

BULGARIA BIRDING TRIP REPORT

4TH - 15TH May 2005

PARTICIPANTS:

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OBJECTIVES:

With our group coming from Catalunya, Spain, the emphasis was on seeing as many of the breeding and migratory birds of Bulgaria as we could in 12 days (10 days birding), although without making a particular effort to see those species that we could find with relative ease in Spain. Hence the focus was a little different from that of most British birders as we made no effort to go out of our way to see birds like Wallcreeper, Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, Black Woodpecker, Eagle Owl, Herons or any of the larks. On the other hand we were interested in seeing some species that wouldn't over-motivate Brits, like Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Lesser Whitethroat and Willow Tit!

So we aimed at timing the trip to see Bulgaria in its springtime splendour while reaching the Black Sea coast with the option of observing some migration.

PLANNING:

As a group of friends we had previously travelled together in territory known to me - Scotland, Norfolk, the Canary Islands - but I had never been to Bulgaria before, so I was pretty sure I was going to need some help. I contacted the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism via the internet and they put me on to an agency called Zigzag holidays, based in Sofia. We arranged the itinerary, the guides and accommodation through them, and on the whole it worked out pretty well. However, they had never dealt with birding groups before and as a result there were a few arrangements that could have been better. For example, on the first day of birding in the Rila mountain area we had to drive for two hours before reaching the site for the Hazel Grouse. We arrived there after 9 a.m. and probably as a result we failed to see the bird. Knowing that this was one of our target species in the area, along with Shore Lark, Nutcracker and Three-toed Woodpecker we felt they should have consulted the guide and found us suitable accommodation on the side of the mountain that we had to bird; as it was we spent far too long driving that day and as a result it was unnecessarily tiring.

The quality of the accommodation was rather mixed, and although it generally ranged from acceptable to good, the first hotel we stayed at on the Black Sea coast was not up to the standard we normally require. But apart from that Zigzag were friendly and helpful whenever they could be.

I later found out that specialist birding companies do of course exist in Bulgaria, and can be contacted either through www.birdwatchingbulgaria.com or Neophron Ltd at www.neophron.com

GUIDES:

Aware of their lack of experience in the birdwatching field Zigzag holidays got in touch with the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds to help in the organisation of guides for our trip. We had a total of four English-speaking guides: Dimiter Georgiev for the Rila mountain and Vitosha areas (day 2); Ivailo Anguelov for the Kardjali area (day 4); Stoycho Stoychev for the Sakar mountain region (day 5), and Svetoslav Spasov for the Cape Kaliakra and Durankulak areas (days 9 and 10).

Dimiter is the manager of Neophron Ltd, and we later came across him again guiding a photographer at Cape Kailiakra. We were unlucky with him, as that day we missed out on both Hazel Grouse and Shore Lark, due to no fault of his own I must add, and he was very apologetic. As compensation he provided us with very good information which enabled us to

get good views of Nutcracker and Grey-headed Woodpecker early the next morning.
Neophron@dir.bg

Ivailo was the youngest of our guides and as far as I could gather he usually worked in the BSPB centre at Madjarovo, taking people to see the vulture feeding station and so on. I think we were a bit of a surprise for him as we passed on the vultures but got ourselves worked up by the first Olivaceous Warbler of our trip! He didn't seem very familiar with the birds' calls and songs, but he knew the places to go and was easy-going enough to put up with our eccentricities!

Stoycho Stoychev was our guide for the next day around the Sakar mountain region. An area he obviously knows like the back of his hand, working as he does for the BSPB in the conservation of the Imperial Eagle. He was easy to get along with and thanks to his local knowledge and alertness we managed to see all the specialities of this wonderful region. He is obviously very involved in the local territory and was always ready to give us interesting information about the plight and habits of the Imperial Eagle, places, people and their relationship with birds and nature in general. The day with him was unanimously agreed to be one of the two best days of the whole trip. sakarbg@mbox.digsys.bg

Svetoslav Spasov is the project manager of the Common Bird Monitoring Scheme and perhaps it's for that reason that he seemed to be the guide with the greatest knowledge of bird calls and songs. He speaks very good English and readily adapted to our more relaxed pace (having by now seen the majority of interesting species we allowed ourselves time off for shopping for souvenirs, gull photography and the inevitable coffee drinking). Neither was he offended by our pathetic attempts at calling his name, which ranged from "Stalingrad", to "Stetispav" to "Stetokov"!

Svetoslav.spasov@bspb.org

No complaints about the guides, and even if you are arranging your own holiday it would at least be well worth contacting Stoycho Stoychev to organise a day's birding around the Sakar mountains - not only can he find the birds, he can also deal with the border guards, the restaurants and hoteliers.

Expect to pay between 50 and 80 leva for a day's guiding (1 Euro = 1.95 leva). And if you're happy with the service then nobody would be offended by a tip, or a contribution to the BSPB. Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds: www.bspb.org

VEHICLE:

We rented a self-drive Kia Pregio 8-seater from Penguin Travel, with headquarters in Denmark. Airport delivery and pick-up was an extra 20 Euros. It was adequate for our needs, with enough space for 5 suitcases and backpacks, although it had limited powers of acceleration.

