

Holiday Highlights

Romania (2)

28 August – 5 September 2016

Guides: Julian Sykes and Attila Steiner

Guests: Liz and Keith Barton, Nigel Kingscote, Heather Welcome and Sarah Rochelle

Day 1: We all meet at Heathrow's Terminal 5 at a reasonable hour and our passage airside is a fairly easy process. The flight is on schedule and around 11:00am we leave the UK heading for Bucharest. The three hour flight passes quickly and soon enough we are landing at the capital's international airport in very pleasant conditions. Everything runs smoothly and an hour after landing we are greeted by our local guide, Attila and being escorted to our very nice minibus where we load the luggage and climb aboard. We have a three hour drive to our first hotel, which is north-west of Bucharest, heading towards one of Romania's major cities – Brasov. The landscape is changing all the time as we head away from Bucharest, passing through an industrial region to agricultural fields of maize and sunflowers to mixed forest as we climb towards the southern end of the Carpathian Mountains.

So far the en-route species are pretty standard fayre with lots of Feral Pigeon, Collared Dove, House Sparrow, Barn Swallow, Black-headed Gull and Rook with arguably our best bird being a Kestrel. It isn't until we reach the mountain village of Rasnov that things improve with Sarah spotting a roadside male Red-backed Shrike, plus we add Raven, Hooded Crow and several more Ravens. Eventually we reach the edge of the National Park and the tarmac almost immediately stops, so on we go along a dirt track. This road winds its way alongside a stream, past the gorge and up the mountain where it opens up into a tiny village which is incredible - it's Brigadoon! We reach our hotel a little before 8:00pm, still light but cooler with scores of House Martins nesting in the eaves.

We are introduced to the hotel's proprietor and allocated our rooms; all are lovely, affording superb views. The sun is setting behind the distant limestone crags from the main balcony, giving them an incredible pink hue and the scene down the valley is just fabulous, we will certainly enjoy our time here in the Carpathians. We agree to reconvene at 8:30pm so off we go to freshen up in our lovely, traditional rooms. The meal is ready and is excellent, despite Julian wanting to splash soup down him with a rogue chilli. After dinner we go through the next day's itinerary, which sounds incredible and hopefully a real kick-start to the tour. Soon after, we retire to our rooms for what is hopefully a good night's sleep...between the dogs barking and the Tawny Owl hooting it proves interesting!

Day 2: A gorgeous sunny morning with beautiful blue skies over the karst limestone mountains and we meet outside at 7:00am for a pre-breakfast walk. It's cool but still very pleasant and we set off with the chatter of House Martins all around. Attila spots a Common Chiffchaff followed by Sarah seeing a second and a little further Julian gets a brief view of a couple of Song Thrush. We make our way along the quiet roads and stand overlooking the fields below lined with Spruce and Silver Birch. This is very productive with Julian finding a Common Buzzard as Luz and Attila get brief views of a Spotted Flycatcher. We can hear Nuthatch and Long-tailed Tits and also get great looks at a couple of Jays, Fieldfare and Mistle Thrush. Sarah and Heather independently find a young Black Redstart in the adjacent garden and Attila calls a Willow Tit that sadly disappears. The hour quickly passes and we start back to the hotel stopping to look at the swarm of House Martins sat on the wires and trees in readiness for southward migration – incredible. We get into breakfast a little after 8:00am and enjoy a delicious buffet before meeting again at the minibus.

We slowly drive down the mountain stopping briefly to look a nice patch of Willow Gentian before continuing on our short journey to the head of the Zarnesti Gorge. With a three hour walk ahead of us we ready ourselves with enough water, sun-block and clothing to stay comfortable during the morning. We are surrounded by Beech and Spruce trees and fantastic limestone crags as we slowly head towards the gorge entrance. Julian and Attila both hear Crested Tit and find it a little way ahead along with Coal Tit and a Goldcrest. Our 'crestie' eventually shows well enough to us all for a positive identification, which is great. A Eurasian Treecreeper plays 'hide and seek' with a few of us and proves frustratingly difficult to see whilst hearing it is easy. It's an excellent start to our walk as we wander slowly up the track with the impressive limestone crags towering above us either side. Our bird list is continuing to grow with some more common British species such Robin, Wren, Kestrel and Great Tit but Julian then shouts "Going over" as we see our first Nutcracker disappear over the ridge. This is followed by a short run of these birds and we all get decent flight looks as they cross the wooded valley. The weather is glorious and butterflies are starting to appear on the wing with Southern Small White, Red Admiral, Comma and Wall Brown with Attila then finding our first 'Erebia' (mountain-type) Grayling. This causes a little confusion as we only have a pocket guide but later we confirm its identification as a female Water Grayling, which is new to Julian and the group. The walk continues with the birds becoming increasingly quiet although Attila spots a couple of stratospheric Alpine Swifts and a little later a Common Swift flies through the gorge. We also start to see lots of dragonflies that are tentatively named as Migrant Hawkers and we also find a lovely Hummingbird Hawkmoth plus later a Silver Y moth. We eventually reach the point Attila had hoped we would get to, with the chance of finding a Hungarian Glider (butterfly) but unfortunately not this time, however we do see a Silver-washed Fritillary along with Large and Small Whites. It is really quite warm now and after about 20 minutes of enjoying these wonderful surroundings we start back down the track. It doesn't take long to return and the botanists amongst us enjoy some quality plant life with Carpathian Harebell, Yellow Ox-eye, Yellow and Purple

Monkshood, Jupiter Sage, Yellow Melancholy Thistle, Grass of Parnassus, Hepatica and Brittle Bladder Fern. We get back to the minibus in plenty of time to reach the hotel for lunch at 1:00pm, which is delicious and very plentiful. Keith is spot on when he says we will all be falling asleep this afternoon with our stomachs so full. Fingers crossed we don't miss anything good!

We have an hour after lunch before reconvening at the minibus, it's still very hot but we have a bit of a drive before reaching the bear-watching area. Down the valley we stop for a Dipper sat on a rock in the stream then continue our drive through various small towns and villages stopping only for a passenger train that looks like something from a by-gone era. We continue to travel out into the more rural areas seeing a few Hooded Crows and when we head off the main road on to a minor track we stop for a pair of immature Red-backed Shrikes. A little further we see a few Yellowhammers along with a Spotted Flycatcher sat on top of a nearby bush. The birds are much the same as we drive along the track until we reach a fish farm where Julian spots a Grey Heron, not unexpected here! Attila finds a suitable parking place which proves ideal as the butterflies are magnificent with superb views of Purple Emperor, Common Glider, Clouded Yellow, Peacock and a very interesting second generation Map Butterfly, which is nothing like their first generation individuals. We also see a couple of very impressive wasp species that need further investigation for their true identity – Attila and Julian are on the case! We walk back along the road and stop near a small patch of apple trees that prove incredibly productive with a feeding flick containing several Long-tailed, Marsh, Coal and Great Tits, Chiffchaff, Nuthatch and Goldcrest plus, whilst scanning for raptors we see a few Raven over the opposite ridge. Time is moving on and we have a rendezvous with our 'bear-watching' people in about 30 minutes so we walk back to the minibus and Attila breaks out the very welcome hot drinks and snacks.

