormorant* and *Glossy Ibis*. We were surprised to see *Hooded Crow* as we think of them as a northern sub-species, but a check of the reference books show that they are more abundant in most of Europe than carrion crows which are confined to the south and south west of Europe which includes most of the UK. As we progressed down some of the side channels we saw *Caspian Tern*, more *Spoonbills*, a single *Purple Heron* and a *Lesser Whitethroat*. *Marsh Harriers* were often around.

We moored the launch in one of the channels and left it to climb a tower hide and see onto a privately owned reserve on the Delta. We saw a good number of birds including *Great Crested* and *Red-necked Grebe*, *Ruff* flying and also a *Black-tailed Godwit*. *Spoonbill* were feeding and we had a very close view of a *Great Cormorant* showing its bright green eye. The photographers amongst us were able to get good views of *Common Sandpiper* and our first close up of a *Blue Tit*. As we returned to the launch we saw nesting *Penduline Tits*. After a return to the house boat for lunch we set off again to a different channel with more trees. Our target here was woodpeckers and we soon saw a *Black Woodpecker* on a bare branch which gave the photographers clear views. After much looking another woodpecker was seen in the top of a tree and then teased us by flying from one side of the channel to the other and back without allowing us to get a clear view. We then realised there were in fact two birds and identified them as *Grey-headed Woodpecker*. To our surprise we were then lucky enough to pick up a *Lesser Spotted Woodpecker* in the same area. We travelled back to our houseboat watching the many herons and ducks that were becoming very familiar.

Friday 18th June - more birding in the delta

Again we set off after breakfast and we went from the main channel into a large lake and were able to see *Black-headed* and *Little Gull*, *Common*, *Black* and *White-winged Tern* and *White Pelican*. Later travelling through other channels we saw both *Great Crested* and *Red-necked Grebe* and *Mute Swans*. There were *Ferruginous Ducks* and a single *Greenshank*. Near some buildings we had a *Hobby* and swimming along in the channel a quite large *Grass Snake*. Overhead there was a *White-tailed Eagle*. We had got used to our leisurely life on the launch but we eventually had to return to the house boat for our lunch. On our return journey we took a short detour to see the bridge which represents the Ukrainian border. At dinner our hosts on the boat provided us with a typical Romanian cake.

Saturday 19th June - our final day

We said goodbye to Eugene and Lenuta and climbed up the gangway back onto dry land to await Lajos and the minibus. It was a long drive back to Bucharest so we had little time to look for birds though we did note the new toll bridge over the Danube. One stop we did make was by a field with at least seven *Red-footed Falcons*. Our final lunch stop was at a pull-in off the auto route where we made sure we took a group photo.

We said goodbye and our thanks to Attila, Lajos and our trusty mini bus at the airport and travelled home with some superb memories of birding around the Black Sea.

Species List - Birds

Little Grebe	Eurasian Griffon
Red-necked Grebe	Short-toed Eagle
Great Crested Grebe	Western Marsh Harrier
Black-necked Grebe	Hen Harrier
Levantine Shearwater	Pallid Harrier
Eurasian Bittern (h)	Montague's Harrier
Little Bittern	Eurasian Sparrowhawk
Black-crowned Night Heron	Goshawk
Squacco Heron	Common Buzzard
Grey Heron	Long-legged Buzzard
Purple Heron	Lesser Spotted Eagle
Western Great Egret	Greater Spotted Eagle
Little Egret	Imperial Eagle
Black Stork	Golden Eagle
White Stork	Booted Eagle
Glossy Ibis	Common Kestrel
Eurasian Spoonbill	Red-footed Falcon
Pygmy Cormorant	Eurasian Hobby
Great Cormorant	Merlin
European Shag	Chukar
Great White Pelican	Grey Partridge
Dalmatian Pelican	Common Quail (h)
Greylag Goose	Common Pheasant
Mute Swan	Water Rail (h)
Common Shelduck	Common Moorhen
Gadwall	Eurasian Coot
Wigeon	Eurasian Oystercatcher
Eurasian Teal	Black-winged Stilt
Mallard	Pied Avocet
Northern Shoveler	Collared Pratincole
Northern Pintail	Northern Lapwing
Garganey	Common Ringed Plover
Red-crested Pochard	Little Ringed Plover
Common Pochard	Common Snipe
Ferruginous Duck	Black-tailed Godwit
Tufted Duck	Whimbrel
Black Kite	Eurasian Curlew
White-tailed Eagle	Spotted Redshank
Egyptian Vulture	Common Redshank

Marsh Sandpiper
Common Greenshank
Green Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Common Sandpiper
Ruddy Turnstone
Little Stint
Curlew Sandpiper
Dunlin
Ruff
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Caspian Gull
Yellow-legged Gull
Black-headed Gull
Slender-billed Gull
Mediterranean Gull
Little Gull
Gull-billed Tern
Caspian Tern
Sandwich Tern
Common Tern
Whiskered Tern
White-winged Tern
Black Tern
Feral Pigeon
Common Wood Pigeon
Eurasian Collared Dove
Laughing Dove
Common Cuckoo
Little Owl (h)
Alpine Swift
Common Swift
Eurasian Hoopoe
Common Kingfisher
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Alexandrine Parakeet
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Middle Spotted Woodpecker
Syrian Woodpecker
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Black Woodpecker

European Green Woodpecker (h)
Grey-headed Woodpecker
Calandra Lark
Greater Short-toed Lark
Crested Lark
Woodlark
Eurasian Skylark
Sand Martin
Eurasian Crag Martin
Barn Swallow
Red-rumped Swallow
Common House Martin
Western Yellow Wagtail - flava
Western Yellow Wagtail - fledegg
Grey Wagtail
White Wagtail
Citrine Wagtail
Tawny Pipit
Winter Wren
Dipper
Blue Rock Thrush
Common Blackbird
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
European Robin (h)
Thrush Nightingale (h)
Common Nightingale
Black Redstart
Common Redstart (h)
Whinchat
European Stonechat
Isabelline Wheatear
Northern Wheatear
Black-eared Wheatear
Eurasian Blackcap
Lesser Whitethroat
Common Whitethroat
Eastern Orphean Warbler
Subalpine Warbler
Sardinian Warbler
Cetti's Warbler (h)

Savi's Warbler
Great Reed Warbler
Eurasian Reed Warbler
Willow Warbler
Common Chiffchaff
Pied Flycatcher
Semi-collared Flycatcher
Great Tit
Eurasian Blue Tit
Sombre Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Eurasian Penduline Tit
Eurasian Nuthatch
Short-toed Treecreeper
Woodchat Shrike
Eurasian Jay
Eurasian Magpie
Western Jackdaw

Rook
Hooded Crow
Northern Raven
Common Starling
House Sparrow
Spanish Sparrow
Eurasian Tree Sparrow
Common Chaffinch
European Serin (h)
European Greenfinch
European Goldfinch
Common Linnet
Hawfinch
Yellowhammer
Cirl Bunting
Ortolan Bunting
Common Reed Bunting
Corn Bunting

Species List - Mammals

Common Dolphins Fox Souslik

Species List - Reptiles

European Pond Terrapin Green Lizard Green Toad Fire-bellied toad

Marsh Frog Grass Snake Dice Snake

Species List - Insects

Large White Eastern Bath White Small Copper Wall Brown Red Admiral Painted Lady Large Tortoiseshell Camberwell Beauty Clouded Yellow
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Orange Tip Swallowtail Peacock Grizzled Skipper Hummingbird Hawk Moth Black Cricket
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