FLIGHT:

Alitalia from Barcelona to Milan, 1.5 hours stopover, and then from Milan to Sofia, arriving around 2.30 p.m. Return flight with Alitalia/Bulgarian airlines to Rome, 1 hour stopover, and then Rome to Barcelona. Stingy with the food and an awful mess as a result of making the booking by phone and not by internet.

Return flight cost approximately 320 Euros.

LANGUAGE:

Apart from the guides and a couple of hotel managers/proprietors very few people spoke any English, some saying they spoke more German or French. Therefore sign language and gestures was the most effective way of shopping, asking for directions etc. But be careful with the gestures! Bear in mind that, in the same way as the Turks, Bulgarians nod their heads to say "no" ("ne") and shake their heads in an Indian fashion to say "yes" ("da")!

Road signs in the Latin alphabet were generally unusual, so our technique for coping with the Cyrillic road signs was usually to learn the first and last few letters of the town we were aiming for. In this respect it helps if you buy a map with the place names in both Latin and Cyrillic. The one I had showed the major place names in both alphabets but not the smaller ones: Bulgaria, scale 1:750 000, by Cartographia, Budapest. The map seemed accurate enough, although due to the small scale some of the smaller roads we needed to access certain sites were not drawn in.

FOOD:

We were very fond of the Bulgarian red wine, both Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot! The national salad "Shopska", made of cucumber, tomato and soft cheese is also excellent, and most other salads on the menu, except in the larger tourist resorts, were variations on the theme. Most meat is chicken or pork, served in breadcrumbs or with different sauces, and is tasty. Good Espresso coffee is widely available, replaced in the more rural districts by a more watered down version, but still readily drinkable. Tea lovers should ask for "Chai".

As for water we were cautious and always drank bottled mineral water, although I suspect in the mountain areas you'd be fairly safe drinking from the tap if you so desired.

Bulgarians like to start their meals by drinking a plum or grape liqueur (50°+) known as "Rakia" (or similar). Worth trying but I don't think I'll continue with the tradition at home.

DRIVING:

We started at the deep end, driving from the airport to the centre of Sofia and then out along the southern ring road. On this route lane discipline is not really a priority as usually the lanes are not marked! Besides that you soon learn that some of the major hazards facing the unwary driver are potholes, horse-drawn carts, signs you don't understand and unpainted sleeping policemen! But don't worry too much - the good side is that except in the major cities there is very little traffic and most Bulgarians are tolerant towards dithering foreign drivers!

South of the main Sofia - Burgas route driving was a slow matter due to the poor state of the roads and the innumerable bends in the mountainous areas. In some places it took almost an hour to do little over 30 kms. North of this line however the roads were generally very good with the added advantage of very little traffic, making it possible to cover as much as 90kms an hour in some places.

ACCOMMODATION:

General comments to be made about the places we stayed should include aspects such as room service, showers and bedclothes. It appears that you shouldn't expect your beds to be made for you if staying in any place for more than one night! Also the showers were incorporated into the bathroom in such a way that the floor was left wet, along with the sink and the toilet and any towels you may have unwittingly left lying about ie. there were no shower screens. Bedclothes were clean but only just large enough to cover the beds, with the consequent annoyance of having to put them back on the bed in the early hours of the morning.

On the positive side there was good food and drink, friendly hosts who were willing to make breakfast for early morning birders, and best of all we were usually the only clients in sight.

Days 1 and 2: Hotel Kalina, Govedartsi (near Samokov) - English spoken, excellent food, in quiet village in attractive surroundings. Rooms acceptable.

Day 3: Newly-built Bachkovo "Assumption" monastery in Kardjali. Nice grounds, rooms OK but monkish, some English spoken. Food acceptable.

Days 4 and 5: Boirana (Sakar) Hotel in Topolovgrad. Good facilities and rooms, good cheap food and friendly service. Some English spoken. Nice grounds.

Days 6 and 7: Lambovi family Hotel, Nessebar. The town of Nessebar is a world heritage site and worth having a look at if in the area. I can't say the same about the hotel, despite the proprietor's friendly attitude.

Days 8, 9 and 10: Elit Hotel, Balchik. New-looking 3-star hotel and the most modern we stayed at. It seemed we were the only clients in a place that is obviously geared up towards accommodating a good number of tourists in the high season. No English spoken. Fine, but I wonder if someone there really doesn't know what happened to my mobile phone that I'm sure I left behind in my room.

Day 11: Stomnite Guesthouse, Beli Osam near Trojan. We had problems in finding this place, mostly because our larger scale map was wrong, and when we phoned the hosts they couldn't speak enough English to direct us. Nevertheless, as we were floundering they drove out and found us and escorted us back to their beautifully renovated Bulgarian house. Then their English-speaking son arrived, and when the food and drink was placed before us we were in heaven!

