

SPATIA WILDLIFE



2014

Nature holidays and wildlife photography tours

Welcome to our new brochure, displaying a selection of our tours for 2014. While we are currently experiencing another successful year, we are already looking excitedly forward to the next one. Since last autumn we have made a number of recces and developed some exhilarating new tours. These will be to Georgia – to witness the world's most spectacular autumn raptor migration, and a spring visit for its Caucasian specialties. To Kuwait with its fantastic wintering and migrating birds. Then there is our trip to wild Mongolia where we now have an excellent itinerary, giving best chances for the local specialties and migrants. At home, in Bulgaria, we will have a new tour focused on watching two of the most elusive species in Europe – Hazel Grouse and Rock Partridge. On the butterfly front, we have a tour especially devoted to the beautiful Cynthia's Fritillary and Bosnian Blue. Plus, new tours to Turkey and Jordan. Surely enough to whet your wildlife appetites.

However there is much more. To top it all (and it is really on the top of the world) stands our planned cruise to the unique Wrangel Island, in the Russian Arctic's Chukchi Sea. To be on Wrangel is a dream of mine; as a child it was the first place I ever wanted to visit after I watched a Russian documentary about this stunning island. Since that moment I have yearned to be there. Wrangel is a truly amazing place; expect to see tens or even hundreds of polar bears, also Polar foxes, Musk Oxen, walruses and seals, whales, etc. Top birds will be the three most beautiful gulls – Ross's, Sabine's and Ivory; Tufted and Horned puffins, Snowy Owl and many more. Unlike any tours that have been so far we will spend more than a week there, giving us plenty of time to photograph the wonderful wildlife, birds, plants and landscape or simply watch and let dreams come to life.

We hope you will enjoy our brochure and better still some of our tours next year. Please note that not all the tours are listed in the brochure, so for the full program please visit our website – **www.spatiawildlife.com**

Best regards,
Dobromir Domuschiev

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Saturday 8th – Saturday 15th February 2014



Because of its mild winter, the Bulgarian Black Sea coast is a haunt for many birds, which winter here in their thousands. For several species Bulgaria is the best place to see them, especially during this time of the year. Foremost among them is the spectacular Red-breasted Goose. In January and February almost the whole world's population is concentrated here. Other attractive species wintering in big numbers are the Pygmy Cormorant, the White-headed Duck and the Dalmatian Pelican. Additionally we have a good chance for real rarities, such as Lesser White-fronted Goose and Spotted Eagle. Even the Great Black-headed Gull is possible as we usually observe several birds every February around the Burgas wetlands. We expect well over 100 bird species in our checklist. This holiday will be on a relaxing pace, with only two hotels to be used.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Burgas airport and short transfer to our hotel, where we stay the next three nights.

DAYS 2 and 3 We spend both days exploring Burgas wetlands which are important Ramsar sites and IBAs. We will also visit some wetlands further south. Meanwhile we enjoy viewing species like Pygmy Cormorant, Dalmatian Pelican, White-headed Duck, Smew, Red-crested Pochard, Pintail, Spoonbill, White-tailed Eagle, Bittern etc. Great Black-headed Gull is also possible. Some early waders such as Sanderling, Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank and Curlew will be already arrived. The deciduous forests around the lakes can provide several species of woodpeckers – Grey-headed, Syrian, Middle and Lesser Spotted and other birds, such as Sombre Tit, Hawfinch, Cirl Bunting etc. The wetlands support a healthy population of Common Otters and the winter is the best time to see them out in the open.

DAY 4 After breakfast we head north, with several stops and lunch on the way. Goritsa hills will provide opportunity for woodpeckers, including White-backed and Black plus other woodland birds. Late in the afternoon we reach Duralnkulak village where we will stay the next four nights.

DAYS 5 to 7 These days we will explore Duralnkulak and Shabla lakes, as well as the sur-

rounding wheat fields where the geese feed. Beside our main goal – the Red-breasted Goose flocks, we will carefully check the White-fronted geese flocks as it may reward us with Lesser White-fronted Goose. Other birds will be Bean and Greylag geese, Black-necked and Red-necked grebes, Black-throated and Red-throated divers, Syrian Woodpecker, Rough-legged and Long-legged buzzards, Hen Harrier, White-tailed Eagle, Goshawk, Merlin, Peregrine and the powerful Saker Falcon. We also stand a good chance for the Spotted Eagle. Passerines will include Bearded Reedling, Moustached Warbler,

Calandra and Crested larks, Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting, Hawfinch and many more. We will also visit some rocky areas in order to find the majestic Eagle Owl.

DAY 8 Three and a half hours transfer brings us to Burgas airport for your flight back home. En-route, we shall have few more birding stops. Departure.

NOTE: This tour is also possible to start/end at Varna Airport! You may also consider our Red-breasted Geese weekend.



Black-necked Grebe

Ground price: 720 EUR / £ 635

Group size: 4-12 + leader

Single supplement: 115 EUR

Deposit: 250 EUR

Individuals: 2-3 + leader

Ground price: 780 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.



Red-breasted geese

Hazel Grouse and Rock Partridge

Sunday 6th – Saturday 12th April 2014



Two of the most elusive bird species in Europe are the Hazel Grouse and the Rock Partridge. Their hidden nature, especially outside the breeding season, well camouflaged plumage and often the inaccessible habitat mean that they are among the least seen species on the continent.

Both have good populations in Bulgaria. The Rock Partridge, although declining, has about 800 pairs. Here they inhabit the rocky mountain slopes from 700 meters above the sea level in Western Bulgaria, while the Eastern part of the country is occupied by their cousin – the Chukar. The Hazel Grouse is more numerous – about 3000 pairs and they prefer mature woodlands with rich undergrowth.

Best time to see both species is in the beginning of their breeding season, or early April. On our tour we will visit two mountain ranges searching for our targets – the Balkan range in central Bulgaria and the Rhodope Mountain in the south.

In order to increase our chances for good observations, the tour participants are restricted to seven plus leader. We will have two full days to find each of our targets and in total we expect to record 100 + birds species, including migrants in good numbers. This will be a relaxing holiday, with only two bases.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Sofia airport and transfer to the village of Koprivshitsa – an architectural reserve, nestled in Sredna Gora mountain, at two hours drive east of Sofia. Upon arrival and check-in, short walk in the surroundings, just before dinner. Accommodation for three nights in small family hotel.

DAYS 2 and 3 We will explore the nearest slopes of Stara Planina (Old Mountain), the main mountain range in Bulgaria and one that holds a considerable part of the Bulgarian Rock Partridge population. Our strategy will be to approach quietly their territories in the area, trying to locate the birds by their calls or movements. Afterwards, we will spend some time watching them in order to get really good views as eventually the birds might come to an open area allowing full view. We will need to have some walking, up to a mile or so, but this will be on relatively flat, dirt road. The area is very good for birding in general, especially for raptors and woodpeckers and we will give it a good search once we are sorted with the Rock Partridges. Species we may find are Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle, Goshawk, Long-legged Buzzard, Hen Harrier and Peregrine plus

more common species such as Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Common Buzzard. Woodpeckers may well include 7 out of the 10 European species – namely Black, Grey-headed, Lesser Spotted, Middle Spotted, Great Spotted, Syrian and Green! Other bird species are Black Stork, Sombre Tit, Rock Bunting, Cirl Bunting, Black Redstart, Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Crossbill, Goldcrest, Short-toed Treecreeper etc.

DAY 4 Today we will move to our second base, the village of Mostovo, in the heart of the Rhodope mountain. On the way we will visit a reservoir where we can see many migrating storks, ducks, waders, passerines and raptors. Arrival at the small family hotel where we will spend the next 3 nights of the holiday late in the afternoon.

DAYS 5 and 6 Both days we will explore the woodlands nearby trying to locate the Hazel grouses by their calls, and then we will approach them to get closer views. We have to be quiet when doing so, as this will maximize our chances. The area is also good for Rock Partridge, so we will have second chance here. Other species we expect are Black Woodpecker, Sombre Tit, Rock Bunting, Alpine Swift, Black Redstart, Black Stork, Long-legged Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Per-

egrine etc. Mammals we can see include Red Squirrel, Suslick, Beech Marten, Chamois, Red and Roe Deer. We may even see some footprints of Brown bears.

DAY 7 Two and a half hours will bring us at the airport for your flight back home. If time allows we will have some birding en-route.



Rock Partridge



Grey-headed Woodpecker

Ground price: 780 EUR / £ 690

Group size: 4-7 + leader

Single supplement: 120 EUR

Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Kuwait's Wetlands and Deserts

Wednesday 9th – Wednesday 16th April 2014

Saturday 24th – Saturday 31st January 2015



The small state of Kuwait, situated on the north-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, lies at the very south-eastern edge of the Western Palearctic, but also on two major migration routes – Eurasia to Africa and Turkey to India.

Because of it and despite its small size and landscape being mainly a sandy desert, Kuwait is a great place to go birding and one put on the birding map relatively recently. For a few species Kuwait is the only place they are to be found within the Western Palearctic – Grey Hypocolios, Lesser Sandplover, Red-vented Bulbul, Bank Myna, Afghan Babbler and White-eared Bulbul. Beside these, many other highlights are around – Crab Plover, Greater Sand Plover, Socotra Cormorant, Red-wattled Lapwing, Greater Crested Tern, Bridled Tern, White-cheeked Tern, Egyptian Nightjar, Grey-headed Swamphen, Dunn's Lark, Black-crowned Sparrow-lark, Common Babbler, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Menetries's Warbler, Upcher's Warbler, Daurian, Turkestan and Steppe Grey shrikes, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Pale Rock Sparrow, Cinereous Bunting, Persian Wheatear and many more.

The coastline holds considerable amount of waders, along with the best three listed above – also Terek, Marsh, Broad-billed Sandpipers, Red-necked Phalarope; gulls – Greater Black-headed, Armenian, Slender-billed and various races of the Lesser Black-backed. The even smaller reedbeds can reveal virtually everything possible in the area, including alongside view of the three 'great' warblers – Great reed, Clamorous and Basra. On our recce trip we have seen 15 + specimens of the 3 crane species, plus the water rail within 50 sq. meters!

The oases and small farms scattered throughout the adjacent deserts will also bring a lot of goodies – White-throated Robin, Persian and quite a few other wheatears, and numerous other passerines. Raptors will include both Levant Sparrowhawk and Shikra, Pallid Harrier and Great Spotted Eagle. And there is always a chance for the Pallid Scops Owl. We can expect over 150 species in just a week. The beginning of April is the time when the migration is in full force, while we may still catch up with many of the wintering birds some of which are still in the area. It will be already warm, but not too hot, around 30 Celsius or so. This will require early starts, but we can return to the hotel for siesta in some of the days. The hotel we have chosen is located at the edge of the city and to reach most the sites we will have very little driving through the traffic. It is not only perfectly situated near one of the major wetlands, but also has a swimming pool - a valuable asset in the middle of the day and in between excellent morning and afternoon birding sessions.

ITINERARY

We will have six full days to explore Kuwait and each day we will go to different areas. However, some of the sites along the coast and wetlands near the hotel we will visit more than once and it also depends on the tides times. The furthest site requires not more than hour and a half drive to be reached.

The city itself is a place where we will look for the Grey Hypocolios, Red-vented Bulbul and the Bank Myna, plus there will be many other migrating birds – Pied Wheatear, various subspecies of Yellow Wagtails, Red-throated Pipits and Ortolan Bunting which can be seen feeding on every tiny patch of green grass. All these can be found at the Green Island, Jahra City Park and Jahra Fields.

The coast will produce most of what we will see in within the holiday – Sulaibikhat Bay, Jahra pools, Jahra east outfalls, Doha spit and Doha south are all excellent spots for birding, both in spring and winter. Gulls, waders – Terek, Marsh and curlew sandpipers, also Red-necked phalaropes, Gull-billed terns, even raptors migrating through Spotted Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Levant Sparrowhawk. The few fresh water wetlands and the outfalls will add even more species – warblers, crakes and more of the waders commoner to us. The adjacent fields will reveal Upcher's Warbler, Steppe Grey and Daurian Shrikes, Eastern Orphean and Lesser Whitethroat warblers and more raptors.

We will also visit the small Abdali farms further north, near the Iraq border and here we will be

looking for Afgan and Common Babbler, as well as many migrants – White-throated Robin, Masked Shrike, Semi-collared and Red-breasted flycatchers, Bush Chat, Pallid Harrier, Graceful Prinia and both Daurian and Turkestan Shrikes. A trip to the south will allow us to see Socotra Cormorant, as well as few tern species – Bridled, White-cheeked, Greater and Lesser Crested Terns.

Another day we will drive westwards into the desert and another small farm (Wafra) nested among the sands – it is amazing to see such a variety of birds clustered in such a small piece of greenery – Montague's and Pallid harriers will glide gracefully above small onion plantations, Shikra and Levant Sparrowhawk will dash into the bigger trees where Pallid Scops Owl can sometimes be found. Here we can also look for the 'Waxwing of the south' - Grey Hypocolios. The bushes around can hold an amazing variety – from White-throated Robin to Siberian Chiffchaff. The adjacent deserts we will check for various larks, Quail and Blue-cheeked Be-eaters.