The co-ordinator of the hide turns up in her minibus with her partner, some feed for the bears and some additional guests but that's not a problem. We follow her and wind our way up the Stramba Valley to our parking place. We ready ourselves for a few hours vigil in the hide and set off in silence (by request) along the track. We eventually reach a small bridge fording the stream, cross this and head to the very substantial 'bear-watching' hide – very much fit for purpose, having a large picture window overlooking the baiting area. A lucky few at the back of the line get to see their first European Brown Bear before entering the hide, with one young animal scrutinizing us ahead of any food being laid out. Once we are all seated and quiet in the hide our two hosts take their bag of molasses and sweetcorn mix out and spread around the viewing site.

First up is a young four year old male that comes wandering out to feed, quickly followed by a gorgeous pair of two year old siblings that keep their distance from the other animals, knowing their place in the hierarchy. A six year old female then joins the group and then a large adult female who dominates the situation for a while. These five animals spend the next half hour moving between the spots where the food is before a large, mature 16 year old male shows up scaring the

youngsters away. Although what is incredible is that this beast of a male is reluctant to feed here while the adult female is around. Both these two Brown Bears move slowly away and are replaced by a 20 year old pregnant female, (to the area's largest male, who sadly didn't show up) followed by another sub-adult male, with a very distinctive mark on his shoulder – hence the name 'Comma' (but Sarah prefers Apostrophe!) These two leave the scene and after a little wait while watching the Jays, Chaffinches and a Robin steal some morsels we have our final two European Brown Bears arrive but these are also very skittish and don't remain here long, plus the food has obviously been depleted. The rain that has been threatening from late afternoon starts and quickly becomes a deluge, with thunder and lightning thrown in. Brown Bears avoid being out in the rain so our chances of an eleventh animal was pretty much zero, but double figures is just superb.

We have to wait a while to allow the rain to abate and then we quickly make our way back to the minibuses. We follow our hosts and wind our way back down the valley to the main road before driving through to Magura. About an hour later we are parking up in the hotel car park and with a quick turn around we are sat down in the restaurant enjoying some soup and bread. As it's so late we don't particularly want a full meal so this is ideal. After our snack, Julian conducts the first checklist of the tour, then soon after this we are heading to our rooms after our incredibly long yet productive day – hopefully this has set the president for the rest of the week.

Day 3: A relaxed start to the morning has us enjoying our breakfast from 8:00am and then preparing our picnic lunches ahead of leaving at 9:00am. The morning starts incredibly well on a cooler day with scattered cloud as Attila spots a group of Alpine Chamois on a very distant hillside. Through the telescopes they are brought into beautiful clarity as we find 17 in total. After about 20 minutes we decide to leave and wind our way down the mountain with Nigel skilfully spotting a Dipper in the stream as we drive slowly by – superb. We reach Zarnesti and continue through this small town stopping to look at House Sparrows and a Collared Dove! We follow the same route as the previous afternoon towards the Stramba Valley but veer off towards Vulcan (great name) to another wee site Attila knows close by – Dopravitzia Fishponds. We stop near the junction as Julian spots a stork species flying towards us that turns out to be a lovely Black Stork, which gives excellent flight views from the minibus. A little further over the extensive agricultural fields we enjoy a bit of a raptor-fest seeing a Sparrowhawk being mobbed by Hooded Crows, an immature Common Buzzard and good looks at our first Lesser Spotted Eagle hunting for suitable prey.

Eventually we reach the village after a couple more stops for a very obliging young Red-backed Shrike plus another Lesser Spotted Eagle and Common Buzzards. The village proves to be a bit of a maze but one failed exit produces two more Black Storks flying over and Sarah spots a fabulous Goshawk that soars right over our heads. We set off again, cruising the village for the proper exit and out we drive to the main lagoon, which is fringed with reed-bed to one end and lots

of fishermen. We start finding new birds from the vehicle with the closer birds being Common Pochard, Common Coot, Cormorant and Great Crested Grebes. Out of the bus we set up the telescopes and start to scan the open water and its surroundings. It is brilliant spending time here calling species with Black-necked and Little Grebes, Great White and Little Egrets, Attila finds a Ferruginous Duck amongst the other diving ducks with Keith adding Tufted Duck to this mix. There are lots of Black-headed Gulls but Julian finds a couple of larger Caspian Gulls and some diminutive Little Gulls plus Whiskered Terns hawking insects above the water. Then Julian announces he has found a snake crossing the fishpond and through the scopes tentatively identifies it as a Dice Snake but cannot be certain at this range. Once we're satisfied we have covered all the species we get back into the bus and drive slowly on, stopping again fairly quickly for a Great Grey Shrike sat on an overhead power-line along with our first decent views of a few White Stork. It is now well after 11:00am and Attila starts to look for a shady corner to take a break and have a very welcome hot drink, despite being out in the now warm sunshine.

The initial places we find are not suitable and time is ticking on, so we return the way we came stopping next to lovely Oak woodland. It is just after noon and lunch is suggested so we settle down with our drinks and picnic in the shade of these mature trees. A fabulous Preying Mantis is discovered on the hot water flask and the obligatory photographs are taken as it poses defensively in front of us. Julian wanders into the wood and soon returns announcing he has seen both Grey-headed and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, which means a short walk is planned once we are all ready. After about 15 minutes we are good to go with the lunch things all packed away Julian takes us to the place where he had seen the 'peckers' and soon enough we are also enjoying fabulous views of both these birds plus the additional bonus of Nuthatch, Spotted Flycatcher and Great and Blue Tits. We then make a short walk deeper into the wood but this is quiet although we do enjoy looking at the various fungi on offer plus an incredible Wood Ant colony. We get back to the minibus a little after 1:30pm and now we drive back towards civilisation and a date with Dracula's Castle – this is Transylvania after all!

We get to Bran around an hour later and it's a tourist's nightmare full of 'tat shops' selling their bits and pieces. Vlad the Impaler's Castle dominates the surrounding area and in another era the whole place would have looked very imposing above the quaint village. Attila knows the best place to park initially for photos of the fortified building before spending some time in the epicentre of this historic town. We also indulge in some retail therapy before Attila treats us to a Transylvanian speciality – chimney cake, which is really good. Our tourist thirst has now been slated so just after 3:30pm we drive out of town to our final wildlife destination of the day before heading back to the hotel.

We arrive into this beautiful wooded valley of Oak, Beech and Spruce where we find several Common Buzzards over the ridge line as we exit the bus. Attila suggests a short walk looking for migrants and passerines before some more

delicious chimney cake. It is pretty quiet as we wander round seeing a couple more Common Buzzards plus lots of evidence of Wild Boar and Roe Deer. Liz does very well finding a cracking Sand Lizard followed by us enjoying super views of at least two pairs of Lesser Spotted Eagle, with one extremely vocal bird. We also see a couple of Ravens and Julian points out another Sparrowhawk. Hot drinks and cake are beckoning so we slowly walk back to the minibus where Attila again breaks out the refreshments. Julian and Attila are scanning the whole time and find another raptor to add to the list with a distant Short-toed Eagle, although sadly it disappears before we all get a chance to see it. Around 5:30pm and with a good drive back to the hotel we start to pack up but a small flock of Mistle Thrush causes some delay but that's okay.