QUICK-LOOK ITINERARY:

- Day 1, May 4th: Arrival at hotel in Govedartsi. Evening stroll on outskirts of village.
- Day 2, May 5th: Breakfast at 6:30 a.m. followed by 2 hour drive to near Rila monastery to search for Hazel Grouse. Afternoon at Vitosha mountain to the south of Sofia.
- Day 3, May 6th: Pre-breakfast birding at Maljovitsa complex, near Govedartsi. Drive to Kardjali, birding on the way at Lozen and in mountains near Topolovo.
- Day 4, May 7th: Birding the Eastern Rhodopes near Studen Kladenets dam and Madjarovo. Drive to Topolovgrad.
- Day 5, May 8th: Birding in Sakar mountains, near Greek and Turkish borders.
- Day 6, May 9th: Drive to Nessebar, birding on way at Goljamo Krushevo. Afternoon visit to Pomorie salt pans and Atanasovsko lake.
- Day 7, May 10th: Morning visit to Poda lagoon, just to the south of Burgas. Afternoon spent on south sides of Mandra and Burgas lakes. Last stop visit to Pomorie salt pans.
- Day 8, May 11th: Drive to Balchik, birding on way at Goritsa and Kamchia. Afternoon shopping.
- Day 9, May 12th: Day spent at Durankulak and Shabla lakes.
- Day 10, May 13th: Morning at Cape Kaliakra and Bolata. Afternoon at Durankulak lake.
- Day 11, May 14th: Driving day, but made a diversion to Srebarna reserve on the banks of the Danube - wow! Chanced on the old capital of Bulgaria at Veliko Tarnovo and the ruins of the Roman city of Nikolasia Ad Istrum. Both are worth a visit if in the area and not in a hurry. Overnight at Beli Osam.
- Day 12, 15th May: Return flight Sofia - Rome - Barcelona.

BIRDS AND PLACES:

Bulgaria really is a great place to go birding. A list of the "common stuff", birds either seen on most days or else abundant in the right areas would include White Stork, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Hobby, Turtle Dove, Alpine Swift, Hoopoe, Syrian Woodpecker, Crested Lark, Red-rumped Swallow, Yellow Wagtail (feldegg race), Great Reed Warbler, Olivaceous Warbler, Red-backed Shrike (almost a plague in some places!), Woodchat Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Roller, Bee-eater, Spanish Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Hawfinch, Golden Oriole, Ortolan Bunting, Cirl Bunting and Black-headed Bunting.

With wetland birds the only species we really "missed" was the Red-necked Grebe, and we understood we were probably too late to see waders such as Red-necked Phalarope, Temminck's Stint and Marsh Sandpiper. We missed the target species on the first day in the Rila mountains basically because of logistical errors, but even then we recorded Semi-collared Flycatcher, Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Willow Tit, Bullfinch, Ring Ouzel, Rock Thrush, Nutcracker, Water Pipit, Firecrest, Goldcrest, Dipper and Crossbill.

In the Eastern Rhodopes and at Sakar the birds of prey were at their best, with our personal tally for those two days amounting to 14 species. This was the only area where we recorded Egyptian and Griffon Vultures, adult Imperial Eagles, Levant Sparrowhawk, Booted Eagle and a more than probable Saker (it was either Saker or Lanner). We were unlucky with White-tailed Eagle and Chukar. It's also a great area for seeing Sombre Tit, Blue Rock Thrush, warblers and Rock Nuthatch.

In the Sakar region special mention must go the Masked Shrike - we were lucky enough to be the first group to see this fine bird in Bulgaria this year, at the same site where we managed to coax a shy Olive-tree Warbler out into the open. Isabelline wheatears were also easy to see here, coinciding with Souselik colonies (burrowing rodents that look like Prairie Dogs), in whose unoccupied burrows they make their nests. On the river at Kardjali itself we were surprised by a party of no less than 6 Black Storks, and the next morning we saw Night Heron and 3 White-winged Black Terns in the same place.

On the Black Sea coast the Pomorie salt pans provided us with excellent views of a large number and variety of waders, including flocks of Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints, mixed in with smaller numbers of Dunlin, Kentish, Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers, Greenshank and Wood Sandpiper. We also had a very pleasant surprise in the form of two Broad-billed Sandpipers at very close range. We tried Atanasovsko Lake, which we could see had a lot of waders, but access was more difficult and so we spent little time there. In the areas of freshwater at Pomorie we also had all three marsh terns, Squacco Heron, Garganey, Little Bittern, Mute Swan and two fly-over Dalmatian Pelicans.

A single Dalmatian Pelican was also seen at leisure on the southern fringe of Mandra Lake, where the day before we heard Penduline Tit, and our brief visit to the southern edge of Burgas Lake was perfectly timed to witness the arrival of a flock of some 1,500 migratory White Pelicans.

Despite the few Pygmy Cormorants and a couple of Ferruginous Ducks that we saw, Poda was a bit of a disappointment, probably because of the noise of the traffic and the fact that the stilt hide was closed due to its unstable condition.