The desert itself supports an amazing number of grazing animals which appear to be feeding on sand, as there is almost no vegetation. Camels, sheep and goats, as well as some good Arab horses can be seen almost everywhere. Relatively recently some large areas have been fenced so no grazing is allowed and the vegetation there is recovering – a green and yellow carpet as far as you can see.

Some of the sites require permits to be visited and for those will apply shortly before our visit. In

any case there are enough sites we can visit and some of them we will visit several times as during the migration - things change very quickly. One annoying thing among all that pleasure of birding at such a place is the shooting. There are a number of ignorant locals who would shoot everything that flies and good numbers of birds are killed this way. However, ecotourism and birdwatching is one of the best ways to diminish and actually stop such dreadful practices and there are already signs that it also works in Kuwait. Otherwise the people in Kuwait are very friendly and open to Westerners and it seems it is not only the Gulf war to be the reason.

Ground price: 1,850 EUR / £ 1,610

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 280 EUR

Deposit: 300 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, visa, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Lithuania's Woodpeckers and Owls

Sunday 6th – Sunday 13th April 2014



Lithuania is a country in Northern Europe, the largest of the three Baltic states. It borders Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east and south, Poland to the south. Lithuania's terrain is an alternation of moderate lowlands and highlands; its maximum elevation is 294 metres (965 ft) in the eastern part of the country. Relief in the southern, eastern and western Lithuania is hilly with many lakes – about 4,000. Thirty percent of its territory is covered with forests. Dry pine forests predominate and continue along all southern-eastern part of Lithuania. Spruce forests predominate in the western part. In central Lithuania, in the region of lowlands, lay wet deciduous and mixed forests with spruce.

Large parts of the forests are mature woodlands, home to rich wildlife – birds and mammals. Most of the European species of woodpeckers can be found here, all in quite good numbers. The rarest one is the Three-toed Woodpecker, with about 100 pairs. Another bird family which is found in the woodlands is the owls, although not all the European species are represented here. Still, there are 10 species in Lithuania, including some of the rare ones – Ural Owl with about 30 pairs, Pygmy Owl with 150 and Boreal Owl which is common in its habitats (300-500 pairs).

Our tour is focused on these three rare owls and the woodpeckers – Three-toed, White-backed, Black, Grey-headed, Middle and Lesser Spotted. The first half of April is the prime time when all these species are best to be found and beside them we will see many other woodland birds, raptors and mammals.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Vilnius airport and 2 and ½ hours drive to our first base for two nights. The hotel is in the old town of Kedainiai settlement. The area has very rich wildlife and the highest density of White-backed woodpecker. Moose, Roe deer, Red fox, Wild Boar and Eurasian Bison are also present in the area.

DAY 2 After breakfast we will move to the north (about 80km) to reach the Sabacius forest, where the local ranger will join us. The area is very diverse, conifer patches are mixed with Adler and Birch trees. We will explore the woodlands for Pygmy Owl, Black, Lesser and Middle Spotted and Three-toed woodpeckers. The area is good place for Hazel Grouse as well. The Roe Deer, Red squirrel, Pine marten, Raccoon Dog and Red fox can be spotted on our short walks. In the afternoon we will stop at the Lanciunava forest IBA. Good spot for woodpeckers, Cranes and some waterfowl and Marsh Harriers.

DAY 3 Today we will move further north and



Three-toed Woodpecker

our next base is at the border with Latvia, the town of Birzai where we will stay for two nights. We will break the journey with a few walks, looking for Hazel Grouse and woodpeckers. Evening walks in the forest if weather permits, listening for Tawny, Ural and Pygmy owls. The forest has a large diversity of mammals, which are active mainly before dusk and after sunset, so we can expect Moose, Roe and Red Deers, Beavers, Raccoon dogs, Red Fox. There are Lynx and Wolves in the area but we will be extremely lucky to spot them.

DAY 4 The whole day will be spent in the woodlands around, looking for woodpeckers – White-backed, Grey-headed, both Middle and Lesser Spotted. Beside our main targets we may also see Goshawk, Rough-legged Buzzard, Spotted Nutcracker, Hawfinch, Crossbill, Bulfinch and many more.

DAY 5 Today we will drive (2-3 h drive depends on the birds and mammals we spot on the way) to our last base for the holiday – a large National park – Aukstaitijos NP. En-route we will have several stops for Common Cranes and Black Grouse. Despite early in the season we may be lucky to find the first Black Storks which have arrived from their wintering grounds. Forests and groves are home for pine martens, beech martens, weasels, stoats, polecats and Eurasian badger. Otters, European and American minks keep closer to the water pools. Populations of the wild boar and roe deer are rather big and constant.

DAYS 6 and 7 Both days we will explore the spruce forests of Boreal Owl, Pygmy Owl and Three-toed Woodpecker. Other birds will be Great Snipe, Capercaillie, Nutcracker, Willow and Crested Tit, Crossbill and Treecreeper. Also Black-throated Diver, Black-necked Grebe, Black Stork, Osprey, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Merlin, Stock Dove, Little Gull and Ruff.

DAY 8 Three and a half hours of driving to the airport and departure. If time permits we can stop here and there, 12 km from Vilnius there is one more site for Three-toed woodpecker.

NOTE: This tour will require easy to moderate walking and you need to be reasonably fit for it. Last year we had snow until end of April. Some days we will walk on forest trails, it might be wet, with some snow, but the snow is normally melted away by the mid April when the tour takes place. So good walking boots are a must, warm clothes too. Weather shall be also favorable but if not we can be flexible and have some minor changes in the itinerary to make the most of the tour.



Ural Owl

Ground price: 995 EUR / £ 865

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 140 EUR

Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Georgia in Spring – semi-deserts and high Caucasus

Saturday 19th – Sunday 27th April 2014



The small state of Georgia is situated between the Black and Caspian seas, south of Russia, with most of its territory occupied by the mighty Caucasus. The vast and seemingly numerous rocky peaks with snowy caps are rough and beautiful. It is a tough land, with tough people but wonderful to explore, moreover not many birders have been here yet. Still there is a rich variety of very different habitats in the rest of the country – from wet forests and wetlands to steppes and semi-deserts. Thus the country offers excellent birding and for some of the species here it is one of the very few places in the Western Palearctic where they can be seen – namely the Caucasian Snowcock, the Caucasian Black Grouse, the Great Rosefinch and the beautiful Giuldenstadt's Redstart. These four are not easy to see and would normally require a lot of walking, or better trekking, throughout most of the year to catch sight of them. However, our tour is designed to coincide with a short time window in the spring when the birds can be seen more easily, as they are much lower down than their breeding sites, forced to be there by the thick snow cover which still blocks them. To find them, we will be based in the village of Stepantsimnda, at 1800 meters a.s.l - the best location in Georgia to find it's Caucasian specialties; and close to Kazbegi peak, one of the highest in the Caucasus at 5033 meters.

Before it we will visit few wetlands and semi-deserts in the south of the country, where the birdlife is very different. We expect to record over 140 bird species on this tour.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Tbilisi airport and check-in in a city hotel for our first three nights of the tour. We can rest after the flight, have city sight-seeing tour as Tbilisi many old churches and historical buildings are well worth a visit, or start straight with the birding.

DAYS 2 and 3 Both days we will explore various habitats from Tbilisi - David Gareja and a couple of wetlands near to the Azerbaijan border. Migration will be in full force, with most of the local breeders already on site, so we expect Demoiselle cranes, Armenian Gull, cranes, various terns, Rollers, Bee-eaters (Blue-cheeked is also possible), terns, waders, Pygmy Cormorant; also Citrine Wagtail, Eastern Orphee, Barred and Paddyfield Warblers, Western Rock Nuthatch, Isabelline, Black-eared, Pied and Finch's wheatears, Red-rumped Swallow, Red-footed Falcon, Black, Griffon and Egyptian vultures, Long-legged Buzzard and many more.

DAY 4 Today we will move north and a five hours drive will bring us at Stepantsimnda village, where will stay the next 4 nights. En-route we will break the journey with several stops which will provide Rock Thrush, Wryneck, White-winged Snowfinch, Chough, the local

race of the Common Buzzard (*menetrieze*) etc. Already in the village we will check-in and if there is enough time, go birdwatching nearby.

DAYS 5 to 8 These days we will explore surroundings slopes, ridges, river valleys and patches of bushes. Our main targets here are the four Caucasian specialties – Snowcock and Grouse, as well as Great Rosefinch and Giuldenstadt's Redstart. Hopefully, the slopes above us will be still covered by snow, so we can find the first two species very close to the village, while the other two can even be seen in the village. In any case we have secured enough time and shall have good views of all four species. Along with them we will also see other species, some of them no less attractive at all. The slopes of the Caucasus are constantly patrolled by the majestic Lammergeyers and one pair breeds nearby the village. The beautiful Red-fronted serins are around too, as well as the Wallcreepers, Alpine Accentors and the smart local race of the Black redstart - *semirufus*. Also, large flocks of both species of choughs, numerous Water pipits, Twites and Ring Ouzels. Many migrants can turn up – Mountain (or Caucasian) Chiffchaff, Red-throated Pipit, Thrush Nightingale, White-throated Robin, Red-breasted Flycatcher, even Corncrake and Quail were recorded on our recce trip. Raptors we will see are



Giuldenstäd's Redstart

Golden eagle, Steppe Eagle, Peregrine, Pallid, Montague's and Hen harriers, Short-toed eagle, Goshawk etc. On the slopes we can see the East Caucasian Tur.

In case our return flight is early one, on day 8 in the afternoon we will drive towards Tbilisi where we will overnight.

DAY 9 Birding in the morning, as much as our time permits. Than catch the return flight home.



Caucasian Black Grouse

Ground price: 1,580 EUR / £ 1,380

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 210 EUR

Deposit: 300 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, visa, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Bulgaria in Spring

Tuesday 6th – Saturday 17th May 2014



This tour is specially prepared to show you the best of the Bulgarian birdlife under an optimal time schedule. You will arrive at Varna airport and thus our tour will start from the north Black sea coast where we will catch many of the northern migrants. After it we will drive down to the south sea coast to explore the wetlands here for more migrant and breeding birds. The second half of our tour will be spend into the mountains of south Bulgaria where the late breeders have already arrived. Our tour will end up at Vitosha Mountain, and your departure flight will be from Sofia airport. We are going to see more than 200 species, including some of the rarest European and Bulgarian specialties – Olive-tree and Paddyfield warblers, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Isabelline and Pied wheatears, Wallcreeper, Black-headed Bunting, Long-legged Buzzard, Imperial eagle and the Levant Sparrowhawk. There will be plenty of opportunities to see butterflies, plants and magnificent scenery.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Varna airport and transfer to Shabla lake. Next three nights we will accommodate in hotel next to the lake, an excellent location to explore the area next two days. If time permits birding around.

DAY 2 Today we will explore both Durankulak and Shabla lakes at our leisure. Here we can see Paddyfield, Savi's, Great Reed, Marsh, Reed, Cetti's and other warblers, Caspian, marsh and Little terns, Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis, Ferruginous Duck, Squacco Heron, Lesser Grey Shrike, Bearded Reedling, waders, Garganey and many more. Forests around the lakes will provide Lesser Spotted and Syrian woodpeckers, Spotted and Red-breasted flycatchers, Hawfinch and Golden Oriole.

DAY 3 We devote the day to the area around cape Kaliakra – the last remaining steppe habitat in Bulgaria. It is a place for Pied Wheatear, Roller, Short-toed and Calandra larks, Black-headed Bunting, Stone Curlew, Long-legged Buzzard and Shag. Here we can enjoy the last migrating Red-footed falcons, flying just around us. Despite a bit early in the season Rose-coloured starlings are also possible. At the end we will visit the nearby river valley where we have good chance for Eagle owls family. Back to Shabla for our last overnight here.

DAY 4 After breakfast we head south. We will have several stops on the way mainly in forest habitat where we can see several species of woodpeckers as well as Semi-collared Flycatcher, Wood and Boneli's warblers, Booted and Lesser Spotted eagles, Short-toed Treecreeper, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Hawfinch and many more. Overnight just outside of Burgas for the next four nights.

DAYS 5 and 6 Both days we will explore the Burgas wetlands – Ramsar and IBA sites. Here we can observe Terek, Broad-billed, Wood, Marsh and Curlew sandpipers, Red-necked Phalarope, Little and Temminck's stints, Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Dalmatian and White pelicans, Gull-billed, Black, White-winged and Whiskered terns, Mediterranean and Slender-billed gulls; Ruddy Shelduck, Little Bittern, Penduline Tit and Bearded Reedling, Olivaceous Warbler, Black Stork and many more.

DAY 7 We drive south to Strandja Mountain looking for woodpeckers – White-backed, Grey-headed, Middle and Lesser Spotted, as well as other woodland birds – treecreepers, Cirl Bunting, Hawfinch. Nightjar is also very possible. On our way we will visit coastal wetland for more waders, herons, terns, gulls, Pygmy Cormorant, White-tailed Eagle, Hobby, Garganey, Little Grebe and many others.

DAY 8 Today we have long transfer to Eastern Rhodopi mountain. We will have one main stop on the way – the site is optimal for Olive-tree Warbler, Masked Shrike, Cirl Bunting, Calandra and Short-toed larks. Lesser Spotted Eagle, Egyptian Vulture and Black Stork are also here. Late in the evening we arrive in our hotel near the town of Krumovgrad, where we stay the next two nights.