The drive back to the hotel is pretty uneventful and we make good time along the rural roads arriving just before 6:30pm with plenty of time before dinner. This allows time for us to pack and sort ourselves out ahead of our departure tomorrow morning – it has been a very enjoyable stay.

Day 4: After our breakfast we say thank you and goodbye to Herman, collect our luggage and set off on our journey across the country. At the stream we get our 'Black-bellied' Dipper fix before heading down out of the Carpathian on a cool, overcast morning. As we pass through Zarnesti Attila points out our first Jackdaw of the trip followed by a White Stork flying over the main road. The journey goes fairly quickly as we chat amongst ourselves about a whole range of topics before making a welcome comfort stop at a fuel station in Comarnic around 11:00am.

Eventually we reach the main Bucharest motorway and progress quickens significantly passing now through lowland, featureless agricultural fields of sunflower, wheat and maize. A migrating flock of 30+ White Storks is a nice distraction along with Marsh Harrier and hordes of hirundines of mainly Barn Swallow but some Sand Martins as well. Lunch is taken at a motorway rest area just east of the capital and a little after 1:00pm we continue east towards Constanta. The landscape doesn't really improve on this portion of the journey and a few of us 'rest our eyes' but for the lucky vigilant couple (Attila and Heather) a Roller sat on an over head wire is some reward. Although Sarah thinks her 'roller' (a parked classic Rolls Royce) is worthy of a mention in the daily checklist too and who are we to argue! We reach the Black Sea coast and turn north along the minor road towards our hotel in the small village of Sinoe.

Although an impromptu stop by Attila at Lake Nuntashi is speculative but within a few minutes of arriving we also realise rewarding too. In the bay we quickly find Little Ringed and Ringed Plovers, Little Stint, a single Dunlin, Ruff and Julian picks out a Temminck's Stint, which sets the wader ball rolling. Attila has already seen Black-winged Stilt, Avocet and Lapwing in the far bay and he then finds a nice flock of 27 Red-necked Phalarope out in the open water with Shoveler, Mallard, Teal and a few young Shelduck. Across the lake he then points out a few Greater Flamingos, which is a good bird in Romania and we also see lots of Spoonbill, Little Egret, Grey Heron and several Purple Heron. Attila now suggests we walk

closer to this second bay and the short stroll produces our first lovely Wood Sandpiper and while looking for this Keith sees our first Curlew Sandpiper feeding in the shallow water. A juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron flies right over us and there is several Marsh Harriers hunting over the reeds together found by Liz. We see lots of gulls with the majority being Black-headed and Caspian but we also find several Mediterranean and a single winter plumage Little Gull. The marsh tern's turn into a masterclass as we sift through the White-winged and find a few conventional Black Terns but it's not easy in their juvenile plumage. We are here a good while enjoying this mass of water birds before wandering back to the minibus with Attila spotting a Common Snipe disturbed by a Marsh Harrier quartering the extensive phragmite beds. We can hear a Bee-eater and with a bit of searching Julian spots it a little way off and flying away – hopefully there will be more in the next few days. At the bus we scan the water once again and a small group of drake Ferruginous Duck are seen, which are the best views yet, rounding off a very successful start to this part of the holiday. Attila is keen we go to the hotel and check-in, so off we go.

The last part of this drive to Sinoe is both quick and easy being just a little further along the minor road and huge thanks are given to our excellent Hungarian guide for his sterling effort on this long drive. We are greeted at the hotel by our host and quickly assigned our rooms and suggest a meeting time to go back out 15 minutes later. We drop our luggage, have a quick freshen up and head back to reception for our final birdwatch of the day. The village is situated on the edge of a lake with the same name and it only takes minutes down a dirt track to be along its reed-fringed edge. We don't have much time left but make full use of it stopping initially for a couple of young Northern Wheatears and a few 'Black-headed' Yellow Wagtails then a purple patch of migrants with Common Redstart, Willow Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher all together. We reach the lakes edge and get out of the bus, setting up the necessary telescopes and start to see much the same as in the previous shallow lake, although Attila spots a few Great White Pelicans flying in the distance followed by a Great Black-headed (Pallas's) Gull flying through but no-one else sadly gets on to it until too late. Julian picks out a couple of juvenile Whinchat sat on top of the reeds and flying around are hundreds of Sand Martins and Barn Swallows. We are keen to try and relocate some more gulls and terns so with limited time we drive further along the dirt track, trying to second-guess their roosting point and Attila is up to the challenge! We see a few Gull-billed Terns and a couple of Common Terns sat with some Black-headed Gulls but there is a larger group, slightly further away and partially hidden by reeds. Our two guides manage to 'scope' them and with huge smiles and 'hi-5s' announce there are lots of Great Black-headed (Pallas's) Gulls and also Caspian Terns – another fabulous target species. In total there are at least 43 Pallas's Gulls, which is astonishing along with 20+ Caspian Terns and good numbers of Black-headed and Caspian Gulls – what a fantastic end to this long and tiring day. If this is a taste of what to expect over our final few days in Romania, we are going to be in for a real treat. We drive back to the hotel as the golden sun is setting and with some time to freshen up we meet for dinner at 8:00pm. It is an excellent meal of traditional dishes with local soup to start and

for the majority (red meat eaters) stuffed vine leaves and cream cake for dessert. The after-dinner conversation and the checklist is again varied and entertaining with Heather and Sarah waxing lyrical about 70's and 80's children's TV programmes, which completely confounds Attila, as it does Nigel, Keith and Liz to a lesser degree who hail from a different era!

Day 5: A pre-breakfast visit to the hotel's garden produces a lovely female, 1st winter Red-breasted Flycatcher for Julian, along with Keith and Liz briefly after their walk around the village finding Tree Sparrow amongst the many House Sparrows. Breakfast is at 8:00am, with another good buffet and we are ready to leave again at 9:00am. The drive out to the Cheia Gorge produces a couple of Marsh Harriers, Kestrel and cracking views of a Long-legged Buzzard. First though we stop at the entrance to a working quarry as there is a fabulous pale-phase Booted Eagle flying around and again we get some cracking views. Attila suggests we check out the quarry and as we drive in there are both Northern and Isabelline Wheatears along with the first of many Red-backed Shrikes hunting for smaller prey. We stop a little further as Julian spots a couple of Crested Larks and over the ridge are lots of raptors that include another (dark-phase) Booted Eagle, Long-legged Buzzards, Kestrel and a Short-toed Eagle hunting for snakes and lizards. We get out of the bus and take a short walk that is constantly interrupted by activity with lots of shrikes and wheatears plus all too brief views of a juvenile Barred Warbler, Garden Warbler, Whinchat and Spotted Flycatcher. Attila then sees an accipiter flying through the valley, it is an adult female Levant's Sparrowhawk and we get to see her properly as she circles up a over the ridge line with a couple of Kestrels for comparison. Time is moving on and we need to get to the gorge before it gets too hot, although we do have time for a good look at Southern Darter and Eastern Bath White.