On the way to Balchik a couple of hours at Goritsa forest provided excellent views of Semi-collared Flycatcher, Middle-spotted Woodpecker and the only Wood Warbler of the trip. We stopped on the southern side of the Kamchia reserve, very beautiful woodland and dunes, but came up with nothing new, except for the best views of Hawfinch that most of us have ever had.

Our time to the north of Balchik was taken in a very relaxed manner, the group was slowly winding down, but luckily the unsettled weather on our first whole day in the area was excellent for observing migration, and so we spent the most of the day near Durankulak and Shabla Lakes. At Durankulak there were flocks of migrating Whiskered and Black Terns with smaller numbers of White-winged Black Terns feeding over the lake, Gull-billed Terns, more than a dozen passing Red-footed Falcons, a flock of some 25 Spoonbills in flight, 2 Collared Pratincoles, a flock of some 80 Yelkouan Shearwaters in the bay, along with a lone Arctic skua, Sandwich, Common and Little Terns. And then there were the more "usual" birds! Like about 5 Paddyfield Warblers, Pygmy Cormorants, Bearded Reedling, Savi's Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Ferruginous Ducks, Garganey, etc. A highlight of the trip greeted us at this site in the form of a

stay-behind Red-breasted Goose, which along with the White-fronted Goose also present there the next day had obviously been injured by the work of a hunter's trigger finger.

There were a few waders at Shabla Lake and a Black-throated Diver on the sea. However, here, as at Durankulak, there was a lot going on among the bushes: Red-breasted Flycatchers were constantly getting in the way when searching for other passerines! We recorded a pair of Collared Flycatchers, Barred Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Lesser Grey Shrike, Willow Warbler and Olivaceous Warbler as flocks of Bee-eaters, Swifts, Swallows and House Martins crowded into the sky above our heads.

Cape Kaliakra was kept for the last day's full birding, and the previous day's squally weather having given way to calm, sunny skies migration had understandably become much less visible. Nevertheless we still managed to pinpoint an Icterine Warbler and several Red-footed Falcons were very obligingly perched on the telephone lines. The Kaliakra special, the Pied Wheatear could not be missed, as it is quite abundant and very approachable in this area. Shags and more (perhaps the same group as the previous day) Yelkouan Shearwaters added to the interest of this attractive area with great migrant potential. Nearby, Bolata delivered a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, although we were too early for the Rose-coloured Starlings, not due at least until the end of the month. A return visit to Durankulak was enjoyable, but produced no new birds except for great views of a singing Marsh Warbler.

The next day we had to make the long drive back to within easy reach of Sofia but we decided to make a diversion northwards and have a look at the world famous Srebarna Lake. What a site! It was teeming with birds: terns, nesting Glossy Ibis, Dalmatian Pelicans, Pygmy Cormorants, Ferruginous Ducks, Herons and 12 Hobbys (Hobbies?) in the air at the same time. We added Ruddy Shelduck, Kinfisher and Goshawk to the list but all too soon we had to press on with our journey. In vain we tried one last site for White-tailed Eagle, on the south bank of the Danube and then became sight-seers before reaching our accommodation at Beli Osam.

This last area has beautiful mountains and beech forests, and is reportedly a good area for breeding Red-breasted Flycatchers, but in the morning it rained quite heavily so we decided to take the major road directly to Sofia airport.

Total species recorded = 217.

Personal highlights included Eastern Imperial Eagle, Masked Shrike, Rock Nuthatch, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Levant Sparrowhawk, Barred Warbler, Paddyfield Warbler, Olive-tree Warbler, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Dalmatian Pelican, Red-breasted Goose, Nutcracker.

I had hoped to see Three-toed Woodpecker, but the guides told me that it would be better to forget about that! We were unlucky with the Hazel Grouse and Chukar, and couldn't stay at the Rock Partridge site until late enough in the day to give it a good go. Another group we met had seen 2 or 3 Pallid Harriers on migration, another claimed Finsch's Wheatear at Cape Kaliakra, and a different group had heard River Warbler

At Kamchia. Apart from that I don't think we missed much of what was going around at the time.

If going back to Bulgaria on a similar trip I would make only a few minor changes to the itinerary, perhaps by taking in the Pirin mountain area or at least staying on the Rila monastery side of the Rila mountains; if there was little hope for migration then two nights at Balchik rather than three would be enough, allowing more time to visit Srebarna. I think I would also try to get closer to Atanasovsko and not bother with Poda (no disrespect to the BSPB intended - it's just that the array of species that can be seen there are not very different from what we can see in Spain). I would certainly return to the Eastern Rhodopes and Sakar.

Note: I have not written this report as a site guide as I think that kind of thing should be left to the natives to write about. I also think that local guides are worth having if your budget will get you that far.