DAY 9 We will explore the nearby Krumovitsa river valley and here we will enjoy Rock Nuthatch, Orphean, Sardinian and Olive-tree warblers, Nightingale, Black Stork, Levant Sparrowhawk, Black-eared Wheatear (both western and eastern races), Wryneck, Roller, Rock and Blue Rock thrushes, Chukar and many others. Great Spotted Cuckoo is also possible. Late in the evening, after dinner we look for the tiny Scops Owl in the poplar trees around our hotel.

DAY 10 After a breakfast we head west and after about four hours transfer we reach Trigrad gorge – a magnificent area, the best place for watching the Wallcreeper. We will have several stops on the way and once in the gorge we will look for the Wallcreeper. Late afternoon walk can provide Rock Bunting, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Bulfinch, Serin and Black Redstart. Overnight in family hotel in the village of Trigrad.

DAY 11 We will spend the morning looking for the Wallcreepers in the gorge and other birds will be Alpine Swift, Grey Wagtail, Crag Martin, Dipper, Rock Bunting, Black Redstart, Honey Buzzard and Peregrine. Afterwards we drive north and reach hilly area next to the Rhodopi Mountain where we can see Imperial Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Stone Curlew, Isabelline Weather, Woodchat Shrike, Bee-eaters and many others. Late in the afternoon we drive to Vitosha mountain, right next to Sofia city, where we accommodate in a hotel situated on the mountain slopes.



Red-breasted Flycatcher

DAY 12 In the morning we will look around for Nutcracker, Ring Ouzel, Water Pipit, Pallid Swift and other birds and latter on we drive to Sofia Airport for your back flight. Departure.

Ground price: 995 EUR / £ 875

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 170 EUR

Deposit: 250 EUR

Individuals: 3-5 + leader

Ground price: 1,130 EUR

The price includes:
ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:
airfare, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Birding Turkey

Saturday 10th – Monday 19th May 2014



Turkey is a huge country, situated on two continents, on the eastern edge of the Western Palearctic, and thus offering a great and spectacular birdwatching. A huge country means a big distances, but our itinerary has excellent logistic we believe and the total driving is about 2 000 km. Within the tour we will be focused on central, eastern Mediterranean and south-eastern regions. We will start and end our tour in the southern town of Adana, with a flight change in Istanbul. We are going to visit deltas, coastal lagoons and high mountains (up to 2 600 m.a.s.l) in order to get the local specialties. And what birds they are! – White-throated Robin, Red-fronted Serin, Dead Sea Sparrow, Iraq Babbler, Caspian Snowcock, See-see Partridge, Cinereous Bunting, Desert Finch, Trumpeter Finch, Pale Rock Sparrow, Kurdish Wheatear, Rufous Bush Robin, Black Francolin and many more. Good number of other wildlife and plants will be also recorded as we will visit variable habitats.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Adana airport and drive to Tasucu (about 2 hours), where we accommodate in the sea view hotel. Depending on the arrival time, there is a chance to explore the nearest parts of the delta, a few kilometers from our hotel. Stay overnight for three nights.

DAY 2 Early morning start to Goksu Delta, which is a prime habitat for wetland birds. With over 335 species that have been recorded here, it is the most famous place for birdwatching in Turkey. We will explore the wetland for our primary species here – Marbled Teal, Grey-headed Purple Gallinule, Black Francolin and Mustached Warbler. Additionally we should be able to find many migrating waders, as well as Audouin's Gull, Collared Pratincole, Spur-winged Plover, Pigmy Cormorant, Ruddy Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard, Bearded Tit, Graceful Prinia, Spectacled (Yellow-vented) Bulbul, pelicans and many different passerines along our route. Keeping our eyes on the sky for Eleonora's Falcon, Long-legged Buzzard and other raptors we'll continue to explore the Goksu Delta the whole day.

DAY 3 After early breakfast we will drive to Uzuncaburc – an area covered by dry maquis scrub and ancient Roman ruins. Here we shall look for eastern Mediterranean species and



Cretzschmar's Bunting



White-winged Snowfinch

our main targets will be Rüppell's Warbler and Cretzschmar's Bunting, but also – Olive-tree, Olivaceous and Orphean warbler, Masked Shrike, Rock Nuthatch, Sombre Tit, Chukar and many more. We will have a picnic in the local pine woods and in the meantime shall enjoy Krüper's Nuthatch, Black-eared Wheatear, Spotted Flycatcher, Hoopoe etc. Time permitting we will continue to explore Goksu Delta in the afternoon. Last stay overnight in Tasucu.

DAY 4 After an early breakfast and morning birding in the marshy area of Goksu Delta, where we can catch up any species we may have missed, we shall head to the north Aladaglar region by crossing the Taurus Mountains. The transfer itself is about 3 hours and upon arrival we accommodate in Safak pension for two nights.

In the afternoon we will start to explore the nearby spectacular gorge and our walk shall produce Red-fronted Serin, White-throated Robin, Rock Sparrow, Chukar, Tawny Pipit, Short-toed Lark as well as the beautiful local race of the Shore Lark – *penicillata*. We shall enjoy our dinner, home made food, with sight-seeing of Demirkazik Peak, and prepare ourselves for early start next morning.

DAY 5 We will have an exceptional birding trip today (optional), with an early start at 04:00 am, and ascend with a tractor or by 4WD to about 2 400 m. a.s.l. depending on seasonal snow level. Getting to our observation point by the first light of the day will allow us to hear and see the elusive Caspian Snowcock calling from the rocky tops above us – a beautiful bird and challenge for every birder. Here we will enjoy our breakfast while watching many other alpine species, including Radde's Accentor, Alpine Accentor, Crimson-winged Finch, Snowfinch and Alpine Chough. Raptors may include Lammergeier, Golden Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard and Peregrine. When ready in the area, we start back with option for several stops on the way down which can produce Ring Ouzel, Red-fronted Serin, Rock Sparrow, Rock Bunting and possibly the Rose-coloured Starling. After a lunch, depending on the time available we can explore the village surroundings or pay a visit to Sultansazligi Nature Reserve, one of the most important breeding areas in the country. A rare ecosystem where salt and fresh waters co-exist, and the only place in Turkey where cranes, flamingos, herons and pelicans breed together. The reserve is a

home to more than 300 different species of which 85 breed here. Back to Safak Pension for our second night here.

DAY 6 In case we had unfavorable weather the previous morning, we shall go back to the same site and try again for Caspian Snowcock and the other alpine species, or alternatively visit another valley for some species we might have missed. If we have seen everything from the area we shall continue to drive south, heading to Osmaniye, Kirmilti Bird Paradise. Yet another spectacular place over Seyhan River which is famous for its kingfishers, heronry and egret colonies. Here we have excellent chance of seeing all three species of kingfishers in the region – namely White-throated Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher and Kingfisher – almost at the same spot. In the afternoon we will have a walk in rocky valey and scrubby area around north-west of Gaziantep where we will look for White-throated Robin, Kurdish Wheatear, Cinereous Bunting, Rock Nuthatch, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Pallid Swift etc. Overnight in Gaziantep, in a city hotel, for one night.

DAY 7 After early breakfast we will check the nearby hills for a collection of specialties which can be seen all in one place, such as Red-tailed (Kurdish) Wheatear, Finsch's Wheatear, Bimaculated Lark, Hill Sparrow (or Pale Rock Sparrow), Cinereous Bunting, possibly the Trumpeter Finch and many other species. This site requires about two miles walk, but we have plenty of time. When ready here, we will head east to the small town of Birecik, situated on the Euphrates river and representing the real Orient. Accomodation for the last three nights. After siesta we shall look around the pistachio orchards just outside the town for Yellow-throated Sparrow, Rufous Bush Robin, Dead Sea Sparrow and Desert Finch. At the edge of the town we will see the local semi-wild Bald Ibis colony and Little Swifts.



Kurdish Wheatear

DAY 8 Pre-breakfast birding along the river just opposite of the hotel where we will search for Iraq Babler, Rufous Bush Chat, Pied Kingfisher, Roller etc. Return for a breakfast and afterwards one hour of driving will bring us to



Cinereous Bunting

another area that is excellent for Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Upcher's Warbler, Black-headed Bunting, See-see Partridge, Oriental Turtle Dove, Bonelli's Eagle and many more. Back to the hotel for lunch and siesta. Afternoon visit to the famous tea garden, where we search for Striated Scops Owl. Latter on we will continue to explore the various habitats along the river, which is a great place for birds. Here we expect to find Dead Sea Sparrow, Desert Finch, Menetries's and Upcher's warblers, Little Swift, Ferruginous Duck, Little Bittern, Pigmy Cormorant, terns and gulls.

DAY 9 Our last full day within the trip we will devote to a spectacular semi-desert reserve where a colony of Cream-colored Courser is regularly seen. See-see Partridge, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Desert Finch, Pale Rock Sparrow, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Finsch's Wheatear and Desert Lark all occur in the same place. In the afternoon option to call at mixed colony of Blue-cheeked and European Bee-eaters. Farewell dinner and last overnight in Birecik.

DAY 10 Three hours of driving bring us to Adana airport, for our connection flight to Istanbul from where we fly back home.

BROWN FISH OWL EXTENSION:

The Brown Fish Owl is one of the most mysteries species in the Western Palearctic. Considered extinct in the region, it was rediscovered very recently when few pairs were located in some difficult to access gorges in Tarsus Mountain in Turkey. Amazingly, just a year ago, by pure luck, few more pairs were found to breed at the cliffs of a large lake near the holiday resort of Antalya. Here, using one of the many boats we will be able to get close enough to get perfect views of probably the least seen species in this part of the world. If you are interested in this option, please ask us for full details. On our last tour we have seen 4 owls.

PACE AND WALKING:

Most days will require pre-birding activities so we will need early morning starts. However, we will also have siestas nearly every day. Fairly easy day walks, except day 7 which needs about four miles walking in total.



Black Francolin

Ground price: 1,395 EUR / £ 1,225

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 195 EUR

Deposit: 300 EUR

Extension: 390 EUR

Single supplement: 60 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, visa, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Wild Mongolia

Monday 12th – Wednesday 28th May 2014

Mongolia is situated in the heart of the great Asian continent, sandwiched between China in the south and Russia in the north. With its size of 1.5 mln sq. kilometers and 2.5 million people, of which one and a half million live in the capital city of Ulan Bator, it is one of the least densely populated countries on the planet. The vast open spaces are a true wilderness, giving you a wonderful feeling of freedom and loneliness. The nature here is shaped by the climate, which except in the spring is nothing but harsh. Bitterly cold winters with temperatures as low as minus 50 and baking hot summers at 50 + Celsius have resulted in huge deserts and steppes with little vegetation. The Himalayas further south also contribute; by receiving all the rains very little precipitation reaches Mongolia's southern parts. Despite this, Mongolia is a home to numerous wildlife and some of the rarest animals in the world are found here – the Gobi bear, the only true wild camels, Snow Leopard, Argali Sheep, Wild Ass and the recently reintroduced Prezhewalski's Horse, which was once extinct in the wild.



To visit Mongolia and watch its wildlife has long been a dream and it came true in June 2013 when I went there on a recce trip. They were a very intensive two weeks, but enough to check all the locations we have planned to visit. Plus some others we discovered while there.

There are two ways of exploring Mongolia in search of its birds – an easy one in June where one can use ger camps and hotels throughout the tour and still see a good variety of local species.

However, there is a second option. It needs to be early in the spring and requires camping in tents throughout most of the tour. We have decided to go for this one. This is not a holiday, but a tour, or better expedition, but the reward is in the form of excellent chances of seeing Mongolia's special birds – Relict Gull, Black-billed Capercaillie, Hodgson's Bush Chat, Oriental and Greater Sand plovers, Altai Snowcock, Asian Dowitcher, Henderson's Ground Jay, Saxaul Sparrow, Siberian Rubbythroat, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Demoiselle and White-napped cranes, Azure Tit, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Saker and Amur falcons and Eastern Marsh Harrier.

We have two reasons to start the tour that early. The first one is the Black-billed Capercaillie. The other few tours that come to Mongolia and its birds are in June – long after lekking is over. Our trip will be there towards the end of the lek, when the birds are still very active. Additionally, on our recce trip last June we located a new site where we can see the Capercaillie with less effort. Most important the forest here is not that dense and we have better chances for proper views, instead of quick glimpses of birds that shoot off. The second reason for the early start of the tour of course are the migrants which pass through Mongolia in early spring and it gives us opportunities to catch up with some special rarities – these can well be Siberian Crane, Baikal and Falcated teals, Red-necked Stint and many more. Along with all those specialties we will also see a number of good birds, not unusual for Europe, but quite rare – Lammergeyer, Wallcreeper, Citrine Wagtail, Taiga Flycatcher etc.

To see all that variety we will visit various habitats – the vast steppe, steppe lakes, taiga forests, sand dunes, saxaul "forest" and rocky gorges. We will need to do some driving in order to cover all these habitats. We expect over 250 birds species to be recorded.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Upon arrival we shall quickly sort out the border formalities at the small airport in UB and less than two hours or so drive will bring us into Gun Galuut National Park, east of the capital city. If there is no need of a rest after the night flight we can visit a couple of wetlands where we will find Demoiselle and White-naped Cranes, the beautiful Goldeneye, Bar-headed Geese, Velvet Scoter, White-winged Black tern and many more. Houbara Bustard may also be seen and if we are lucky enough we can spot the rare Argali sheep. Overnight in a ger or tent camp.