We drive a short distance to the track that leads to the gorge and stop almost immediately for our first European Roller sat amongst hundreds of Starlings. A little further and we stop again for a young Lesser Grey Shrike at the side of the track and then discover a lovely Isabelline Wheatear and a European Souselik, which means we see several of these cute, ground dwelling mammals. Liz spots a Swallowtail butterfly and Julian then gets a good view of an Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow, which keeps the 'butty list' moving forward. We drive slowly on and another couple of wheatears make Attila stop the bus with one looking particularly dark and squat. He is thinking Pied Wheatear but it flies before a proper look but Julian manages to see the diagnostic tail pattern that pretty much clinches the identification. Sadly we can't find it again so on we go slowly again, stopping for a group of 'Romanian' Yellow Wagtails and a juvenile Whitethroat. We pass a modern style monastery but carry on to avoid the visiting crowds, stopping soon after for a very close Roller, which is fabulous. In Drum Bun, the road becomes tarmacked again and we quickly get to the 'Cheia Gorge' initially for our lunch in beautiful sunny conditions.

During lunch Julian and Attila do some butterfly identification around the area, which is very successful with Tree Grayling, a few impressive Cardinal, Silver-

studded, Adonis and Common Blues, Meadow Brown and the gorgeous Lesser Fiery Copper – superb. We walk along the road slowly as it's now very hot and Julian spots a wheatear that lands nearby. Attila is straight on to it and says "Could be Pied Wheatear?" and sure enough we are looking at a stonking well marked juvenile. Great to see this scarce breeding species so well after the last one disappeared. The walk continues as we wander up the slope to a fabulous viewpoint that looks out beyond the gorge to the pseudo-steppe beyond, which are sadly covered in wind turbines. We can hear Bee-eaters almost constantly but struggle to see one until Julian finds an individual lower down, flying south. It is very quiet now as expected in the heat of the day so we walk back to the minibus and after another wee break set off for the coast.

The journey takes us through mile after mile of ploughed fields and wind farms, stopping for a Tawny Pipit that shows very well and a group of beautiful Bee-eaters on overhead wires. There are also several Rollers, Marsh Harrier, Long-legged Buzzard, Lesser Grey Shrike and a few passerines in the scant vegetation along the edge of the track. A little further Attila calls "Turtle Dove" and stops the bus reversing to look at a huge cow shed with lots of Collared Doves but after a minute Julian re-finds the bird and we add another species to the list. We reach the edge of Constanta with a view of the Black Sea stretched out in front of us when Attila stops the minibus as there are lots of falcons hunting over a ploughed field. His suspicions are confirmed as he says "Red-footed Falcons" and we enjoy the sight of at least 20 of these gorgeous raptors. While we are scanning, Nigel asks about a larger bird sat on the edge of the field that then alights and flies away a short distance looking very interesting. It lands and Attila jumps out of the bus and announces with a smile – Osprey! So out we get and all get a decent look through his telescope before it flies again and this time out of sight. We continue to enjoy the Red-foots with Sarah giving it 'raptor-ous applause!'

It is time now to leave and continue the short distance to Vadu, stopping first at a couple of pools on the edge of town. These are (like the previous day) superb but with much the same species of wader although the group of Bee-eaters hawking insects above the pools is brilliant. We do get to see both Black and White-winged Terns stood on one of the small islands, which is a nice comparison of this tricky species. Sarah understandably gets excited and a little animated when she finds a gorgeous Hoopoe feeding on the ground as it not only a fabulous bird but one she really recognizes and fully appreciates. We are all also very grateful being one of our key species and Keith heads off to try and photograph it. Attila who is busy pointing out Temminck's Stint realises we need to move on as we still have at least one more stop to make before returning to the hotel.

Once we are back together we climb back into the bus and drive through town towards the beach, which is apparently nudist! It is our great pleasure to find out we are not going that far as the buildings finish and the salt marsh begins before the beach dunes. Sarah spots a juvenile Purple Heron next to the road, skulking

in the short reeds so Attila stops, reverses and says “No - that's a Glossy Ibis”, Julian is confused as he is watching a young Purple Heron but we soon realise there are two birds, which are both close and showing really well. We have a little further to drive and still be a safe distance from the coast to save any embarrassment, stopping to look at a couple more lagoons. The first is bigger than the others with a large island in the middle with gulls and terns including Mediterranean Gull, a couple of Caspian, Gull-billed and Common Terns amongst others, although the highlight here are three Red-necked Phalaropes spinning on top of the shallow water, hoping to stir up some tasty morsel to feed on. This action also draws the attention of a Black-necked Grebe as it seems to be hanging around these delicate waders. We then go to check another small area of reed-fringed pools where we know there are Common Snipe and it's not long before we find a few skulking around the edge. There are lots of lovely Yellow Wagtails here along with another Temminck's Stint and our first Common Sandpiper of the trip. Liz finds a Little Grebe whilst watching the Common Snipe, and Attila picks out a distant 'ring-tail' harrier but we cannot assign it to either Montagu's or Pallid at this distance – hopefully we will get another chance over the next few days. Again we need to leave as the plan is to revisit Lake Nuntashi from the previous evening but as they say –the best laid plans.... We are just slowly driving past our 'Glossy Ibis' pool and Keith says “Night Heron”, so we stop to look at this 1st winter bird. Then Julian says “Squacco Heron” as it flies in and lands near to our position. While we are enjoying this new heron plus some fabulously close Wood Sandpiper, Julian is grilling the Yellow Wagtails and announces “Think I have found a 1st winter Citrine Wagtail”, Attila has a good look at the bird and smiling agrees with the identification, knowing this is a good bird to find here and yet another 'write-in' to the checklist.

Time is now really moving on and off we must go but not before we again check the original scrapes on the edge of town but this time higher up on the roadside. This allows us to scrutinise the larger, deeper pool at the back, which produces several Ferruginous Ducks, Common Pochard, Common Coot and lots of 'marsh terns' picking insects off the surface of the water – superb. It is definitely time to leave now and head straight back to the hotel - it has been another incredible day. Back at base we arrange the meal for 8:00pm and after a very welcome freshen up we have a lovely meal in the bar/restaurant. Tomorrow we head to the Danube Delta!!!