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

1. **Black-throated Diver** *Gavia arctica*
1 in winter plumage on sea at Shabla Lake on the 12th May.
2. **Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*
A few on the sea at Poda on the 10th and a few at Srebarna on the 14th May.
3. **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
Single birds recorded at Pomorie on the 10th, Bolata on the 13th and Srebarna on the 14th May.
4. **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*
Recorded in ones or twos on the sea or freshwater lakes on the 10th, 12th, 13th and 14th May.
5. **Yelkouan Shearwater** *Puffinus yelkouan*
Flock of approximately 80 birds close to shore off Durankulak on the 12th, and a group of similar size off Cape Kaliakra on the 13th May.
6. **White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus*
Migratory flock of some 1,500 birds soaring high over Mandra Lake on the 10th May. Probably the same birds landing on northern shore of Burgas Lake later the same day.
7. **Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus*
1 seen at close range on southern shore of Mandra Lake on the 10th and 2 birds flying low over Pomorie saltpans later the same day. Colony at Srebarna Lake on the 14th May.
8. **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Common at Poda, Pomorie and Durankulak on the 9th, 10th, 12th and 14th May.
9. **(Mediterranean) Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii*
Quite numerous at the base of the cliffs at Cape Kaliakra on the 13th May.
10. **Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*
Small numbers at Poda on the 10th, and more numerous at Durankulak and Srebarna on the 12th, 13th and 14th May.
11. **Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus*
Singles at Pomorie on the 9th, Poda on the 10th, Kamchia on the 11th, Durankulak on the 13th and Srebarna on the 14th May.
12. **Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*
Singles on the river at Kardjali on the 7th, Pomorie on the 9th and Mandra on the 10th.
13. **Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides*
Several at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th, at Poda on the 10th, at Durankulak on the 12th and 13th, at Shabla on the 12th and at Srebarna on the 14th May.
14. **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*
1-3 birds seen at most wetland sites.
15. **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*
Small numbers or breeding colonies at virtually all wetland sites.
16. **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea*

Seen at Poda and Mandra on the 10th, Durankulak on the 12th and 13th and Srebarna on the 14th May.

17. **White stork** *Ciconia ciconia*
Seen all days except the 11th and 12th May.
18. **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*
6 on river at Kardjali on 6th, with 2 there the next morning. Frequent in Eastern Rhodopes and Sakar regions on the 6th, 7th and 8th and birds in flight over Durankulak on the 12th May.
19. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*
Flock of about 12 birds on southern shore of Mandra on the 10th, small numbers at Durankulak on the 12th and colony at Srebarna on the 14th.
20. **Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*
Party of 6 or 7 birds on the southern shore of Burgas Lake on the 10th and migratory flock of approximately 25 birds passing Durankulak on the 12th May.
21. **Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*
Family groups at Pomorie, Mandra and Durankulak on the 9th, 10th, 12th and 13th May.
22. **White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons albifrons*
1 bird at Durankulak on the 13th May.
23. **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis*
1 bird at Durankulak on the 12th and 13th May.
24. **Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*
Common in the Burgas area wetlands on the 9th and 10th, with small numbers at Durankulak on the 12th and 13th May.
25. **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*
At least 2 birds at Srebarna on the 14th May.
26. **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*
Seen in small numbers on the 4th, 7th, 9th, 10th and 12th May.
27. **Gadwall** *Anas strepera*
Small numbers in the Burgas and Durankulak areas and at Srebarna on the 9th, 10th, 12th, 13th and 14th May.
28. **Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*
1 male at Mandra on the 10th May.
29. **Garganey** *Anas querquedula*
Several birds at Pomorie, Poda and Mandra on the 9th and 10th and fairly numerous at Durankulak on the 12th and 13th May.
30. **Pochard** *Aythya ferina*
A few at Poda and Mandra on the 10th and at Srebarna on the 14th May.
31. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca*
2 at Poda on the 10th and fairly numerous at Durankulak and Srebarna on the 12th, 13th and 14th May.
32. **Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*
2 at Poda on the 10th May.
33. **Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus*
Fairly common in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.

34. **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus*
2 in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
35. **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*
1 at Durankulak on the 13th May.
36. **Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*
Single immature birds near Lozen on the 6th and in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May. At least 2 adults in the Sakar mountains on the 8th May.
37. **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina*
2-3 birds near Lozen on the 6th, 2-3 birds in the Sakar mountains on the 8th, 1 near Elhovo on the 9th, and at least 1 at Mandra on the 10th May.
38. **Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus*
At least 2 birds in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th and 1 in the Sakar mountains on the 8th May.
39. **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus*
1 in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
40. **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*
In the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th, in the Sakar mountains on the 8th and on the way to Burgas on the 9th May.
41. **Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*
Near Lozen on the 6th and at most wetland sites.
42. **Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus*
A pair over fields near Elhovo, on the way to Burgas on the 9th May.
43. **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*
Several birds near Lozen on the 6th, in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th, in Sakar mountains on the 8th and 1 at Cape Kaliakra on the 13th May.
44. **Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*
Common.
45. **Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*
3 birds near Topolovo on the 6th, in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th, in the Sakar mountains on the 8th and near Durankulak on the 12th May.
46. **Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*
1 at Vitosha on the 5th and 1 in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
47. **Levant Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter brevipes*
Brief but very close views of a male in the Sakar region on the 8th May.
48. **Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*
1 at Srebarna on the 14th May.
49. **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*
Seen every day.
50. **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus*
About 5 birds in fields near Pomorie on the 10th, 12+ migrants at Durankulak on the 12th, and several at Cape Kaliakra on the 13th May.
51. **Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*

Birds apparently on migration in many places, with concentration of 12 birds together at Srebarna on the 14th May.