DAY 2 Drive further east for a couple of hours until we reach the taiga edges where we will look for one of the prime species – Black-billed Capercaillie. Stops en-route at a few smaller wetlands which despite being small may need most of the day to be checked carefully. Arrival at the camp late in the afternoon where we will have an early night as the next

day requires very early start. Overnight in a tent camp.

DAY 3 Early morning start as we need to be near the lek as early as possible, best if we arrive while it is still dark. We will try to locate the birds and it needs us to be absolutely quiet. We will also search the forest for Hazel Grouse as well as Red-throated Thrush, Daurian and Common redstarts, woodpeckers, plus Daurian Jackdaw, Olive-backed Pipit, Eyebrowed Thrush and Pine and Meadow buntings in the surrounding meadows, where we will spend the rest of the day.

DAY 4 In case we need another try for the Capercaillie we will do so and when ready will head west, passing UB and our goal is Hustai National Park. On the way we will stop at a couple of sites near UB where we will look for Azure Tit, Fork-tailed Swift, some warblers – Two-barred, Yellow-browed, Pallas's Leaf, Arctic and Dusky, also Brown Shrike etc. Late in the afternoon we will arrive in the national park

where we will stay for one night. If time permits we will explore the park's territory, which is a home to the recently reintroduced Prezhewalski's Horse. The animals have adapted surprisingly well to the extremes of the climate and the predators and there are now more than 70 foals born in the wild. We can see the horses late in the afternoon when they come to drink by the small creeks; with some luck we can also see Mongolian Gazelle and even a Wolf. Driving and walking on the set trails into the park we can see many raptors – Oriental Honey Buzzard, Amur and Saker falcons, Upland and Long-legged buzzards, Black and Beard-ed vultures. Great Bustard is also possible.

DAYS 5 to 12 From now on we will drive west and then south visiting few large lakes and many smaller wetlands in the steppe. We will have rough plan where to stay overnight camping but if there is a need we can be flexible and save or spend an extra night here and there. It depends on what we see and weather of course. Major wetlands will



Daurian Redstart

be Ogiy, Sangiyn Dalay, Orog and Boon Tsagaan lakes plus numerous small ones. We will record many wetland birds - cranes - the very common Demoiselle, White-naped and Common and if lucky we can see the Siberian crane too; Bar-headed, Swan, and Bean geese, Falcated Duck and Baikal teals; Relict, Greater Black-headed, Brown-headed, Mongolian and other gulls, Asian Dowitcher, Red-necked Stint, Citrine Wagtail, Blyth's Pipit, Pallas's Reed Bunting, Paddyfield Warbler, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler plus very many other familiar ducks, grebes, waders, terns and passerines. Raptors will be Pallas's Fish Eagle, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Saker Falcon, Steppe and Golden eagles, Black and Griffon vultures, Black-eared Kite. With some luck we will also find the smart Hogdson Bush Chat. Along the roads we will find many commoner species such as Ruddy Shelduck, Rock Sparrow, Pere David's Finch, Hill Pigeon and many more.

On the evening of day 12 we will arrive at Baga Bogd mountain - one of the many Gobi-Altai ridges. We will drive through most of the day to get there but will break the journey with few birding stops - here we will see the beautiful Pallas's Sandgrouse, it is virtually everywhere and we will carefully look for the even more beautiful Oriental Plovers, also for the Greater Sand Plovers. We will reach the camp in the evening and will accommodate for 2 nights here.



Relict Gull

DAY 13 Today we will have earlier start, and it will be good to wake up as early as possible and explore the picturesque gorge and home of the Altai Snowcock - another Mongolian highlight. Here, unlike most of the sites where this bird is looked after we can see the calling males from the point where our vehicles will bring us. A bit of a climb however, half a mile walk and ascend about 200 meters or so will bring us even near to the displaying males and we can enjoy their gentle whistling calls, watch them feeding and eventually one will fly above us, crossing the narrow gorge and landing on the opposite slope. Another member of the family we can see here is the Chukar. Other birds we will see in the gorge are the beautiful Wallcreeper, White-winged and Mongolian finches, Common Rosefinch, Brown and Alpine accentors, Godlewski's Bunting, Chough, Golden Eagle, Hill Pigeon, Rock Sparrow and Rock Thrush. When ready we will descend a little and will be soon looking again for another of our targets - the Henderson's Ground Jay, also a pair of Greater Sand Plover.

When ready - long drive and our destination is the famous Gobi's sand dunes. On the way we will see numerous Sandgrouse, Pied and Desert wheatears, Rock Thrush, Oortolan Bunting, Saker, Long-legged and Upland buzzards, Griffon and Black vultures. We will look again for the ground jays as it is a bird wonderful to watch, but also for our first encounter with the handsome Saxaul Sparrow. Goitered Gazelles are also in the area so we have to be quick to spot them as they will disappear fast. Arrival at the ger camp in front of the sand dunes latter in the evening.

DAY 14 After breakfast we will visit the sand dunes and the bird we really need to find here is the Saxaul Sparrow. In order to see it we will spend some time along the river, where the sparrows usually come to drink. There are also a few more pairs of the Ground Jay around, plus many Pallas's Sandgrouse, Desert Wheatear, Isabelline Shrike, Short-toed and Horned larks. When ready, a few hours' drive, with a couple of short stops, will bring us to Yolyn Am - the valley of the Lammergeyers.

DAY 15 Explore Yolyn Am we will see these magnificent raptors, also Saker Falcons, Golden eagles, Goshawk and Upland Buzzard.

Mongolia's only endemic bird lives here - Kozlov's Accentor, as well as Brown Accentor, Common and Chinese Beautiful Rosefinches and Godlewski's Buntings, White-winged Snowfinch and again the Wallcreeper. The Spotted Great Rosefinch is much rarer, but we also have a chance for this one. The gorge itself is a spectacular formation and being here is a privilege. Towards its lower end the gorge is less narrow, but more open smoothly turning into a wide valley. Here we can see Barred Warbler, wheatears, Short-toed Lark etc. Stay overnight in a nearby camp.



Oriental Plover

DAY 16 Early start in order to get our return flight to UB where after arrival we can continue birding and look for the species we might have missed the previous days - Azure Tit, Azure-winged Magpie, Baikal Wagtail, Pine and Meadow Buntings. The capital city of Ulan Bator is strikingly different compared with the traditional life in the countryside gers and small settlements. There are a couple of historical and cultural sites we can visit, provided there is an interest. We can also buy some fine cashmere products to bring home as presents.

DAY 17 Morning flight will take us out of Mongolia and we will arrive home later in the evening.

For full tour details please visit our website.

Ground price: 2,970 EUR / £ 2,580

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: at request

Deposit: 300 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, visa, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Wrangel Island – Before the Ice Age

Thursday 17th July – Tuesday 5th August 2014



In our modern, high-tech world there are now only a very few places where there are very few people and one of them is the Russian Wrangel Island, situated in the Chukotka Sea, 140 km north of the East Siberian coast. It is the largest island in the region, discovered during expedition in 1867. Most of the year it is completely blocked by ice shields. It is only during the summer that there is a short time frame when the floating ice reduces, allowing the very few icebreaker ships in the area opportunity to access the island.

Though one of the world's most amazing wildlife locations, Wrangel was until very recently remained firmly off the wildlife-watchers map, due to the impossible access and political relations. Fortunately however with the recent warming of the political climate and unfortunately the warming of the real climate resulting in the retreat of sea-ice in the Chukchi Sea, sea passage is now available in from the east.

Wrangel Island together with its small neighbor Herald Island were designated as strict nature reserves back in 1975 and was twice later increased with adding in territorial waters. Its land surface is 7608 sq. km, while Herald is only 11.3 sq km. In 2004 it became the first site in the Arctic to be included in Unesco World Heritage List. There is a small team of scientist and rangers, currently 21 in total working during the summer on it. There is a lot of professional and detailed scientific work and monitoring taking place here by the Russian scientists. The Snow geese population and breeding have now been observed for more than 40 years.

There are a few reasons for the uniqueness of the island. First of all, amazingly, during the last ice age the island was ice free and as a result there are 417 vascular plants on it, to compare with 200 in the Siberian tundra of a similar size. About 40 are endemic. It also has more plants than the whole Canadian archipelago altogether! It is known as the Mammoth steppe! Due to the lack of ice the woolly mammoth survived here longer than anywhere else in the world. Recent studies show that the last animals were still roaming here until 2000 B.C, only 4000 years ago! It was a local subspecies, not found anywhere else - Mammoth *primigenius wrangelensis*. Mammoth tusks can still be found protruding from the ground!

Currently, Wrangel, together with its small cousin – Herald Island, 67 km east of it, is the world's single most important site for the polar bear and each year up to 500 females come to give birth on the islands, with about 100 of them on Herald. Some areas have 12 dens per square km. In the summer, recently when the ice is very little, if any, the land is crucial in supporting the lives of this supreme predator. Bears from a huge area around gather on the Island, waiting for the new icepack to be formed. There are recent records of circa 180 bears seen in just 3 days here. The time we have chosen to be there gives us the best chance to photograph good numbers of bears, both on floating ice and on land. There are other mammals beside the polar bear including Polar Fox, Wolf, Wolverine, Musk Oxen, Reindeer and both Siberian and Wrangel island Collared lemmings.

It is also the place with the largest colonies of Walrus on earth and again we will have opportunities to photograph them both on ice and land. In the summer up to 80 000 animals can be found on the shores of the island and together with those on floating ice in the sea the total goes up to a staggering 130 000. Ringed seal is very common too and we stand a chance for the rare and beautiful Ribbon and Larga seals. The waters around Wrangel support good numbers of Grey Whale and Beluga, while Bowhead whales, Fin and Humpback whales.



Wrangel Island – Mammoth steppe

The only surviving Asian breeding population of the Lesser Snow Geese is found here, where around 200 000 pairs are coming to breed each summer. Another iconic species here is Snowy Owl – about 60 pairs and up to 160 individuals. Sabine's gull is a common breeder, Ross's is rarer but in the late autumn more than half its world population might be concentrated here. Ivory Gull is found here too, Common, Spectacled and Steller's eiders, Horned Puffin, Brünnich's Guillemot etc. Lapland Longspur is the commonest bird inshore. A total of 62 species breed here.

It is a trip of a lifetime and next year we are heading there. Together with Greentours we have chartered the expedition cruise ship, the Spirit of Enderby to bring us on Wrangel. We have developed our own itinerary and we plan to have 8 or 9 days on and around Wrangel and to feel, experience, explore, watch and photograph all that remote and wild beauty. The few cruises that have been there so far visit the island for only 2 to 3 days, but that is not enough and we will be the first to have such a long stay on Wrangel. We will also have the opportunity to cross the island on a 3 days/2 night's trip which will be nothing but a unique experience.

The period we have chosen is the best one in terms of earliest possible period to visit the island and its surrounding waters from the retreating ice and still have all the chances to find and photograph its major wildlife on ice and land, Polar bears being the highlight. We shall find massive adult males, females and new born cubs or yearlings, single animals floating on ice or roaming on the 'mammoth steppe' as well as bears concentrated on a walrus or even a whale corpse stranded on the beach. We will circumnavigate around the island in order to visit its biodiversity hotspots and travel by zodiac where appropriate, subject to polar bears presence, weather and rangers permitting.

On the way to and back from Wrangel we will visit a few other sites where there is amazingly rich and unique wildlife – birds and mammals, huge seabird nesting colonies, arctic tundra and indigenous chukchi people settlements.

We journey from the eastern tip of Asia, picking up our expedition ship in the northern port of Anadyr then rounding Cape Dezhnev, only fifty miles from Alaska. We'll visit famed Whalebone Alley on Yttygran Island and sea cliffs and estuaries where we'll see vast flocks of puffins and auklets, Emperor Geese and possibly the fabled Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Pods of Killer Whales patrol these coastal waters and anywhere on our voyage sightings are likely of Gray, Humpback and Bowhead Whales.

We shall be visiting Nuneangan, Arakamchechen and Kolyuchin islands, plus Kolyuchin Inlet where huge sea bird colonies are found. The exact itinerary will be drawn latter, when the exact dates of the cruise will be set up.

The three weeks journey will give us precious flexibility as we can go straight towards Wrangel or leave it for a week later, depending on the local ice situation which of course is impossible to predict.

For full tour details and itinerary please visit our website.



Horned Puffins



Polar Bear

Anadyr to Anadyr

Cost:

Triple shared facilities: \$13,820

Twin shared facilities: \$15,350

Twin private facilities: \$16,890

Mini-suites: \$18,420

Heritage Suite: \$19,960

All categories have an additional local payment of \$1000

Deposit: \$3,100

30% of the price by

15th January 2014

Balance: due by 15th April 2014

Flight prices available on request

Price Includes:

Cruise transfers, all on board ship accommodation, meals and all sceduled expedition shore excursions.

This trip does not include:

All items of a personal nature, laundry, drinks, gratuities. International/domestic flights, visas and travel insurance.