Day 6: An earlier breakfast than usual sees us leaving the hotel around 8:30am having already sorted our luggage. We drive south out of the village to a patch of phragmites overlooking the other side of Lake Nuntashi from the previous evening, having already seen Bee-eaters and a Roller sat on overhead roadside wires. There are hundreds of gulls sat in a ploughed field and following the tractor working the land, which are mainly Black-headed but with both Mediterranean and Caspian amongst them. Out on the lake we get good views of our first few Pintail, plus there are Mallard, Shoveler and Shelduck. A Whinchat is spotted on the reeds followed by a female Reed Bunting and we can hear the occasional tick of a Reed Warbler but they stay hidden. Attila thinks we should walk along

the road to keep checking the phragmite beds, which proves worthwhile as we find a slightly injured small Grass Snake on the tarmac road. A little further a couple of Spoonbill fly over and at a small channel a Black-crowned Night Heron flies out and away. We stay around here searching the reeds and eventually get rewarded with a Great Reed Warbler that sits in full view for a few seconds before again disappearing. This prompts our return to the minibus but Sarah spots a flock of large birds overhead heading north that are Great White Pelicans, spotting their diagnostic black and white underwing pattern. Then Liz sees a warbler in a nearby small tree and it is actually a Reed Warbler showing very well and clearly not skulking in the reeds. We reach the minibus and start to load our gear when Attila says "Pelican close" and there is a single Dalmatian Pelican flying low over the field – brilliant. We now leave this part of the lake and drive round the edge to where we have been previously with a lucky few at the front of the bus seeing a male Red-footed Falcon disappearing behind some trees. At the water's edge we again park, now in the shade as it's getting hot again. We are checking the waders for Broad-billed Sandpiper but sadly not today (not Knot Keith!) although we do get a good selection with the usual Ruff, stints, Avocets, stilts, Lapwing, plovers and sandpipers. The Greater Flamingos are still in the same place and it's all a very similar scene to the previous evening except the sun is in a different place making it difficult to see. Eventually we wander back along the edge of the lake and Sarah spots a lizard on the rocks, which looks interesting (and different) to Julian. There are also a couple of obvious Sand Lizards here so he isn't absolutely certain and checks the field guide, confirming it to be a Balkan Wall Lizard – superb.

It is now time to start north towards the Danube Delta but first we need a petrol station and more importantly we indulge ourselves in a necessary ice cream! The drive north is lovely and we stop to look at the impressive Enisala Castle perched majestically on a hilltop. We reach Lake Razim and start to find good birds, with our first stop producing a couple of Black-tailed Godwits and a Common Gull amongst the bigger numbers of Black-headed and Caspian Gulls plus several 'carrot-billed' Caspian Terns for good measure. The shallow muddy fringe to this lake is a wader magnet and a little further on Attila finds the perfect pull-in to stop, get out and use the scopes along with having our lunch – the perfect combination. Initial looks produce a Hobby dashing through, plus a few Spotted Redshanks and more Black-tailed Godwits in the water feeding voraciously. There are lots of Little Stint, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Black-winged Stilt and Avocet with a few Curlew Sandpiper and Dunlin. Then Attila announces he has found a Broad-billed Sandpiper, one of our major targets but it's disappearing behind some low vegetation. We continue to stand with our lunch and hot drinks waiting for it to reappear and seeing many of the same species really well but it's above us that produces a surprise. Heather and Sarah point up as there are big groups of migrating Great White Pelicans, what an incredible sight. To see these huge prehistoric-looking water birds effortlessly drifting over in flocks of easily 100+ is a fabulous spectacle. Attila decides it's time for 'plan B' and goes off to look for the 'Broad-bill' and does really well in doing so, saying it should appear soon. We wait again with a plan to go individually with him

so as not to disturb the waders too much but this is not required. He again returns from his view point with the news it should be out in the open from our vantage point by the minibus and sure enough there it is. We continue to get fabulous telescope views of this 'humbug bird' as it shows itself in full glory by moving out of the shadows into the sunlight. Very well done to Attila for his fantastic persistence and fortitude.

While this is going on and everyone's enjoying this bird through his scope Julian is scanning the far horizon and sees an interesting large raptor way off in the distance but is immediately struck by its size, wing shape and all dark appearance – being a definite eagle. He asks Attila to look at it through his superior scope and he also thinks its interesting being too broad winged and fingered for Lesser Spotted Eagle. He says "Has to be Greater Spotted Eagle!" and Julian readily concurs with a broad smile. We are very lucky as this 'Aquila eagle' only migrates down the Black Sea coast and in lesser numbers than its smaller, similar counterpart – superb. Unfortunately this has potentially made us late for our rendezvous with our Danube Delta guide Eugene but we know he will not leave without us (allegedly).

The drive north to the jetty is a good one and soon enough we are travelling on the cobble roads of Tulcea to the boats moored in the harbour. Attila spots Eugene and we park next to our small open-sided vessel and transfer our luggage and belongings from land vehicle to marine. Once ready we set off out of Tulcea along the mighty Danube River with Eugene giving us an introduction to what we might expect over the next couple of days. It is wonderful just to sit back and enjoy the scenery of this great river system with our guides pointing out birds as we cruise along. At one point there are a few raptors together with a pair of adult White-tailed Eagles, Booted Eagle, Marsh Harrier and Sparrowhawk together. A Kingfisher is spotted by Attila and there are many Whiskered Terns, Great Cormorants, egrets and herons. As we continue along the Sulina Channel at a very easy pace we start to see a few new species with another Kingfisher being spotted by Attila and then a little later Sarah. There are a few Green Sandpipers, Eugene points out a couple of Pygmy Cormorants in flight and very bizarrely a Pheasant flies right across the river in front of us.

Thankfully we do have services on board this vessel as the slow journey takes at least 4 hours and towards the end it is getting quite cold, although it is worthwhile staying out so late as the sunset is astonishing from the back of the boat. It would take too long to mention everything we see whilst on this initial journey with the highlights being a Grey-headed Woodpecker clung to a bare tree, single Black Stork, a few cracking Hobby's and incredible numbers of marsh terns (particularly White-winged), Bee-eaters and Rollers along the channel. It has been a fabulous taster to hopefully the main event over the next two days. We reach our hotel at Crisan (right next to the river) around 7:30pm and quickly sort out the rooms and luggage to be ready for dinner at 8:00pm. This plan works well and soon we are sitting down to a delicious meal of predominantly fish, but this is a welcome change. After this we conduct our

usual checklist routine before retiring to our rooms with the prospect of a big day ahead.

Day 7: Another beautiful morning and after a 7:30am breakfast that involves Eugene 'waxing lyrical' about his beloved delta, we are very streamlined and are on the small boat with Dan at the helm by 8:20am and heading off a short way back along the Sulina Channel. There are Bee-eaters, Whiskered and White-winged Terns flying around already as we stop for a few more lunch provisions in Crisan. Dan is continuing to talk all the time we are sailing, as we head north away from the main channel to Tulcea on to the Caraorman Channel. This traverses all the way through the northern section of the Danube Delta and we are going to see a fraction of it today. Already there are water birds at either side of the channel with Grey Heron, Little and Great Egrets, Black-crowned Night-heron, Mallard, Great and Pygmy Cormorants. Eugene stops the boat at the entrance to a small shallow lagoon and we see our first new bird of the day with a few Garganey in their 'eclipse plumage' along with Ferruginous Duck, a few Squacco Herons, Greylag Geese and a Black Stork is seen on a small open section of land. We take a small detour into a side channel but don't see much bird-wise but there is a Dice Snake swimming in the water, which shows very well.