52. **Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*
2 birds seen around rock face in Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
53. **Saker *** *Falco cherrug*
A large falcon chasing kestrels around the same rock face as the Peregrines in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May looked more like a Saker than a Lanner, but there is some room for doubt; however it was definitely one of these two species.
54. **Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix*
Pairs on the 9th and 12th May, the latter at Durankulak.
55. **Quail** *Coturnix coturnix*
Heard singing in cereal fields on the 6th, 10th, 12th and 13th May.
56. **Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*
Not as common as in Spain! Singles or small numbers seen on the 10th, 12th, 13th and 14th at Poda, Durankulak and Srebarna.
57. **Coot** *Fulica atra*
Small numbers at most wetland sites.
58. **Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*
2 seen on the beach at Poda on the 10th May.
59. **Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Seen at Pomorie, Poda and Shabla Lake on the 9th, 10th and 12th May respectively.
60. **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*
Seen at Pomorie, Poda, Shabla and Durankulak on the 9th, 10th, 12th and 13th May.
61. **Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola*
2 at Poda on the 10th and 2 at Durankulak on the 12th May.
62. **Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*
1 by Maritsa River on 8th, also at Pomorie on the 9th, Poda on the 10th and Shabla Lake on the 12th May.
63. **Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*
A few at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th May.
64. **Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Several at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th May.
65. **Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*
2 at Pomorie on the 9th and 1 on the beach at Durankulak on the 12th May.
66. **Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*
Inland near Plovdiv on the 6th, at Pomorie on the 9th and at Mandra on the 10th May.
67. **Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*
At Poda on the 10th May.
68. **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*
A handful of birds at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th May.
69. **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*

The most abundant wader, present in large numbers at Pomorie and Atanosovsko Lake on the 9th and 10th and on the beach at Durankulak on the 12th May.

70. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus*
2 at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th May.
71. **Little Stint** *Calidris minuta*
Abundant at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th, with a few at Shabla and Durankulak on the 12th May.
72. **Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*
A few birds at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th May.
73. **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*
2 on the beach at Poda on the 10th May.
74. **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*
1 heard at Pomorie on the 9th May.
75. **Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*
Several at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th May.
76. **Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica*
1 at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th May.
77. **Curlew** *Numenius arquata*
A few at Atanosovsko on the 9th and 2 or 3 at Pomorie on the 10th May.
78. **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*
In small numbers at Pomorie and Poda on the 9th and 10th May.
79. **Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus*
1 over beach at Durankulak on the 12th May.
80. **Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus*
Present at most coastal wetland sites.
81. **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus*
Several at Atanosovsko Lake on the 9th May.
82. **Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus cachinnans*
A few inland, otherwise present at all coastal wetland sites.
83. **Little Tern** *Sterna albifrons*
In small numbers at Pomorie and Poda on the 9th and 10th, and at Durankulak on the 12th May.
84. **Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis*
Seen at all Black Sea coastal sites.
85. **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica*
Small numbers seen at Pomorie, Poda and Durankulak.
86. **Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*
2 on river at Kardjali on 7th May; fairly common on Black Sea coast.
87. **Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia*
1 at Pomorie on the 9th May.
88. **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*
Small groups at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th, Durankulak on the 13th and Srebarna on the 14th.
Larger migratory groups at Durankulak on the 12th May.

89. **White-winged tern** *Chlidonias leucoptera*
3 on river at Kardjali on the 7th. Up to 9 at Pomorie on the 9th and 10th, and more than 12 through Durankulak on the 12th May.
90. **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida*
In small numbers at Pomorie on the 9th and Durankulak on the 13th. Migratory flocks through Durankulak on the 12th, and common at Srebarna on the 14th May.
91. **Rock Dove** *Columba livia*
Feral variety seen most days.
92. **Stock Dove** *Columba oenas*
4 near Lozen on the 6th May.
93. **Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus*
Seen most days, less commonly along the coast.
94. **Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*
Seen in most areas except for the mountains in the south.
95. **Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*
Widespread and not uncommon; seen most days.
96. **Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*
Recorded every day except on the 4th May.
97. **Little Owl** *Athene noctua*
1 seen near Kardjali on the 6th May.
98. **Scops Owl** *Otus scops*
Single birds heard in Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th, Sakar mountains on the 8th and at Srebarna on the 14th May.
99. **Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus*
1 seen flying by road at dusk in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
100. **Swift** *Apus apus*
Widespread, seen most days.
101. **Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus*
Varying numbers of birds positively identified on the 5th, 6th, 7th and 13th May, the latter at Cape Kaliakra.
102. **Alpine Swift** *Apus melba*
Seen in all mountain areas and on the Black Sea coast on the 11th and 13th May.
103. **Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*
Seen every day except the 4th May.
104. **Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*
1 at Srebarna on the 14th May.
105. **Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster*
Seen every day except the 4th May.
106. **Roller** *Coracias garrulus*
Several in the Sakar region on the 8th and a roadside bird on the 10th, 11th, 12th and 14th May, most common on the southern shore of Mandra Lake.