Raptor bonanza in Georgia

Saturday 20th – Saturday 27th September 2014



The small state of Georgia lies mainly on the mighty Caucasus but to the west it is bordered by the eastern coast of the Black Sea. Although relatively small, the Black sea is still big enough to force the migrating raptors to avoid it, flying along its coast. Another obstacle for the raptors lies just east of the coast. Emerging virtually from the sea are the Caucasus with its numerous high peaks, covered in snow for most of the year. Both the sea and the mountains create a very narrow gap where the raptors funnel through. The result is nothing short of spectacular, it is the biggest raptor migration in the world. This migration route was known in the past of course, but was poorly studied until few years ago when professional monitoring of the migrations was launched. Nobody was really prepared for what was to be discovered. Last September when we made our recce trip, over the course of fifty days of monitoring, the migration the team recorded over ONE MILLION raptors passing through. To make this figure even more staggering, the count did not include both sparrowhawks, both kestrels and smaller falcons – Red-footed and Eleonoras!

The numbers are truly amazing – we expect to see thousands of birds migrating in a single day. Figures of 10 000 large eagles (Imperial, Steppe and both spotted) or Black kites, 30 000 steppe buzzards and 50 000 Honey buzzards are not unusual. The highest number recorded in a single day was over 180 000 Honey buzzards, a mind blowing number really. Not only the numbers are huge but the variety is great and virtually all the European raptors have been recorded here, except the Spanish Imperial Eagle and the Gyr Falcon, including rarities such as the tundra Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus calidus*), Oriental Honey Buzzard, the dark morph of the Western Marsh Harrier etc. There are also many Black storks and cranes. Another great thing about the migration here is that you do not see dots in the sky or beyond the horizon. In fact huge numbers of birds, especially in bad (which means favorable in this case) meteorological conditions, will fly very close to the raptor watching points we will be using. This will be an excellent opportunity to improve our birds of prey in flight ID skills as we will see different species, of different ages, plumages etc., virtually in the same time. For example you can have Sparrowhawk, Levant Sparrowhawk and Goshawk in your bins in the same time. Same for different species of harriers, eagles and buzzards.

The whole area is really nice – numerous green hills around us, with some higher ridges visible towards east, while westwards, but very close is the Black Sea. Beside the raptor migration we will also pay attention to the coast line, as well as some wetlands for other migrants, these might include Citrine Wagtail, through Terek and Broad-billed sandpipers to Greater Black-headed Gull.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 An afternoon arrival at the small town of Batumi, via Istanbul, followed by half an hour transfer to our hotel for the holiday. It is right on the sea side, with huge garden and ideally situated for our activities next days. After a check-in we can have some easy sea-watching from the garden – skuas, gulls, terns and waders start filling our notebooks and we may also record the first raptors.

DAYS 2 to 7 We have six full days and at least four of them we will use to watch the raptor migration. There is no need of very early starts as the movements normally start about 09.00 and we have less than half an hour drive from our hotel. The early birds among us can go earlier for sea-watching just outside the hotel and it is likely that every morning will produce different species.

Being about nine at the raptor watching point we will have about 4 hours of intensive migration and when it gets quiet we will have a picnic lunch. Following some rest, the migration picks up again in the afternoon and depends on the weather condition might go well up until 19.00.

There are a number of wetlands along the coast near Batumi plus a few larger ones further north along the coast and we will pay visits to them too. Here we can find big variety of species – Moustached Warbler, Red-throated Pipit, Red-breasted and Semi-collared flycatchers, numerous shrikes, wagtails and other passerines, gulls, all European terns, all the crakes, waders

– Marsh Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope and even Great Snipe, herons etc. Purple Swamphen is also possible as we have recorded it on our recce trip in October 2012. One of the wetlands here is Kolkheti National Park. Its names probably comes from the ancient Colchis and it is from here where the mythical hero Jason and his Argonauts brought the Pheasant into the European countries west of the Black Sea, which unfortunately is no longer pure one. However, around the Kolkheti NP the only population of pure pheasant can still be found.

At the sea we can find Red-necked and Black-necked grebes, both divers and some sea ducks, plus many Harbour Porpoise and both Bottle-nose and Common dolphins.

In the town of Batumi there is a well maintained botanical garden and here we will find the smart Krupper's Nuthatch.

The exact program we will define when on site as the weather may slow or accelerate the migrations. It works like this that if the raptor migration is slow, the passerines and the water birds are in higher numbers and the other way around. In any case there will be huge numbers of birds to see.

Local people are really friendly and open. Georgia's culture, ancient history and national pride is something we will experience. There is a downside of all that though and that is the shooting. Locals have been aware a long time about the migration and good numbers of birds are shot each autumn – estimation is about 3 000 raptors, mainly Honey Buzzards. There is also shooting at the some of the wetlands along

the coast. But a monitoring project has been employed for 5 years already has done some great conservation work among the local communities and the raptor shooting has already decreased. Ecotourism is one of the main tools in this battle and our presence there will further contribute to this cause. Part of our profit will be donated to the conservation work in the area.

DAY 8 After some final mornings birding we will catch our return flight home.

Ground price: 1,135 EUR / £ 985
Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 170 EUR
Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:
ground transport, full board,
accommodation, guide, entrance
fees for all nature reserves.
No hidden extras.

The price does not include:
airfare, travel insurance,
hard drinks, beverages and all
items of purely personal nature.

Bats and Caves

Saturday 10th – Saturday 17th May 2014



Bulgaria has a uniquely high diversity of bats. Out of the 35 species found in Europe, 33 species are known to inhabit the country. The major reasons for the great species richness and abundance of bats are the country's transitional geographic position, the mosaic of various habitats, the extensive farming activities in the semi-mountain regions, the high diversity of insects and last but not the least is the presence of over 5 400 caves.

Our tour is unique opportunity to learn and enjoy the secret world of the bats. The main focus of this tour is the caved-welling bats and their underground roosts in the Rhodopes Mountain. All bats are strictly protected by the national and international legislation. This status impose many restrictions for their study and thus provides only limited but still rewarding opportunities to witness their spectacular swarming and foraging behavior.

In addition to our activities we will also enjoy lectures and power-point presentations on bats – species, their distribution and biology, conservation, methods of researches etc.

Each of the caves we will visit in the evenings is situated not more than 30 minutes from the hotel where we will be based. The sites we will visit are rich in wildlife, so we will have plenty of options for birds, insects and flora.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Sofia airport and transfer to Dobrostan ridge (about two and a half hours of driving). Accommodation and dinner, followed by 20 minutes transfer to a cave nearby. Observation of an emerging colony of Schreiber's and Long-fingered bats.

DAY 2 We will spend the day exploring mountain plateau (30 minutes of driving from the hotel) for its rich wildlife. Here we will visit small show cave with few bats. In the evening we can observe an emerging colony of Greater and Lesser Mouse-eared bats, Schreiber's and Long-fingered bats at the mouth of a cave. Back to the hotel for our second night here.

DAYS 3 and 4 After a breakfast we head to Eastern Rhodopes mountain (two and a half hours of driving) and will have two nights stay near Madzharovo. On the way we will pay a visit to the Seven Caves karstic complex. On the rock's near Madzharovo we can observe roost of a colony of the European free-tailed bat. In the evening we can see emerging and foraging behaviour of Daubentons bat, Greater and Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Geoffroy's Bat, Common and Pygmy Pipistrelle, Savi's pipistrelle bat.

DAY 5 Short transfer to Krumovgrad town, where again we will stay for one night. Accommodation and dinner, followed by a transfer to a cave nearby. Here we can see emerging and foraging behaviour of Greater Horseshoe Bat, Blasius's Horseshoe Bat and Mediterranean Horseshoe Bat, Greater and Lesser Mouse-eared bats.

DAY 6 Today we drive to Trigrad gorge (four and a half hours of driving). It is a long drive but we have plenty of excellent options for stops on the way at suitable bats' habitats. Accommodation for two nights in small family hotel, in the village of Trigrad. After a dinner we will witness the spectacular emerging of thousands of Schreiber's and Long-fingered bats at the entrance of Devil's throat cave (twenty minutes from our hotel). Foraging behaviour of Daubenton's Bat, Long-fingered Bat and Whiskered bats at a small pond near Trigrad.

DAY 7 During the day we will visit two spectacular show caves: Devil's Throat and Yagodinskata Peshtera caves. In the evening – foraging behaviour of the Whiskered bats, Lesser Noctule and possibly of the Giant Noctule above a calm mountain stream in a spruce forest near Yagodina village.

DAY 8 Three and a half hours transfer brings us at the airport for your flight back home.

Additional information: All activities will be held with minimum (if any!) impact to the bats. The Bulgarian Biodiversity Act prohibits all kind of direct disturbance of bats in Bulgaria without a permit issued by Ministry of Environment and Waters. The Protected Areas Act regulates the access to all important bat underground roosts. The caves to be visited can be changed depending on the occurrence/absence of bats. Foraging behaviour of at least five bat species during each of the evening walks is going to be observed.

Equipment: compact LED headlamp, long-range torch (optional), Bat detector and a recording device (optional), sturdy shoes/boots, warm clothes.



Lesser Horseshoe Bat



Common Noctule

Ground price: 860 EUR / £ 760
Group size: 6-10 + leader

Single supplement: 105 EUR
Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:
ground transport, full board,
accommodation, guide, entrance
fees for all nature reserves.
No hidden extras.

The price does not include:
airfare, travel insurance,
hard drinks, beverages and all
items of purely personal nature.

Reptiles and Amphibians

Tuesday 6th – Saturday 17th May 2014



Bulgaria is inhabited by 20 species of amphibians and 37 species of reptiles and the biggest majority of them are represented by healthy populations, thus being among the richest European countries in terms of herpetology. Many of the species that occur here can be seen only in that part of the continent. The reason for this richness is the biogeographical situation of the country, as well as the well preserved habitats. Within the twelve days of the tour we expect to see over of 35 species, including some rare ones or with restricted distribution.

Our tour will cover the three best areas for reptiles and amphibians in Bulgaria. Some of the rare species occur in all of them, so we will have more than one chance to find those. The period of our tour coincide with the beginning of all the species' reproduction cycle and this gives us more chances to find them. The frogs can be located and identified by their calls. Some of the rare species (Syrian Spadefoot Toad, Leopard Snake, Cat Snake) are nocturnal and will be sought after dusk, so some evening observations are necessary.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Sofia airport and transfer to Kresna gorge, about two and a half hours of driving. Accommodation for the next four nights. Depending on the arrival time, short walk in the surroundings of our hotel.

DAYS 2 to 4 All the three days will be spend exploring different sites in the area. We will visit various habitats – gorges, rocky and sandy terrains, big river valleys and small streams, wet meadows, small ponds and forest patches in order to find as much as possible species.

We will have short transfers driving to the sites, but most of the time we will walk in search of reptiles and amphibians. Beside the common species, here we expect to find also some rare and species with restricted distribution – Syrian Spadefoot Toad, Yellowbelly Toad, Stream Toad, Kotschy's Gecko, Balkan Green Lizard, Erhard's Wall Lizard, Worm Snake, Dahl's Whip Snake, Leopard Snake, Four-lined Snake, Montpellier Snake, Cat Snake, Horn-nose Viper. We can also find both species of tortoises – Hermann's and Spur-thighed, as well as the Balkan Terrapin.

DAY 5 Today we have transfer (about three and a half hours) to Smolyan, in the Western Rhodopes, for one nights stay. We will break the journey with few stops on the way where we expect to see mountain species – Fire Salamander, Alpine Newt, Spring and Common Frogs, Slow

Worm, Sand Lizard, Viviparous Lizard, Aesculapian and Smooth Snakes, Adder. Late in the afternoon we arrive in the hotel.

DAY 6 Today we continue further east with a transfer of about three and a half hours of driving to our next base for a night stay in Ivaylovgrad, next to the Greek border. Again we will have several stops on the way and upon arrival shall explore the southernmost part of the Eastern Rodopi Mountains – the only locality of the Snakeeyed Lacertid. Here we can see also some more common species like Yellowbelly Toad, Large and Dahl's Whip Snakes, Aesculapian Snake, Montpellier Snake, both species of tortoises and some orchids.

DAYS 7 and 8 Short transfer further north to the small town of Harmanly, where we accommodate for two nights. Both days we will explore different sites in the area, close to the hotel. The longest distance we will cover in a single day will be less than 50 km one way. The species we can see here are European Glass Lizzard, Worm Snake, Sand Boa, Leopard Snake, Dahl's Whip Snake, Blotched Snake, Montpellier Snake, Smooth Snake, along with many of the common species in Bulgaria.

DAY 9 Transfer to the Black Sea coast, and our base for the next three nights will be Primorsko. Again we will have few stops on the way where will look for reptiles and amphibians.

DAYS 10 and 11 Both days we will explore the Ropotamo Reserve and Strandzha Nature Park. It is the largest protected area in Bulgaria and has extremely rich biodiversity, including 9 species of amphibians, as well as 23 species of reptiles. Again, we will make short trips every day. We will visit both Veleka and Ropotamo rivers, as well as the sand dunes near Arkutino reserve. We will also search the foothills of Strandzha mountain covered by deciduous forests. If the weather is favourable, we can have another evening trip looking for the Syrian Spadefoot Toad. Here we have the option to look for most of the species we have seen so far, or those we have missed. The only species which can be seen only in this area is the Reddish Wip Snake, so we need to pay special attention to that species in order to find it.



Montpellier Snake

DAY 12 Transfer to Burgas airport. Departure. Note: For those flying back home from Sofia airport, we continue to Sofia.