Eugene reckons this is all pretty mundane as our first Kingfisher flies ahead of the boat quickly followed by a second and we reach the entrance to the shallow Lake Jacob. We had been warned that there should be a lot of birds here and we should count the Squacco Herons, well it is astonishing! There are other birds such as a couple of Dalmatian Pelicans and several more Great White Pelicans at the far edge of the lake. Around the edge it is dotted with innumerable herons, egrets, and cormorants with lots of Greylag Geese, Mute Swans, Shoveler, Teal and more Garganey. However, it is the numbers of Squacco Heron that is pretty staggering and we do attempt to count them but quickly realise once we are at 50+ after a small section it would just be impossible and take all day – there are hundreds. We are on the clock today so we cannot stay too long and head back out towards the Caraorman Channel seeing a few Glossy Ibis feeding at the edge of the lake entrance. A Red-breasted Flycatcher is heard by Julian and Attila sees an Icterine Warbler so we stop the boat and search the extensive willow trees that line these waterways. The warbler is not seen again and we are frustrated by the flycatchers but eventually we do see one sat amongst the dense foliage.

Back in the main channel and Julian points out a pair of distant adult White-tailed Eagles but our attention is drawn towards a calling Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Eugene brings out the recording and sets it going and again we are initially frustrated with brief flight views but nothing really tangible. A Black Woodpecker then calls from further down the channel and Eugene changes recordings with the Lesser-spot reacting to this and flies out over our heads and back again on to a bare tree with its mate and we get superb views of them both on the dead branches. The Black Woodpecker tape has been left going as we enjoy the 'Lesser peckers' and once they have departed we drift further towards the area

where we had heard it. This also works a treat as a huge male Black Woodpecker flies out from the large willow trees and again over our heads before returning to a large dead trunk and calls back to us. This is incredible as it clings on to the bare wood looking around for its potential rival – just im'pecker'ble! It is 'hi-5's' and huge grins all round especially from Keith who had cited at the start of the holiday his desire to see one properly after just flight views on previous Speyside Wildlife holidays. Could the day get any better?

Eugene is getting slightly concerned now as we have spent so long with these birds and eaten into his itinerary time and we need to crack on. The journey is continually interrupted with birds as waders line the channel with Black-tailed Godwit, Common Snipe, Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper and Lapwing being the more regular species plus an occasional Ruff and Green Sandpiper for good measure. Caspian Terns fly over as do lots of other gulls and terns, Marsh Harriers, Hobby and another immature White-tailed Eagle.

It is now getting very warm as we reach the jetty of Caraorman village, which actually has a few vehicles despite being totally cut off from the rest of the mainland by road. It is a bizarre place with a network of derelict buildings that were never occupied from a time when the Romanian's in power wanted to extract minerals from the ground. This didn't happen as it wasn't financially viable and they just walked away leaving this 'ghost town' to go to rack and ruin. We walk out beyond the village to an area of seasonal pools that have now all but dried up and concentrate the waders, gulls and terns to a small area. We don't find anything new for the trip but it's nice to get good views of Spotted Redshank, Greenshank and Black-winged Stilt together. There is a group of fourteen Curlew, three Little Stint, Common Sandpiper and Avocet along with a few Spoonbill, herons and egrets. Julian picks out a couple of Common Gull amongst the throng of Black-headed and Caspian Gulls and there are a couple of Hobbys hawking insects over the buildings. It is time for lunch so we walk slowly back to the boat, melting in the sunshine and thankful for the shade of the boat's canopy. Not being aesthetically pretty at the village jetty, Eugene wants to move to another area for our picnic lunch.

We motor back out into the vegetated delta to the edge of a designated nature reserve with a tower hide for viewing the extensive reed-bed and lagoon. We sit on the boat with our lunches and the mosquitos for company, but thankfully they aren't too onerous. The birds are now quiet in the heat of the day but we do enjoy seeing a gorgeous Large Copper butterfly and hordes of Common Bluetail Damselflies along with an odd Large Redeye and Common Emerald. After we have finished Eugene suggests we visit the tower hide, which gives a great overview of the surrounding area. We don't spend long here but the visit does produce a few Gadwall on the large lagoon plus views of several Purple Herons, Squacco Heron and a couple of Marsh Harriers. It is very hot when we leave the Santuari and back on board Dan heads off along the narrow watercourse and Eugene continues with his oration of the natural surroundings. Julian then shouts "crossing the channel" as we get a brief view of a Muskrat

moving from right to left across our bow. A little further and Attila hears the high-pitched whistle of a Penduline Tit so we stop (right in the reeds!) and try to lure them nearer. This is actually working but it's not until we are back in the centre of the channel do we see two juvenile Bearded Tits feeding on the muddy fringe of the river – superb. Eventually we reach our first lake of the afternoon called Puiulet but its pretty quiet with much the same species as previously seen so we don't loiter too long here. The next place is the bigger relation to this lagoon being Lake Puiu and the furthest we are going from Crisan not taking too long to get there. We are still remaining vigilant as we make our way along the narrow water course with Heather and Sarah seeing a tiny heron-like bird sat low down in the reeds – has to be a Little Bittern. We are coming back this way so fingers crossed its still here. We get to Lake Puiu and scan the water-birds for something new or a wee bit different but although good it is lots of herons, egrets and wildfowl.

Eugene says we now need to make our way back to the hotel because he is conscious of the previous evening's late arrival and knows we would like something a little more relaxed. As we retrace our steps along the channel we look out for birds seen perching on the way in and first stop is for a gorgeous juvenile Hobby sat at the top of a bare tree making for an excellent photo opportunity. Then a Little Bittern is found on the opposite side of the channel but near the original sighting by our ladies but we still think it's another individual. The journey back continues at a good pace with Eugene highlighting more aspects of the delta's topography as we go. Then our boatman Dan shouts something in Romanian and Eugene conveys "there should be a Wild Boar swimming across the channel?" Sure enough, ahead of us is this shape that looks bizarrely like a shark swimming from one side to the other and it's a huge male Wild Boar – absolutely incredible. We cruise up to where it went into the reeds on the left and we can hear it crashing through the vegetation but don't get another sighting unfortunately. Time is moving on so without any further delay we carry on through this network of routes through the delta only stopping again for another Little Bittern. This is a very young individual that still has some downy juvenile feathers left and is incredibly dark and streaky, almost like a minute Great Bittern – looks superb. We really do need to crack on now and its full steam ahead until we get back to the Sulina Channel and then on to Crisan and our hotel. We give our thanks to Eugene and Dan for such an awesome day with some fantastic highlights and very special moments – fingers crossed the next day will be just as good.