107. **Black Woodpecker** *Dryocopus martius*
1 heard in the Rila mountains on the 5th May.
108. **Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis*
Seen in one's or two's in most areas.
109. **Grey-headed Woodpecker** *Picus canus*
1 heard in the Rila mountains on the 5th and 1 seen near Govedartsi (Rila) on the 6th May.
110. **Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major*
Seen in the Rila mountains on the 5th and probably also at Goritsa forest on the 11th May.
111. **Syrian Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos syriacus*
Widespread in orchards, villages and town gardens. Seen on the 6th, 7th, 8th, 11th and 12th May.
112. **Middle Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos medius*
3 or more birds at Goritsa forest on the 11th May.
113. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos minor*
A pair at Bolata on the 13th May.
114. **Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla*
At inland sites on the 6th, 7th, 8th and 14th May.
115. **Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*
Common and widespread, heard every day except on the 4th May.
116. **Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*
Seen every day except on the 4th and 6th May.
117. **Woodlark** *Lullula arborea*
Heard on the 8th, 9th and 11th May.
118. **Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*
1 or 2 birds singing near Lozen on the 6th and probably at Pomorie on the 9th May.
119. **Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra*
Seen in the Sakar mountains on the 8th and 9th, and between Cape Kaliakra and Durankulak on the 12th and 13th May.
120. **Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*
Common over coastal wetlands.
121. **Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
In the Rila mountains on the 4th and 5th, the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th, Sakar on the 8th and at Cape Kaliakra on the 13th May.
122. **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*
Common.
123. **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica*
3 at Govedartsi on the 4th, also in small numbers on the 6th, in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th, in the Sakar region on the 8th and 9th and at Durankulak on the 12th May.
124. **House Martin** *Delichon urbica*
Common.
125. **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris*
1 at Pomorie on the 9th and 1 at Kamchia on the 11th May.

126. **Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta*
2 at Vitosha on the 5th May.
127. **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*
1 near Topolovo on the 6th May.
128. **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*
Seen every day.
129. **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*
Birds of the *feldegg* race seen near Lozen on the 6th, Pomorie on the 9th, Poda on the 10th, Kamchia on the 11th, Durankulak on the 12th and 13th. About 15 birds, probably of the race *flava* at Mandra on the 10th May. Others apparently *dumbrowskii* near Srebarna on the 14th May.
130. **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*
In the Rila mountains on the 4th, 5th and 6th May.
131. **Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*
In the Rila mountains on the 5th and 6th May.
132. **Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus*
In the Rila mountains on the 4th and 5th May.
133. **Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*
At Vitosha on the 5th May and near Govedartsi on the 6th May.
134. **Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*
Seen most days.
135. **Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*
Heard every day.
136. **Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*
1 male at Goritsa on the 11th May.
137. **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*
In the Rila mountains and Vitosha on the 4th, 5th and 6th May.
138. **Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*
Seen near Cerven on the 6th, in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th and in the Sakar region on the 8th May.
139. **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina*
1 near Lozen on the 6th, several in the Sakar region on the 8th and 9th and 2 near Burgas Lake on the 10th May.
140. **Eastern Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe melanoleuca*
1 in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
141. **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka*
Abundant around Cape Kaliakra and Bolata on the 13th May.
142. **Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra*
Small groups of migratory birds near Lozen on the 6th, at Pomorie on the 9th, at Durankulak on the 12th and Cape Kaliakra on the 13th May.
143. **Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata*
Seen in the Eastern Rhodopes, the Sakar region, at Durankulak and Cape Kaliakra, and near Srebarna.

144. **Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius*
2 birds in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
145. **Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis*
2 at Vitosha on the 5th and 1 near Topolovo on the 6th May.
146. **Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*
Common in the Rila mountains on the 5th and 6th and along the northern Black Sea coast from the 11th to the 14th May.
147. **Blackbird** *Turdus merula*
Common throughout.
148. **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus*
4 at Vitosha on the 5th and 1 near Govedartsi on the 6th May.
149. **Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria*
1 displaying bird in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th, 1 near Mandra Lake on the 10th and 1-2 migrants at Shabla Lake on the 12th May.
150. **Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin*
1 singing near Srebarna on the 14th May.
151. **Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*
Common.
152. **Orphean Warbler** *Sylvia (hortensis) crassirostris*
Has this been split or not? Singing birds in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th, and in the Sakar region on the 8th and 9th May.
153. **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*
Single (probably) migrant birds at Poda on the 10th, Balchik on the 12th and Bolata on the 13th May.
154. **Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis*
Common.
155. **Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
2 at Poda on the 10th May.
156. **Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides*
Singing birds at Durankulak on the 12th and 13th and Srebarna on the 14th May.
157. **Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*
1 in the Rila mountains on the 5th and 1 at Burgas Lake on the 10th May.
158. **Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*
1 by river in Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th, common at Poda on the 10th and at Durankulak and Srebarna lakes.
159. **Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris*
1 singing at Durankulak on the 13th May.
160. **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola*
Approximately 5 birds at Durankulak (3-4 singing) on the 12th May.
161. **Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*
Recorded at all wetlands except in the Rila mountains.
162. **Icterine Warbler** *Hippolais icterina*