Ground price: 1,120 EUR / £ 985

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 165 EUR

Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.



Syrian Spadefoot Toad

Early Butterflies

Saturday 3rd – Thursday 15th May 2014



This tour is focused on the early spring butterflies of Bulgaria and Greece. It is not possible to see most of these species on the later summer tours and that is the reason why we have developed this special tour which enables us to see them. Besides being early, most of the species also have a limited distribution, so they are rare and very local. Within the tour we will visit various habitats which will allow us to find most of the species specific to the area – Southern Swallowtail, both festoons, Iolas Blue, Powdered Brimstone, Cleopatra, Gruner's Orange Tip, Eastern Greenish Black Tip, Grass Jewel and Dalmatian Ringlet. Of course we will also record a good number of early flowers and many birds. We shall be running it for a third consecutive year.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Sofia airport at midday and a transfer to Kerkini Lake in Greece where we will stay for the first two nights. The transfer is about three and a half hours but we will have a few stops on the way to break the journey. Accommodation and dinner.

DAYS 2 Today we will explore the lake surroundings and Belasitsa mountain foothills for Southern Comma, Southern and Eastern festoons, Lattice Brown, Nettle-tree Butterfly, Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell, Powdered Brimstone, Yellow-banded Skipper, Eastern Dappled White.

DAY 3 We will drive further south and our next base will be in Siatista, where we will stay for three nights. On the way we will have several stops where we expect to find Gruner's Orange Tip, Chequered Blue, Eastern Baton Blue and Dalmatian Ringlet.

DAYS 4 and 5 Both days we will explore the area for Grass Jewel, Gruner's Orange Tip,

Eastern Greenish Black Tip, Dalmatian Ringlet, Bavius Blue, Powdered Brimstone, Lesser Fiery Copper and Inky Skipper.

DAY 6 Drive to Pindos mountain, where we will be based near Konitsa, for 3 nights stay. Upon arrival we will explore the surroundings.

DAYS 7 and 8 Both days we will explore Pindos mountain for Southern Swallowtail, Eastern Festoon, Mountain Small White, Eastern Orange-Tip, Blue Argus, Iolas Blue, Freyer's Purple Emperor, Pygmy and Mediterranean Skippers.

DAY 9 Drive to Olympus for a one night stay. Here we will look for Cleopatra, Grass Jewel and Powdered Brimstone.

DAYS 10 to 12 Drive to Bulgaria for a three nights stay near Kresna gorge. Few stops on the way for Gruner's Orange Tip, Southern Comma and Lattice Brown. Both days we will explore the area, including Kresna Gorge and Rupite locality. Here we expect to see Balkan Green-veined White, Kruper's Small White,



Iolas Blue

Small Bath White, both Eastern and Southern Festoons, Southern Comma, Little Tiger Blue, White-banded Grayling, as well as some of the coppers and blues that have already emerged plus Scarce Swallowtail and Swallowtail.

DAY 13 Drive to Sofia for our flight back home, with several stops on the way if time permits. Departure.



Southern Swallowtail

Ground price: 1,180 EUR / £ 1,035

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 230 EUR

Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Butterflies of Turkey

Wednesday 25th June – Wednesday 9th July 2014



Turkey is hard to match when it comes to watching butterflies. It's extremely rich flora provides a huge range of food plants and nectar sources for butterflies. Situated on a 'biogeographic crossroads' Turkey has a several fauna types – Eastern-Mediterranean, Irano-Turanian, Caucasian etc. Add to this the huge variety of habitats and various climates – dry, cold and hot and no wonder it results in around 380 species – from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa. About 40 of them are endemic. The time of our tour is optimal as most of the species will be on the wing, plus we have a chance for some of the early and late butterflies. Within the tour we will be focused on central, eastern Mediterranean and north-eastern regions. We are going to visit river valleys, semi-desert regions and high mountains in order to get the local specialties. Our route will start at the sea level to a height of up to 3000 metres. Walking will be easy, as most of the localities are near the roads. While at Aladag and Chaglyan ridges there will be moderate walking as the bigger the distances we cover the bigger the chances are to see more rare and interesting species. Good number of other wildlife and plants will be also recorded.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Adana airport and drive to Taşucu (about 2 hours), where we accommodate in the sea view hotel. Depending on the arrival time, there is a chance to explore surroundings. Stay overnight for two nights.

DAY 2 Early morning start to coastal region near Taşucu. Here we will explore different sites for our primary species here – Pigmy, Sage, Millet skipper, Indian Grass Blue, Grass Jewel, Little Tiger Blue, Aegean Meadow Brown, African Ringlet, Southern Swallowtail, Cleopatra and Powdered Brimstone. Additionally we should be able to find some migrating species like Plain Tiger along our route. In the afternoon we will drive to Göksu Canyon – an area covered by dry maquis. Here we shall look for Lebanese Silver-line, Inky Skipper and more.

DAY 3 After an early breakfast and morning we shall head to the north Aladağları region by crossing the Taurus Mountains. On the way we will have some stops, where we can catch up any species we may have missed, plus some others - Aegean, Levantine, Anatolian, Reverdin's Marbled skipper, Krueper's Small White, Levantine Marbled White, Bavius and Lebanese Adonis blues; Isaurian False Argus, Lydian Tawny Rockbrown, Eastern, Samos and Southern graylings, Nettle-Tree Butterfly. The transfer itself is about 3 hours and upon arrival we accommodate in Safak pension for two nights. In the late afternoon we will start to explore the nearby spectacular gorge. We shall enjoy our dinner, home made food, with sightseeing of Demirkazik Peak.

DAY 4 We will have an exceptional trip today in Aladağları, ascending to about 2 600 m. a.s.l.. Here, as well as on the way down, where we can walk some distances we may see Anatolian Green-underside, Bosnian, Chelmos, Odd-spot, Lebanese Adonis and Actis blues; Eastern Brown, Geranium, Isaurian False Argus, Gerhard's Black Hairstreak, Freyer's Tawny, Tawny Rockbrown, Peak White.

DAY 5 Today we shall continue to drive north, heading to Göreme. The Göreme National Park was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985. In the afternoon we will explore rock

formations and scrubby area around, where we will look for Tessellated Skipper, Persian Skipper, Mountain Small White, Iolas, Alcedo, Lebanese Anomalous, Gerhard's, Small Anatolian, Persian Anomalous, Turkish Furry, Anatolian Chalk-hill, Poseidon, Wagner's Blue, Orange-banded Hairstreak, Nogel's Hairstreak, Great Steppe Grayling, Amasian Satyr etc.

DAY 6 After early breakfast we will continue exploration of the region and in the afternoon will head north-east to the town of Gürün – a fore post of semi-desert fauna. On the way will make a brief stop at Mazıkıran Pass. Accommodation for two nights.

DAY 7 The whole day will explore surroundings of the town for Pogge's Skipper, Turkish Fiery Copper, Firdussi's, Turkish Furry and Bavius blues, Orange Hermit, Anatolian Hermit, Saadi's Heath, Staudinger's Steppe Brown, Wagner's Steppe Brown, Freyer's Tawny Rockbrown, Klug's Tawny Rockbrown, Amasian Satyr, Southern Swallowtail, Sooty Orange Tip.

DAY 8 After early breakfast we shall continue to drive north, heading to Sivas. Near the town we will visit Çamlıbel Pass, searching for Mountain Small White, Balkan Copper, Gerhard's, Pontic, Chelmos, Myrrha Blue, Lesser Lattice Brown, Southern, White-banded Grayling. Accommodation in Imranlı for one night.

DAY 9 After early breakfast we will head east to the town of Erzincan. Today we will visit two mountain passes - Kizıldag Pass and Sakaltutan, where among many others we hope to see also Persian Skipper, Mediterranean Skipper, Alcedo Blue, Mountain Green-veined White, Persian Fritillary. Accommodation for two nights.

DAY 10 We will explore Munzur National Park: near Çağlayan- a valley in Munzur mountain ranges and Kolçekmezdağı Pass. First one is the only place during the tour, where is possible to find Levantine Silver-line and Large Silver-line. Other species for today: Alcon, Large, Loew's, Zephyr, Alpine, Turkish Furry, Poseidon, Turkish, Gerhard's and Persian Anomalous blues; Fiery Copper, Mithridates, Geranium Argus, Bowden's White, Anatolian Hermit, Great Steppe Grayling, Eastern Grayling, Wagner's Steppe Brown, Syrian Marbled White.

DAY 11 Transfer to Erzurum for two nights stay. On the way will stop at Tanyeri and Kopdağı Pass. The main target species there are Pogge's Skipper, New Skipper, Tessellated Skipper, Aegean Skipper, Lesser Fiery Copper, Rebel's Hairstreak, Syrian Marbled White, Anatolian Tawny Rockbrown, Small Bath White, Hewitson's Ringlet, Marsh Fritillary, Eastern Orange Tip, Menetries' Clouded Yellow.

DAY 12 Today will explore Palandöken Mountain, where the road reaches 3000 m a.s.l.! The summit is at a distance of only 10 km from Erzurum city center, which itself extends at an elevation of 1950 m. Here we expect to see Alpine Green Hairstreak, Pontic, Damon, Firdussi's, Hubert's, Nina's, Phyllis and Tanker's blues, Eastern Greenish Black-tip, Bowden's White.

DAY 13 Transfer to Yusufeli, situated in Çoruh Valley. On the way will cross Gölyurt Pass, where will make some stops trying to find among the others Pfeiffer's Green Hairstreak, Larger Anatolian Blue, Russian Heath, Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell, Southern Comma, Christoph's Clouded Yellow, Bowden's White.

DAY 14 Exploring Çoruh Valley – a real butterfly paradise. Here we expect to see Alcides Skipper, Hopffer's Blue, Hi Blue. Farewell dinner and last overnight in Yusufeli

DAY 15 Two hours of driving bring us to Erzurum airport, from where we fly back home.

Ground price: 2,100 EUR / £ 1,840

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 290 EUR

Deposit: 300 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, visa, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Cynthia's Fritillary and Bosnian Blue - in search of beauties

Sunday 6th – Saturday 12th July 2014



Among the most beautiful and rare butterflies in Europe is the Cynthia's Fritillary. It has a restricted range on the continent – occupying only the high Alps, but also the two highest ranges in Bulgaria – Rila and Pirin Mountains, starting from 2 200 meters above the sea level. The subspecies found in Bulgaria is arguably the most beautiful, being brightly marked. Being rare, very local and its habitat not the easiest to access, it is one of the least seen butterflies in Europe. Additionally, the mountainous climate at these elevations even in the summer is swift to change, often becoming rainy and windy. One is not guaranteed to see the Cynthia's even if it is on the right place in the right period. In our Butterflies of the Balkans tour we had set aside one day for to look for it, but during the last 6 years we have twice failed to see it due to adverse weather.

Another butterfly, the Bosnian Blue, although not as beautiful as Cynthia's, is even rarer. A recent split from the Gavarine Blue, it has very restricted distribution, occupying very few mountain peaks scattered throughout the Balkan Peninsula and is just as tricky to find as Cynthia's Fritillary. Both are found in Bulgaria and one is possible to access by vehicle. Again, the weather here, at 2000 meters dictates one is not guaranteed to see it in a single day visit.

That is why we have decided to devote a special tour to these two special butterflies and it will give us excellent chances to find them. First, we will have 2 days for each of the species, and second, we can be flexible and change the order in the itinerary just before the tour, in case the forecast is not favorable, thus avoiding bad weather. In case of poor weather in the mountains there are many other locations lower down where we will find many other butterflies to see. If we need an extra day for one of the targets, we will have it, reducing our stay at the last site.

The tour dates meet the prime time not only for our main targets, but for very many other butterflies, including attractive ones such as Apollo, Purple Emperor, Lesser Purple Emperor, Camberwell Beauty, Large Tortoiseshell, Southern White Admiral, Common Glider and many more. In overall, we expect to see near to a 100 species of butterflies. Some dragonflies, orchids and other flowers will be also seen. There will be also excellent photographic opportunities as two of the hotels are next to very rich butterfly sites so we can get them early in the morning when motionless and light is great.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Sofia airport and one and a half hour's transfer will bring us at the foothills of the Rila Mountain. A couple of stops on the way will produce our first good butterflies – Purple Emperor, Lesser Purple Emperor, Soth-ern White Admiral, Hungarian and Common gliders, Purple-shot Copper, Chequered Blue, Cardinal, High Brown Fritillary and many more. Early evening we will arrive at the village of Gov-edarts, where we will be staying the first two nights of the holiday in a small family hotel.

DAY 2 Half an hour drive will bring us to the cabin lift, which will take us high up on the northern slopes of Rila Mountain at 2400 a.s.l. We will have to walk about two miles on slightly ascending, but otherwise wide and good dirt road to reach the Cynthia's Fritillary habitat. We have the whole day for it, and once we reach the site we shall find it quickly as the bright males chasing actively each other aren't difficult to spot. Other butterflies may be Dusky Grizzled Skipper, Dewy Ringlet, Nicholls's Ringlet and Eastern Large Heath etc.

In the afternoon we shall explore the meadows behind our hotel for Nickler's and Marsh fritillaries, Scarce Copper etc.