Day 8: Our final full day in Romania and Eugene has another full itinerary for us but to another part of the delta. After breakfast we load the bags on to the boat and head off again down the Sulina Channel with Black-crowned Night-heron, White-winged Tern and Marsh Harrier quickly seen. We turn off to the Old Danube but quickly leave this section for a secondary channel that runs parallel with the original River Danube. All the waterways pretty much look like any other part of the delta apart from going in a different direction. It is quiet this morning but we enjoy a few Squacco and Purple Herons, Kingfisher and Julian sees a pair

of Reed Buntings as we meander along. Eugene talks about the fragile topography of the land and how huge islands of reed are formed that actually get moved in strong winds. The vegetation is interesting around here with lots of Purple Loosestrife, Water Soldier, yellow and white water lilies. On we slowly continue stopping again for a posing juvenile Little Bittern on the side of the channel.

We eventually reach Lake Bogdaproste where we encounter our first Great White Pelicans but they are a long way off. Unfortunately there are a lot of fishing boats here and they will not come closer until they have left and being Sunday this will not happen any time soon. There is a dead tree full of Pygmy and Great Cormorants, looking like a huge candelabra and around the edge there are lots of Great White Egrets. We cannot get any closer to them as this is very shallow water so we move through the lake into the channel and on to the next one, which is much better for the pelicans. As we enter this second smaller lake we get fabulous views of another Hobby sat in the top of a dead tree, much like the day before. Our views of Great White Pelicans are much better and we all manage to get some decent images before they move off to the back of this lake. We move through the deeper centre into another short channel before entering Lake Trei lezere. This is another big lake like Bogdaproste and again full of birdlife with the expected Shoveler, Mallard and Ferruginous Duck on the water. Eugene diverts our attention to a gull sat on the water but it is another Caspian, despite looking darker mantled. Then Sarah says "what's this diving?" Julian answers "OTTER!" We cannot believe our luck with the mammals on this holiday as we watch it swimming around, surfacing occasionally before heading off away towards the reed-bed. On we cruise back into the channel that connects this network, seeing a couple of White-tailed Eagles in flight being watched by a Hobby. A large flock of Great White Pelicans are circling in the distance with potentially 150+ birds involved.

We are getting near to lunchtime as we make our way further through this incredible network to the next lake. This is a 'special place' that Eugene has brought us to and we cannot be told the name but we don't mind as it's stacked with birdlife – mostly wildfowl. We can see good numbers of Garganey, Common Pochard, Ferruginous Duck plus Eugene and Keith are lucky enough to see a couple of Wigeon amongst the throng flying around. There are at least two Dalmatian Pelicans here and we get our best view yet of these scarce breeding birds. We have to keep going as we have a rendezvous with another boat at lunchtime but stop again before leaving this 'special place' as Julian has spotted a couple of Red-necked Grebes, one still in partial summer plumage. The next section of channel through the 'old Danube' involves some good navigation by Dan, who is more than up to the task as he winds us through some narrow channels. Heather (our top Little Bittern spotter) finds another one sitting at the side of the river but we cannot stop now as it's after 1:00pm and lunch is very much beckoning.

Eventually we reach Lake Furtuna and chug out to the centre of the lagoon, where we turn off the engine and remain stationary in the calm, shallow water.

Lunch is organised and is excellent with a chicken and mushroom salad, some fish moussaka, cheese, tomatoes and cucumber – very nice. As we are finishing our picnic we see another boat arriving into the lake, which comes alongside and we have to transfer to this one. Apparently Dan has to transfer the people on the other back to Crisan and we are now with John (our driver) chugging on to Tulcea, where we are staying for the last night. We have allegedly a five hour transfer to our destination so we don't have time to stop much along the route. It is very much a case of working our way through the Sontea and 36 mile channel lined with Flowering Bulrush and Willow spotting what we can, which is much of what we have seen previously. Not far beyond Lake Furtuna John thinks we may have an issue with the propeller and needs to stop and check it out. So Eugene takes the boat's controls while John puts on some shorts, we tie up against a fallen tree and into the water John goes. Apparently it's just some vegetation and not the assumed fishing nets that is causing the propeller to run slow and quickly this is removed and John is back on board.

We set off again on our journey and apparently our speed has doubled from 5 to 10Kph – sure Lewis Hamilton would be impressed. It is pretty quiet but the avian highlight however is unquestionably a pair of White-tailed Eagles sat in a dead tree about 30m away as we drift by, in fact we are so excited by this we turn round and do it again so our on-board photographers can have two bites at the 'good image' cherry – brilliant. It is also not just about the birds as Julian and Attila try to work out the dragonflies we are seeing as we sail on. This is not easy in a moving vessel but we get some help as we confirm Eastern Willow Spreadwing that lands on Liz's finger and we are confident about seeing Banded Demoiselle and Scarlet Darter, both new for the trip. We eventually arrive at the Tulcea branch where we again join the main Sulina Channel with Tulcea now just a few kilometres away.

It's around 6:45pm when we dock and thirty minutes later we are pretty much ready to leave having collected the minibus and packed the bags. The drive, which feels a bit strange after two and a half days on a boat, is short to the hotel and after taking the luggage inside we are presented with a very alcoholic liqueur and a very tasty biscuit (bit of an odd combination!). We are assigned our rooms and off we head to freshen up before the evening meal. The dinner is excellent and lots of it, which is greatly appreciated and after we have finished we say "goodbye and thank you very much" to Eugene for all his hard work and knowledge within the Danube Delta, his skills have been gratefully appreciated. We finish the day with the penultimate checklist before retiring to our respective rooms for the last time in Romania.

Day 9: Breakfast is at 8:00am and it is delicious with plenty to choose from and incredibly well presented with copious amounts of tea and coffee – great start. Our planned departure is for 9:00am and we make that deadline having our luggage loaded and ready to go. We drive out of Tulcea and on to the rural minor roads seeing an odd Bee-eater sat on the roadside wires. After about half an hour Attila pulls into a dusty car park and is greeted by a very friendly dog. The plan

is to walk up into the woodland a few hundred metres away to look for Sombre Tit and Middle Spotted Woodpecker. It is actually the entrance to the Celic Dere Monastery and we pass this lovely building on the track up to the trees. A Syrian Woodpecker calls and flies across the track and lands briefly in full view before moving into the denser foliage. There are big areas of thistle and cornflower that have a lot of butterflies including Cardinal, Silver-washed Fritillary, Common Blue and Small Heath. Attila points out a Spotted Flycatcher and then we hear a middle-spot calling from the deciduous forest. A walk into the shade is most welcome as its getting hot again with clear blue skies and lots of sunshine. Attila attempts to entice the woodpecker, which works a treat and high up in the branches we get great views of a male Middle Spotted Woodpecker – brilliant! We need to press on as this is just an interlude before our flight later this afternoon so back out into the sunshine we go. Julian spots a couple of raptors that are Common Buzzard and a 'dark-phase' Booted Eagle and another Middle Spotted Woodpecker flies past into the mature trees. We continue slowly back towards the minibus in a loop and then discover a few new butterflies with a gorgeous Queen of Spain Fritillary, Painted Lady and a new one for Julian, Woodland Grayling. Another three Booted Eagles appear with one showing exceptionally well overhead that Keith and Nigel really appreciate, as they are not just dots on the horizon. Not too far from the bus Julian hears an unfamiliar trill that Attila immediately responds too and within a couple of minutes we are having good looks at a pair of Sombre Tits – just brilliant and we cannot believe our luck. However, we really need to leave!