- 1 migrant at Cape Kaliakra on the 13th May.
163. **Olive-tree Warbler** *Hippolais olivetorum*
Several in the Sakar region on the 8th and 9th May.
164. **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida*
1 in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May, fairly frequent thereafter.
165. **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*
1 or 2 migrants on the coast on the 12th and 13th and 1 at Srebarna on the 14th May.
166. **Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*
1 singing in Goritsa forest on the 11th May.
167. **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus orientalis*
Singing birds in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th and in the Sakar region on the 9th May.
168. **Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*
Heard in the Rila mountains, the Eastern Rhodopes and in the Sakar region from the 5th to 9th May.
169. **Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*
2+ Singing at Vitosha on the 5th May.
170. **Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapillus*
Singing in the Rila mountains on the 5th and 6th May.
171. **Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*
Singles at Durankulak on the 12th and at Bolata on the 13th May.
172. **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva*
1 female at Balchik on the 11th, migrant fall at Durankulak and Shabla lakes on the 12th (the most common passerine migrant) and a few at Cape Kaliakra on the 13th May.
173. **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis*
A pair of migrants at Shabla Lake on the 12th May.
174. **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata*
1 male in the Rila mountains on the 5th, and a singing male in Goritsa forest on the 11th May.
175. **Great Tit** *Parus major*
Common.
176. **Coal Tit** *Parus ater*
Common in the Rila mountains and Vitosha on the 4th, 5th and 6th May.
177. **Blue Tit** *Parus caeruleus*
Seen in all regions except the Eastern Rhodopes.
178. **Marsh Tit** *Parus palustris*
1 singing at Kamchia on the 11th May.
179. **Willow Tit** *Parus montanus*
2 in the Rila mountains on the 5th May.
180. **Sombre Tit** *Parus lugubris*
1 in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
181. **Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caedatus*
Heard in the Rila mountains on the 5th and seen at Kamchia on the 11th May.

182. **Bearded Reedling** *Panurus biarmicus*
Several at Durankulak on the 12th and 1 there on the 13th May.
183. **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus*
Heard at Mandra Lake on the 9th and 10th and at Srebarna on the 14th May.
184. **Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*
Heard in the Rila mountains, between Sakar and Burgas and at Kamchia.
185. **Rock Nuthatch** *Sitta neumayer*
2 nests with adult birds in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
186. **Short-toed Treecreeper** *Certhia brachydactyla*
Recorded in the Rila mountains, near Burgas and at Kamchia and Balchik.
187. **Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*
Common in open areas with bushes.
188. **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator*
Seen in small numbers from the 6th to the 10th May.
189. **Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus*
1 singing male in the Sakar region on the 8th May.
190. **Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor*
Single bird near Kardjali on the 6th, several in the Sakar region on the 8th and 9th, and then fairly regularly from the 12th to 14th May in the Durankulak and Srebarna areas.
191. **Magpie** *Pica pica*
Common.
192. **Jay** *Garrulus glandarius*
Common in wooded areas.
193. **Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes*
1 or 2 at Vitoshka on the 5th and 12+ near Govedartsy on the 6th May.
194. **Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*
Small numbers seen most days.
195. **Rook** *Corvus frugilegus*
Seen on 3 days in the Rila and Rhodopes areas.
196. **Hooded Crow** *Corvus corone cornix*
Common.
197. **Raven** *Corvus corax*
Seen in the Rila and Rhodopes mountain areas.
198. **Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*
Common.
199. **Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus*
Common in all areas except the Rila mountains.
200. **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*
Common.
201. **Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis*

Common in all areas except the Rila mountains.

202. **Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*
Seen every day.
203. **Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*
Common.
204. **Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina*
A few in the Sakar region on the 8th and at Cape Kaliakra on the 13th May.
205. **Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*
Common.
206. **Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*
Common.
207. **European Serin** *Serinus serinus*
Seen on the 4th, 6th and 8th May.
208. **Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*
A few in the Rila mountains on the 5th and 6th May.
209. **Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
Seen on the 6th, and from the 8th to 11th May.
210. **Common Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*
A few in the Rila mountains from the 4th to the 6th May.
211. **Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*
A few at Durankulak on the 12th and 13th May.
212. **Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*
Common near Topolovo on the 6th, and frequent in semi-open areas from the 7th to 10th May.
213. **Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*
Several in the mountains near Cerven on the 6th May.
214. **Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus*
Small numbers seen most days.
215. **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala*
Seen frequently from the 7th May onwards.
216. **Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia*
1 singing in the mountains near Cerven on the 6th, also seen in the Eastern Rhodopes on the 7th May.
217. **Corn Bunting** *Miliaria calandra*
Seen every day.

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