DAY 3 In case we have missed the Cynthia's yesterday due to a bad weather, we will return to its realm and search for it again. If we have seen it, we will drive south, to Pirin Mountain, where is our second main target – the Bosnian Blue. We will be based near Gotse Delchev for two nights. Several stops en-route to break the

journey, which will take about four hours. One of the stops will be for the Freyer's Purple Emperor, so we will have the full set of emperors.

DAY 4 Early start as we have about 16 km of road drive to reach Orelek peak where at 2000 meters asl is found the Bosnian Blue. We will try to get there first and look for it and once found, we will return at a leisurely pace, having stops to search for other butterflies. Another species here, nearly endemic, is the Higgins's Anomalous Blue, its only other site being in the nearby Phalakron mountain in Greece. Others here will be Apollo, Mountain Argus, Great Sooty Satyr, Balkan Copper and many more.

DAY 5 Again, if we need to return for the Bosnian Blue, we will do so, and if not we will spend the first half of the day in the area, then drive to the next area of the holiday, near the famous Rila Monastery – to most visited cultural landmark in Bulgaria. We will stay for a two nights in a small family hotel. Stops on the way can produce – Krueper's Small White, Little Tiger Blue, Common Glider and Lattice Brown.

DAY 6 Explore the nearest river valley, which is among the richest butterflies sites in Bulgaria, for Purple Emperor, Yellow-banded Skipper, Map Butterfly, Balkan Copper, Niobe Fritillary, Clouded Apollo, Chequered Skipper and many more. We can also visit the Rila monastery, if we have not done so the day before.

DAY 7 We have about 2 hours to the airport to catch your return flight and if the time permits we can have stop on the way and visit our



Cynthia's Fritillary

Apollo reintroduction project in Vitosha mountain (where it became extinct in the 70-ies), just south of Sofia. Departure.

Ground price: 780 EUR / £ 690

Group size: 4-12 + leader

Single supplement: 120 EUR

Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:
ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:
airfare, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Butterflies of the Balkans - Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece

Saturday 12th – Saturday 26th July 2014



This unique trip is combining three countries and allows us to explore some of the prime butterfly habitats on the Balkan Peninsula. Within the fifteen days we will visit Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece looking for rare and hard to see anywhere else butterfly species. We expect a total number of over 130 species (152 on our 2012 tour), from attractive ones such as Cynthia's Fritillary, Apollo, Poplar Admiral, Purple Emperor and Large Copper to very local and difficult to see species like Bulgarian Ringlet, Macedonian Grayling, Dill's Grayling, Freyer's Fritillary, Freyer's Grayling, Phalakron Blue, Higgins's Anomalous Blue and many more. Additionally we will enjoy many rare and endemic flowers and plants as well as other wildlife.

Our route goes in a circle, starting and ending in Bulgaria, exploring areas of Macedonia and Greece in between. We will also enjoy the beautiful scenery and the different habitats of the region, as well as cultural landmarks like Rila monastery in Bulgaria. It is also an excellent opportunity to taste the local food and drinks as well as to feel the local lifestyle in three different, but still closely related countries. We have been running this trip successfully for 3 years.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Sofia airport and transfer (less than two hours, with stop on the way – Lesser Fiery Copper, Short-tailed Blue, Great Banded Grayling) to our hotel, situated near Rila monastery. Accommodation and dinner.

DAY 2 Explore the nearest river valley for Poplar Admiral, Purple Emperor, Balkan Copper, Scarce Copper, Hungarian and Common Gliders, Yellow-banded Skipper, Eastern Bath White, Map Butterfly, Niobe Fritillary, Clouded Apollo, Chequered Skipper and many more. Optional afternoon visit to the Rila monastery – the most visited cultural landmark in Bulgaria.

DAY 3 Three hours of driving brings us into the Republic of Macedonia. We will explore Kresna Gorge on the way and our destination is Pripet town where we will stay the next two nights. Possible species to find are Little Tiger Blue, Krueper's Small White, Southern White Admiral, White-banded Grayling, Eastern Rock Grayling, Yellow-banded Skipper, Nettle-tree Butterfly.

DAY 4 Today we will visit a river valley southwest of the town, having few stops on the way. Species we expect are Macedonian Grayling, Great Sooty Satyr, Eastern Greenish Black-tip, Camberwell Beauty, Alcon Blue, Little Tiger Blue, Balkan Marbled White, Large Tortoiseshell, Eastern Baton Blue, Lattice Brown and many more.

DAYS 5 and 6 Less than two hours of driving brings us to Galitchitsa Mountain which we will explore both days. Species to be seen



Balkan Copper

here are Damon Blue, Grecian Anomalous Blue, False Eros Blue, Russian Heath, Purple and Brown hairstreaks, Esper's Marbled White, Apollo, Freyer's, Marsh and Twin-spot Fritillary, Dusky Grizzled Skipper, Lesser Lattice Brown. We will be based in a hotel situated near Pre-spa Lake for two nights.

DAY 7 Today we drive to Greece and will have two nights near Sidirikaströ. On the way we will check Kerkini Lake for Large Copper, Lang's Short-tailed Blue, Southern Comma, Lattice Brown etc.

DAY 8 We will explore the area for Iolas Blue, Grass Jewel, Eastern Baton Blue, Balkan Grayling, Eastern Knapweed Fritillary, Zephyr Blue. If time permits we will check the river valley for Freyer's Grayling, Sandy Grizzled Skipper, Southern White Admiral, Hermit, Anomalous Blue and Grecian Anomalous Blue.

DAYS 9 and 10 Short transfer brings us to Phalakron Mountain, which we will explore both days. Here we can see Phalakron Blue, Dill's Grayling, Eastern Rock Grayling, Balkan Grayling, Hermit, Great Sooty Satyr, Eastern Greenish Black-tip, Black Ringlet, Ripart's and Higgins's Anomalous Blue, Apollo, Dusky Meadow Brown, Southern Comma, Lesser Marbled Fritillary and many more. Two nights in a small, family run hotel in the village of Volakas.

DAY 11 Transfer to Predela, just west of Bansko on the foothills of Pirin mountain. On the way we will have two main stops for Large Blue, Turquoise Blue, Spotted and Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Twin-spot Fritillary, Cardinal, Large Wall Brown, three species of Short-tailed blues etc. If time permits we will check the mountain slopes for Bosnian Blue. Overnight near Bansko for two nights.

DAY 12 Today we explore the mountain meadows over Vihren hut looking for Arran Brown, Large Ringlet, Nicholl's Ringlet, Common Brassy Ringlet, Ottoman Brassy Ringlet, Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered fritillaries, Clouded Apollo, Alcon and Large Blues, Blue Argus etc.

DAY 13 Long transfer to the northern slopes of Rila mountain. On the way we will stop and look for Bulgarian Ringlet, Ottoman Brassy Ringlet,

Bright-eyed Ringlet, Shepherd's Fritillary, Balkan Fritillary etc. Arrival at village of Govedartsi late in the afternoon. Here we will accommodate for two nights.

DAY 14 The cabin lift brings us high in the northern slopes of Rila Mountain. Here we will look for Cynthia's Fritillary, Balkan Clouded



Freyer's Fritillary

Yellow, Dusky Grizzled Skipper, Dewy Ringlet, Nicholl's Ringlet and Eastern Large Heath etc. In the afternoon we shall explore the meadows behind our hotel for Brown Hairstreak, Nickler's Fritillary, Scarce Copper etc. Farewell dinner.

DAY 15 One hour of driving brings us to Sofia airport. Stop on the way for a Purple Emperor, Lesser Purple Emperor, Chequered Blue, Hungarian and Common Gliders, Purple-shot Copper and other species, depending on the time.

Ground price: 1,480 EUR / £ 1,300

Group size: 6-12 + leader

Single supplement: 280 EUR

Deposit: 300 EUR

Individuals: 3-5 + leader

Ground price: 1,610 EUR

The price includes:

ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:

airfare, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Golden Eagle and Winter Birds

Sunday 24th – Saturday 30th November 2013

Sunday 2nd – Saturday 8th March 2014



Bulgaria boasts a healthy population of Golden eagles and more than 160 pairs inhabit its mountains. Our tour gives you the opportunity to take photos of these impressive raptors. From a distance of 25 to 35 meters you can photograph their natural behavior – feeding, preening and even mating without disturbing them. In the winter, when the food is scarce, the eagles visit willingly the baits in front of our hides. The great advantage of Bulgaria when it comes to Golden Eagle photography are the various options for background, as well as light and perches. Here you will not photograph the eagles only in snow, but on small rocks, on the ground, on junipers bushes, on mountain hay meadow or on a wooden branch properly situated by us. The light in Bulgaria, even in the winter, can be excellent for photography and in fact gives you opportunity to be creative even with a difficult subject as the Golden Eagle. There are also opportunities for flight shots of the eagles when they land and take off from the bait.

We have been running this tour successfully for over seven years and so far we have build up a number of hides giving various options for photography and avoiding obstacles as bad weather, no access due to a deep snow, recent disturbance etc. All of the hides are different in terms of setting, access, distance to the birds, perches, background etc. Every pair of Golden eagles visiting the baits is also more or less different – some birds prefer to feed in the morning, others in the afternoon; some are feeding individually, some pairs usually come together.

The same is true for the other species visiting the baits – one hide has a Goshawk visits daily, another one has a constant flock of 30 + Ravens, third one has a Common Buzzard pair and few Jays etc. We have also established few bird feeders around the hides and these are constantly visited by Hawfinch, Sombre Tit; Grey-headed, Syrian, Great Spotted, Middle Spotted, Green and even a Lesser Spotted woodpeckers; Willow Tit, Brambling, Yellowhammer, Bulfinch, Goldfinch, Fieldfare, Jay and many more commoner species.

The itinerary provided below is provisional in terms of sites and species that can be photographed, beside the Golden eagle of course which is the main target. If you are interested in that tour, please let us know what your preferences are as well as the period convenient for you, and we will be happy to suggest you what we think is the best option. That tour is possible from late November till the middle of February.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arriving at Sofia airport. Transfer to the village of Koprivshitsa, about two hours of driving east. Here we will accommodate in a small and cozy hotel.

DAYS 2 to 6 Five full days of Golden eagles photography. Early wake up, we have to leave the hotel before 06.00 am. We have up to 50 minutes driving and 5 to 10 minutes walking to the hide, where we need to be not later than 07.00 pm. Other species visiting the baits at the feeding site can be Goshawk, Common Buzzard and Raven. With some luck we can also have Long-legged and Rough-legged buzzards.

DAY 7 Morning session at the small birds feeders time permitting, followed by transfer to the airport for your return flight

Additional information: You can leave the hide only after 18.00 o'clock in the evening. It is possible also to leave the hide when there are unfavorable weather conditions: thick fog, heavy rain fall etc. when it is sure that the eagles will not see you leaving the hide. In case you think you have made a good photos during the first days, or you just want to have a day off, other program is possible which is subject to discussions. In any case there are enough options for bird photography.

Clothes: Warrm clothes and boots, hat, gloves etc are necessary. We will also provide you with some small heaters. It can be as low as minus 10 outside, but in the hide

the temperature is much more pleasant. However, during the last years winters in Bulgaria are getting milder and it is often well above the zero.

Physical conditions:

You need to be in good physical conditions in order to stay all the day in the hide.

Equipment: At least 300mm lens plus converter. Stable tripod is essential.

Extension:

The Golden eagle photo tour can be combined with a short extension trip for Dalmatian pelicans photography. Depends on the winter, there are several sites where we can do this in Bulgaria. Alternatively, the best site for that species is Lake Kerkini in Greece, just next to the Bulgarian border. Here we can also photograph Greater Flamingoe, Pygmy Cormorant, Great White Egret etc. Best period is end of January and February when the pelicans'bill's lower mandible turn into a bright red color. Within two to three days you can get excellent photos of the pelicans in breeding plumage – feeding, resting, flying etc. Please contact us if you are interested in that option.



Golden Eagle

Ground price: 1,345 EUR / £ 1,045
2-4 photographers

Single supplement: 90 EUR
Deposit: 300 EUR

The price includes:
ground transport, full board, accommodation, guide, entrance fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:
airfare, travel insurance, hard drinks, beverages and all items of purely personal nature.

Spring Wetlands Bird Photography

Saturday 5th – Saturday 12th April 2014



Early April is the time when migration is in full force and many of the wetlands hold a good variety of species and in good numbers too. Moreover, after the winter moult all the birds are in fresh pristine plumage. When we add the beautiful and soft light in the beginning of the spring, pleasant temperatures and lack of mosquitoes it all builds up to a wonderful wetland bird photographic experience.

At a small dam we have two hides suitable both for morning and evening sessions. They give fantastic opportunity for „Contre Jour“ photography. The diversity of water birds during the migration gives us opportunities to photograph Garganey, Ruddy Shelduck, Little Bittern, Black Stork, Great White Egret, Purple Heron, Spotted Redshank, Little Ringed Plover, Ferruginous Duck, displaying Great Crested Grebe etc. If the water level permits, we may also use floating hides. Although most of our time will be spent at the wetland, we will also use two other hides in the area. First one is for mammals and at the end of the winter we still have a good chance for foxes and the Golden Jackal. The second hide is set for woodpeckers and finches attracted by a pond and feeders. Depending on how busy it is, we can also use it.

For the entire holiday we will be based in one hotel only – in the north-east of Bulgaria – near the town of Shumen. The hides are near the hotel and the only long transfers we will do are from and to the Sofia airport – about five hours one way. Though arrival at Bucharest airport in Romania is also possible, and that is only two and a half hours journey.

