

Montenegro & Albania

Saturday 14 – Sunday 22 April 2012

Trip Report

Tour Leader:
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Day 1 - 14th April

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

Day 2 - 15th April

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

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

Day 3 - 16th April

We left Virpazar in rather rainy weather. After crossing tunnel Sorina we reached the Adriatic and turned southeast towards Albania. After Bar we chose a narrow road leading through scattered settlements, orchards and pastures to Dobra Voda where remarkable migration of Blackcaps and Winchats was on. It was raining more or less constantly, but we still saw several Golden Orioles and a Woodchat Shrike. After a long queing at the border at Sukobin we reached Albania in sunny weather. While driving on terrible roads to Skhoder we saw a nice flock of Montague's Harriers and many hundreds of Sand Martins hunting over the River Moraca. From Skhoder we turned towards Velipolje and had our lunch at the bank of a nice marshy lake (Squacco Heron, Great Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and Marsh Harrier seen). Early afternoon we crossed the strange and exotic town of Skhoder and passed along the eastern edge of the Lake Skadar. During our numerous stops the first Black-eared Wheatear pair was seen attacking a Little Owl as well as a big flock of Spanish Sparrows, a few Crested larks, a Pied Flycatcher and a very remote little group of Dalmatian Pelicans on the lake. We went back to Montenegro at Hani Hotit and stopped at the watch tower near Tuzi, which was in a disappointing condition. In heavy rain we saw only one Dalmatian Pelican and a Red-rumped Swallow.

Day 4 - 17th April

Right after leaving the hotel we stopped not far from Virpazar harbour to look for waterfowl, where several Pygmy Cormorants, Great Crested and Little Grebes, a few Whiskered Terns were observed. While driving along the southern bank of Lake Skadar we saw a Grey Wagtail and stopped frequently in dry, bushy places in search of Sombre Tit, which was finally seen near Marstijepovici. On the southern slopes we saw Western Rock Nuthatches and a Rock Bunting. The old Sweet Chestnut forest at Gornja Briska was an unforgettable location, where Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Sombre Tit, Hawfinch and Green Woodpecker were seen. During the picnic lunch in a forest full of orchids near Ostrosi we saw a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers.

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

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

Day 5 - 18th April

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

Day 6 - 19th April

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

Day 7 - 20th April

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

massive rocks and observed Willow Tit and Mistle Thrush. During the walk in the spruce forest in Zabljak before the rich dinner we finally had good views of a Black Woodpecker.

Day 8 - 21th April

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

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

Day 9 - 22th April

After breakfast we headed for the airport of Dubrovnik.

BIRD SPECIES LISTS

GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS - Anatidae

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* A few seen on Lake Skadar.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Seen on Lake Skadar and Ulcinj Salt pans.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Seen on Ulcinj Salt pans.

Garganey *Anas querquedula* A few Seen on Ulcinj Salt pan and near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Seen on Ulcinj Salt pans.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* Seen on Lake Skadar.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* Seen at the entrance to Komarnica Valley

GREBES - Podicipedidae

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Many of them seen on Lake Skadar.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* A few seen on Lake Skadar.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* A few seen on Lake Skadar.

STORKS - Ciconiidae

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* A few migrating flocks and some nesting birds seen.

PELICANS - Pelecanidae

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* 9 seen during the boat trip on Lake Skadar.

IBISES & SPOONBILLS - Threskiornithidae

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* A larger flock seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

HERONS & BITTERNs - Ardeidae

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Seen regularly near wetlands.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* 1 seen on Lake Skadar.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Seen regularly near wetlands.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* A few seen in Croatia.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* A few seen on Lake Skadar.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* A few seen on Lake Skadar.

CORMORANTS - Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Many seen at Lake Skadar.

Pigmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmaeus* Good numbers seen at Lake Skadar.

HAWKS, EAGLES & allies - Accipitridae

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* 1 seen near Virpazar.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* Common near wetlands, reedbeds.

Montague's Harrier *Circus pygargus* A migrating flock seen in Albania.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* A few seen.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* Common, seen on most days

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* A pair seen at Kotor Bay.

Short-toed eagle *Circaetus gallicus* A pair seen above Kotor Bay and an another near Virpazar.

FALCONS & allies - Falconidae

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Regularly seen.