Back in the bus we set off across country towards Bucharest with about 200 km to go initially but Attila drives at a decent pace along these open roads and makes very good progress. Lunch is taken at a large reed-fringed lagoon just before the crossing over the River Danube. It's nice to stretch the legs and during our time here we see Osprey, Marsh Harrier, Great Crested and Little Grebes, Wood Sandpiper and lots of Cormorants. We don't have long to enjoy these surroundings but it's been a very worthwhile stop and comfort break. Our journey towards the capital continues, we pass through extensive agricultural fields with the occasional seasonal pool seeing Glossy Ibis, Little Egret and a couple of soaring Great White Pelicans. We are very thankful we're not on the opposite carriageway as a badly burnt-out Range Rover is causing long tail-backs on that side of the motorway. We reach the airport just after 3:00pm, perfect timing as usual by Attila. We thank Attila whole-heartedly as he has been simply superb in every way and hopefully our paths will cross again one day. Once in the airport we realise there is a slight delay on the flight but we have a relaxed time getting through security and then complete our last checklist and the special events of the trip. This, as always, is interesting and varied but expectedly European Brown Bear and the Danube Delta dominate the categories although European Souslik and the Zarnesti Gorge come a close second. Our flight sadly ends up being two hours delayed due to a bag having to be off-loaded but it could be worse!

Thanks to everyone for making this trip such a marvellous and successful holiday, the combined contribution has been both invaluable and fantastic.

Species of the trip

Sarah European Brown Bear + White-tailed Eagle/Pelicans
Keith European Brown Bear + Black Woodpecker
Liz Souseliks + Pelicans
Nigel Souseliks + Little Bittern
Heather European Brown Bear + Pelicans
Julian Lesser Fiery Copper + juvenile Pied Wheatear

Place of the trip

Sarah Zarnesti Gorge
Keith Danube Delta
Liz Zarnesti Gorge
Nigel Danube Delta
Heather Danube Delta
Julian Palazu Mic Quarry

Magic Moment

Sarah Wild Boar swimming across the channel
Keith First bear sighting before entering the hide
Liz Eastern Willow Spreadwing landing on my finger
Nigel Seeing all the Brown Bears
Heather Getting the full 'bear' experience followed by the fantastic storm
Julian Finally seeing the Broad-billed Sandpiper

BIRDS

Little Grebe
Black-necked Grebe
Red-necked Grebe
Great Crested Grebe
Great Cormorant
Pygmy Cormorant
Great White Pelican
Dalmatian Pelican
Grey Heron
Purple Heron
Squacco Heron
Black-crowned Night-heron
Great Egret
Little Egret
Little Bittern
White Stork
Black Stork
Glossy Ibis
Spoonbill
Greater Flamingo
Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Shelduck
Gadwall
Eurasian Teal
Mallard
Shoveler
Pintail
Garganey
Common Pochard
Ferruginous Duck
Tufted Duck
Osprey
White-tailed Eagle
Short-toed Eagle
Booted Eagle
Lesser Spotted Eagle
Greater Spotted Eagle
Common Buzzard
(Steppe Buzzard)
Long-legged Buzzard
Honey Buzzard
Goshawk
Sparrowhawk
Marsh Harrier
Common Kestrel
Hobby
Red-footed Falcon
Pheasant
Common Coot
Moorhen
Black-winged Stilt
Avocet
Lapwing
Little Ringed Plover
Ringed Plover
Common Snipe
Curlew
Black-tailed Godwit
Spotted Redshank
Greenshank
Wood Sandpiper
Common Sandpiper
Green Sandpiper
Dunlin
Curlew Sandpiper
Little Stint
Temminck's Stint
Broad-billed Sandpiper
Ruff
Red-necked Phalarope
Black-headed Gull
Mediterranean Gull
Little Gull
Common Gull
Caspian Gull
Yellow-legged Gull
Great Black-headed (Pallas's) Gull
Common Tern
Gull-billed Tern
Caspian Tern
Black Tern
White-winged Tern
Whiskered Tern
Feral Pigeon
Stock Dove
Woodpigeon
Collared Dove
Turtle Dove
Tawny Owl (heard only)
European Bee-eater
Hoopoe
Eurasian Kingfisher
Common Swift
Alpine Swift
Grey-headed Woodpecker
Green Woodpecker (heard only)
Syrian Woodpecker
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Middle Spotted Woodpecker
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Black Woodpecker
Crested Lark
Barn Swallow
House Martin
Sand Martin
Tree Pipit (heard only)
Tawny Pipit
Yellow Wagtail – *Morticilla flava*
(Black-headed Wagtail – *Morticilla flava feldegg*)
Citrine Wagtail
White Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Wren
Dipper
Robin
Common Redstart
Black Redstart
Whinchat
Northern Wheatear
Isabelline Wheatear
Pied Wheatear
Fieldfare
Blackbird
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Sedge Warbler
European Reed Warbler
Great Reed Warbler
Garden Warbler
Blackcap
Barred Warbler
Greater Whitethroat
Lesser Whitethroat
Icterine Warbler
Willow Warbler
Common Chiffchaff
Goldcrest
Bearded Tit
Penduline Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Coal Tit
Crested Tit
Sombre Tit
Willow Tit (heard only)
Marsh Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Spotted Flycatcher
Red-breasted Flycatcher
Nuthatch
Eurasian Treecreeper
Short-toed Treecreeper (heard only)
Red-backed Shrike
Great Grey Shrike
Lesser Grey Shrike
Jay
Magpie
Nutcracker
Hooded Crow
Rook
Jackdaw

Raven
European Starling
House Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Chaffinch
Goldfinch
Reed Bunting
Yellowhammer
Corn Bunting

MAMMALS

European Brown Bear
Alpine Chamois
Muskrat
Wild Boar
European Otter
Yellow-necked Mouse
(deceased)

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Dice Snake
Grass Snake
Sand Lizard
Balkan Wall Lizard
Edible Frog
Marsh Frog
European Pond Turtle

BUTTERFLIES & OTHER INSECTS

Southern Small White
Small White
Large White
Wood White
Eastern Bath White
Clouded Yellow
Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow
Swallowtail
Red Admiral
Peacock
Painted Lady
Map Butterfly (2nd generation)
Comma.
Small Copper
Large Copper
Lesser Fiery Copper
Common Blue
Adonis Blue
Silver-studded Blue
Water Ringlet
Wall Brown
Meadow Brown
Tree Grayling
Woodland Grayling
Speckled Wood
Queen of Spain Fritillary
Silver-washed Fritillary
Cardinal
Purple Emperor
Common Glider
Small Heath
Migrant Hawker
Ruddy Darter
Southern Darter
Scarlet Darter
Common Bluetail
Large Red-eye
Common Emerald
Eastern Willow Spreadwing
Banded Demoiselle
Hummingbird Hawkmoth
Red-winged Grasshopper
Silver Y
Hornet
Impressive wasp sp
Preying Mantis
Acida hungerica
Carpenter Bee