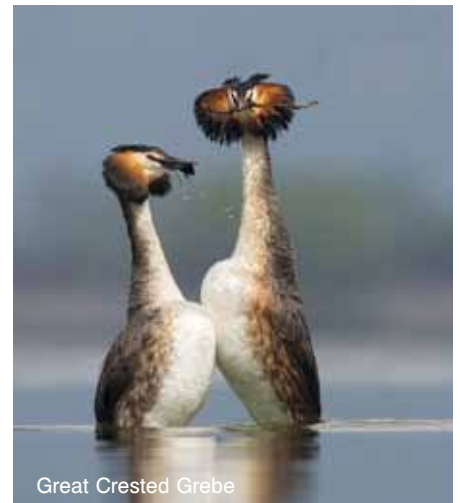
ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Sofia/Bucharest airport followed by transfer that bring us to a small village of Kulevcha, near the town of Shumen. Accommodation for the entire holiday, and if time left introduction to the area and check of various sites in the area in order to become familiar with the settings and the various opportunities.

DAYS 2 to 7 Six full days of photographing wetland birds. The hides for water birds fit for morning and evening sessions, so we can split in two groups in different days so all have the chance to use the hides. The hides are made of wood, soft mattress' on the bottom let you get low angle shots, but the hides are big enough to use chair and tripod if you are not used to laying down for long time. Wagtails are sometimes trying to get into the hides, and waders are used to it and crossing only few meters away from the lenses. Herons are coming close too.

To avoid disturbance we need to enter the hides before sunrise, and depending on the weather, the heat haze will make photography impossible about 11 a.m., so we will go back to the hotel for siesta and go outdoor again after 3 pm for the evening sessions (sunset is about 8 pm.). The hides are situated on the end of small dam, and birds are getting very close, so zoom lens is handy sometimes. Birds are very tame; you can have waders at 4-5 meters distance. The Ruddy Shelduck is aware of the shutter sounds. Early starts are recommended in order to get the best light in the morning, additionally that is the period when the birds are in the peak of their activities. Best strategy is to have siestas, followed by long afternoon sessions to take advantage of the evening light too.

DAY 8 Depending on your departure flight, we can have an early session in the morning, then pack up and three to five hours transfer will bring us at the airport your flight back home.



Great Crested Grebe



Kingfisher



Little Bittern



Garganey

Ground price: 1,350 EUR / £ 1,175
for 4-6 photographers
2-3 photographers - 1,450 EUR
Single supplement: 115 EUR
Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:
ground transport, full board,
accommodation, guide, entrance
fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:
airfare, travel insurance,
hard drinks, beverages and all
items of purely personal nature.

Rollers and Bee-eaters

Sunday 25th May – Sunday 1st June 2014



This bird and wildlife photography tour is focused on two of the most colorful European birds – the Roller and the Bee-eater. The tour dates coincide with the period when the birds will be forming the pairs, so we expect a lot of activities – food transfer, mating etc. Our tour is designed for keen photographers who want to spend more time with their subject and get the maximum of it, rather than chasing bigger numbers of species.

We will be working in at the edge of the Ludogorie plateau and for the entire holiday we will be based in one hotel only – in the north-east, of Bulgaria – near the town of Shumen. Here we will also photograph shrikes, Hoopoe and Syrian Woodpecker, finches, possibly Golden Oriole. At a small dam we will split into two hides suitable both for morning and evening sessions. They give fantastic opportunity for „Contre Jour“ photography too. The diversity of water birds gives us good chances for Ruddy Shelducks with chicks, variety of wading birds and herons, Black Stork etc. The biodiversity in the area will also provide opportunities for macro photography – butterflies, dragonflies and other insects. We will have early morning and late afternoon session and siestas in the middle of the day as this will allow us resting for a while and also avoiding the harsh midday light which is no good for photography. We will be based in one hotel only for the entire tour and most of the sites are less than half an hour drive from it. The only long transfers we will do are from and to the Sofia airport – about five hours one way. Though arrival at Bucharest airport in Romania is also possible, and that is only two and a half hours journey.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Sofia/Bucharest airport followed by transfer that bring us to a small village of Kulevcha, near the town of Shumen. Accommodation for the entire holiday, and if time left introduction to the area and check of various sites in the area in order to become familiar with the settings and the various opportunities.

DAYS 2 to 7 Six full days of photographing Rollers, Bee-eaters, Hoopoe, possibly Golden Oriole, shrikes and many more. We will have at least three sessions with our main targets, using canvas hides. Once ready, we can also use the wetland hides. They both fit for morning and evening sessions, so we can split in two groups in different days so all have the chance to use the hides. In all the days early starts are recommended in order to get the best light in the morning.



Roller



Hoopoe

DAY 8 Depending on your departure flight, we can have an early session in the morning, then pack up and three to five hours transfer will bring us at the airport your flight back home. Departure.

Ground price: 1,300 EUR / £ 1,130
for 4-6 photographers

2-3 photographers - 1,380 EUR

Single supplement: 115 EUR
Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:
ground transport, full board,
accommodation, guide, entrance
fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:
airfare, travel insurance,
hard drinks, beverages and all
items of purely personal nature.

Butterflies and Macro Photography

Sunday 15th – Sunday 22nd June 2014



Bulgaria in summer offers excellent macro photography opportunities due to its rich biodiversity and variety of habitats. Our main targets will be the butterflies, but the summer season and the various sites we shall visit will provide numerous other insects – dragonflies and damselflies, grasshoppers, spiders, beetles etc, as well as flowers and orchids. We will have early starts and late evenings in order to take advantage of the best light and it is also the time when butterflies and other insects are normally motionless. Early afternoons we may have siestas to rest, avoiding the harsh midday sun.

Our tour will start with a two night stay in a small village east of Sofia, where we will explore the areas around for fritillaries, the first blues, gliders and emperors. After which, we will be based in Koprivshitsa for the next two nights, a nice traditional village. One of the very few in Bulgaria designated as architectural reserve, situated in the heart of Sredna Gora mountain (Middle Forest). These days we will explore the immediate surroundings, having only short transfers. At the end we will move to the beautiful Dobrostan ridge in the Western Rhodope mountain, where we will stay for three nights, exploring the butterfly rich surroundings. We will also have a moth trap with us which will allow us to photograph a good number of moths, additional to the many butterflies we will get.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrival at Sofia airport and transfer to the village of Mirkovo, about an hour drive, for a two nights stay. If time permits, we will have an afternoon session along a small river, not far from the hotel, where we can find Map Butterfly, Spotted, Niobe, Twin-spot and Marbled fritillaries.

DAY 2 Day in the area, looking for fritillaries, hairstreaks, Freyer's Purple Emperor, Southern White Admiral, Yellow-banded Skipper, Lattice Brown, Large, Sooty, Lesser Fiery and Purple-shot coppers and many more.

DAYS 3 and 4 Short transfer will bring us to our next base, the picturesque village of Koprivshitsa, where we will stay again for two nights. Both days will be spent in local meadows, having only short transfers. Here we will find Chequerred, Large, Alcon and other

blues, Russian Heath, Black-veined White, White Admiral, many fritillaries and skippers, as well as dragonflies and damselflies.

DAYS 5 to 7 We will have morning session, followed by a transfer to our last base for the holiday – the beautiful Dobrostan plateau, in the Western Rhodope mountains. Here we will stay for three nights in a lovely hotel, situated in a tiny village, providing excellent panoramic views. In the afternoon, as well as the following two days we will explore the meadows around, looking for Apollo, Balkan and Scarce coppers, Niobe, High Brown, Dark Green, Twin-spot and other fritillaries, Great Sooty Satyr, many blues, hairstreaks and skippers. Here we will also find many orchids.

DAY 8 Option for another early session, time permitting, followed by a three hours transfer to the airport for your flight back home.



Pearly Heath



Silver-studded Blue



Bee Orchid

Ground price: 820 EUR / £ 715
for 4-7 photographers
for 2-3 photographers – 970 EUR

Single supplement: 120 EUR
Deposit: 250 EUR

The price includes:
ground transport, full board,
accommodation, guide, entrance
fees for all nature reserves.

The price does not include:
airfare, travel insurance,
hard drinks, beverages and all
items of purely personal nature.

Our leaders

MARIO LANGOUROV

Mario is entomologist working in the National Museum of Natural History. Besides being an expert in butterflies and insects, he is also one of the best herpetologists and excellent birder. He speaks Italian, English and Russian; and has a broad knowledge of the Bulgarian history. His expertise and easy going personality and sense of humor all contribute to the butterflies, birdwatching and reptiles and amphibians tour he leads.



MITKO PETRAKIEV

Mitko is engineer in hydrology but his love of mountains made him one of the leading experts in hiking and trekking in Bulgaria. He has travelled widely around the Balkans, Caucasus, Middle East, North Africa and South America leading trekking tours. Mitko is also an excellent birder and during the last four years he is also leading birdwatching tours.

HOW TO BOOK YOUR HOLIDAY

Once you decide which tour you want to book, just let us know sending an e-mail. You will be provided with all the needed information. After you send the deposit, we will send you your tourist voucher where all the tour details are described and thus your place is reserved. The payment of the balance has to be done 60 days before the tour starts.

CANCELTION

Deposit - non-refundable.

60 - 30 days prior the tour - 50 % of the tour price.

29 - 0 days - 100 % of the tour price.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE?

We are ground operator and our tour price includes everything once you arrive in Bulgaria. This includes accommodation, full board plus coffees and refreshments,



BORIS BELCHEV

Boris is 28 years old and his passion for nature started when he was 10 years old teenager. He is studying Ecology since 2009, in Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas, Lithuania) - Environmental Department. Beside his excellent knowledge on the birds, Boris is also very passionate wildlife photographer.

ALEXANDAR DUTSOV

Alex is one of the leading scientists in Bulgaria, working on the large carnivores' conservation and has excellent knowledge about bears and wolves. He is currently leading a project for development of a Brown Bear Action Plan in Bulgaria and is also a leader of one of the most active Bulgarian NGO - "Balkani" Wildlife Society. Alex is married and lives in Sofia.

BOIAN ZLATKOV

Boian is 28 years old and his passion for butterflies started when he was 14 years old teenager. He has MC since 2005, and since 2006 he started his PhD on the *Tortricidae* family, in Sofia University, Biological Department. Beside his excellent knowledge on the

butterflies, Boian is also very familiar with most of the moths.

DOBROMIR DOMUSCHIEV

Dobromir is founder and owner of Spatia Wildlife. He holds an MSc degree in economics and management from the Academy of Economics, Svishov. Nevertheless, the love of birds and nature have been the actual reason for his involvement in their conservation and Dobromir is working on a number of environmental projects. His true wish is to make the local people believe that sustainable tourism is a real alternative to poverty and quick intensive depletion of natural resources in the beautiful countryside of Bulgaria.



guides, ground transfers, all entry fees and taxes for natural and cultural sites we visit during the tour, plus 25 EUR donation for nature conservation activities in Bulgaria (please see below). For our photo tours, hides and chairs are included. There are no hidden extras. The price excludes airfare, travel insurance, alcohol and all items of a purely personal nature. The price conditions are given for each tour described inside this brochure.

PASSPORT, VISA AND HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

To enter Bulgaria, a valid passport is required. European citizens, except those from Russia and Turkey, do not need a visa to visit the country. Bulgaria is not a country with dangerous diseases. However, some insects can be a problem, so the usage of an appropriate repellent is recommended if

you visit the country in the summer months. Being high in the mountains in the summer months means that sun screen is also essential in order to prevent sun burn.

ITINERARY CHANGES

Our itineraries are carefully prepared and no changes occur without a serious reason. We reserve the right to change the itinerary upon circumstances which are out of our control i.e. harsh weather, closed roads, not working chair or cabin lifts etc. However, in such a case we will discuss the situation with you and the group. We will just offer different options and the final decision will be taken in mutual agreement.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Before you book a holiday with Spatia Wildlife, please read carefully our terms and conditions. You will find them on our website: www.spatiawildlife.com

PHOTO CREDITS:

Guido Bonett - Fire-belly Toad, Syrian Spadefoot Toad and Montpellier Snake; **Mario Langourov** - Iolas Blue and Freyer's Fritillary; **Andrew Burns** - Southern Swallowtail; **Patrick Dieudonne** - Golden Eagle; **Michele Mendi** - Three-toed Woodpecker, Bearded Vulture; **Kai Gauger** - G\u00fcldenst\u00e4dt's Redstart; **Nikolay Simov** - Lesser Horseshoe Bat; **M. Kelly/HE** - Ribbon Seal; **A. Terauds/HE** - Pollar Bear; **K. Ovsyanikova/HE** - Wrangel Island; **JERoss/HE** - Horned Puffins; **Melvin Grey** - Hoopoe; **Stefan Stefanov** - Green-underside Blue; **Sergey Zlatkov** - Red-breasted Geese, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Garganey, Black-necked Grebe, Roller; **Svetoslav Tsvetanov** - Kingfisher, Great Crested Grebe, Little Bittern; **Boris Belchev** - Ural Owl; Front cover - Pallas's Sandgrouse, back cover - Apollo and rest of the photos are courtesy of **Dobromir Domuschiev/Spatia Wildlife**.

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