RAILS, CRAKES & COOTS - Rallidae

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* Common on Lake Skadar.

Thick-knees - Burhinidae

Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* 4 seen on Ulcinj Salt pans

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS - Charadriidae

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* Seen every day in good numbers near wetlands.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* A few seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* A few seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* A few seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

SANDPIPERS, SNIPES & allies - Scolopacidae

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* A few seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* A few seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* A few seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* A few seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Common near wetlands.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Seen at the canals near Ulcinj Salt pans.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* A flock of 20 seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Good numbers seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* Seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* A few seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS - Laridae

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* Common on Lake Skadar.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* Common on Lake Skadar.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* A few seen on Lake Skadar.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* Common on Lake Skadar.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* 2-3 seen on Lake Skadar.

PIGEONS & DOVES - Columbidae

Rock Dove *Columba livia* The feral form common, seen every day. Also some wild birds in the mountains above Lake Skadar.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* Common, seen every day.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* A few seen in Komarnica Valley.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Seen almost daily in towns.

CUCKOOS - Cuculidae

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* Heard and seen a few times.

OWLS – Strigidae

Little Owl *Athene noctua* 1 seen in Albania.

Scops Owl *Otus scops* Heard and seen in Virpazar and Dubrovnik.

SWIFTS - Apodidae

Common Swift *Apus apus* Common along the Adriatic.

HOOPOES - Upupidae

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* 2 seen in Komarnica Valley.

WOODPECKERS - Picidae

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* Seen in Komarnica Valley.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* 1 pair seen in the mountains near Lake Skadar.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* 1 seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* Heard in the mountains near Lake Skadar.

SHRIKES - Laniidae

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* Seen on pastures near Bar.

OLD WORLD ORIOLES – Oriolidae

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* A few seen on migration near Bar.

CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES - Corvidae

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Common, seen on most days.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* Seen on most days.

Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula* Common in villages and towns.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* Seen few times during the trip.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* Common, seen on most days.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax* Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

TITS & CHICKADEES - Paridae

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* Seen and heard in Komarnica-valley.

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* Seen in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater* Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

European Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus* Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris* Seen twice, first in the mountains around Lake Skadar then in Komarnica Valley.

Great Tit *Parus major* Common, seen every day.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* Common, seen most days.

PENDULINE TITS - Remizidae

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* Heard at Lake Skadar.

LARKS - Alaudidae

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* Common on pastures and grasslands.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* A few seen along the road in Albania.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* A flock of about 15 seen at Ulcinj Salt pans.

SWALLOWS & MARTINS - Hirundinidae

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* Seen at Kotor Bay.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Common, seen most days.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* Common, seen most days.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* One bird seen at Tuzi birdhide, Lake Skadar.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* Several hundreds seen in Albania hunting above River Moraca.

LONG-TAILED TITS AND BUSHTITS - Aegithalidae

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* Seen and heard at several places.

OLD WORLD WARBLERS - Sylviidae

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* Common, seen and heard every day.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* Common, seen and heard most days.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* Seen and heard a few times.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Seen and heard in Albania.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* Seen and heard in Albania.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* Very common, seen or heard every day.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* Seen or heard most days.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* Common, seen on most days.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* Common along the Adriatic.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* 1 bird seen near Dubrovnik on the last day.

CRESTS & KINGLETS - Regulidae

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus* Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

WRENS - Troglodytidae

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

NUTHATCHES & WALLCREEPER - Sittidae

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* Seen and heard in Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer* A few seen in the mountains around Lake Skadar.

STARLINGS - Sturnidae

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* Common, seen every day.

THRUSHES - Turdidae

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* Seen or heard most days.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* A few seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* Fairly common.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* A few seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

OLD WORLD CHATS & FLYCATCHERS - Muscicapidae

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* Seen or heard most days.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* Heard and seen a few times during the trip.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* A few seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* One singing male seen at the end of the trip in Croatia.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* Seen during migration near Bar.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* A few seen near Zabljak, Durmitor NP.

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* Seen in Albania.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* Seen or heard a few times during the trip.
European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* 1 bird seen in Albania.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS & allies - Passeridae

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Common, seen most days.
Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* Seen several times at the airport and Albania.
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Seen a few times.

WAGTAILS & PIPITS - Motacillidae

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

FINCHES & allies - Fringillidae

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

BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS & allies - Emberizidae

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