

Via Pontica – Late Autumn Migration

Sunday 20th – Sunday 28th September 2015

Trip report by Daniel Mitev

Tour leaders: Daniel Mitev
Leo Apon

Tour participants: Mr. Nils Taal
Mr. Paul Borgerding
Mr. Hans Veltman
Mrs. Irene ter Horst
Mrs. Joke Eeltink
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Mr. Jan Vonk

Our goal was to witness the bird migration along the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria, and mainly raptors migration.

Day 1 Sunday 20th September

Outbound from Varna;

After the arriving of the group at Varna airport we visited Povelianovo wetlands to check for waders, only several of them left around but our efforts payed off with a nice view at Osprey roosting on a pole. Other birds presented in the area by Crested Lark, Marsh Harrier, Red-backed Shrike, Goshawk and Sparrowhawk, Greenshank, Redshank, Green and Wood Sandpiper, Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers. After that we headed North to the town of Tjulenovo, where our hotel was. On the way we stopped several times just to enjoy the numerous Yellow and White Wagtails, Stonechats and Winchats, Turtle Doves and of course Hoopoe. Several times we heard how Tree Pipit and Red-throated Pipit flying above us, but we could not find a good look at them.

Day 2 Monday 21st September

Durankulak and Shabla lakes;

We planned to spend the entire day birding the area around Durankulak and Shabla Lake complex. But before breakfast we had the opportunity for a short walk around the hotel, where we took a close look at Black-eared Wheatear and a Little Owl. Several Shags presented in the Sea. After breakfast we headed to Durankulak Beach, which separated the lake from the sea. Here we observed Ferruginous Ducks, Pygmy Cormorants, Purple Heron, Whiskered Tern, Black Tern and other waterfowl. Just before we go, we had a good look at adult White-tailed Eagle. During coffee break at the camp site, we saw several flocks of Spoonbills and a single Grey Wagtail, it worked along the water edge. Our next stop was at the West side of the lake, where we found couple of Red-breasted Flycatchers, Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart. Shabla Tuzla Lake presented several interesting bird species. There were hundreds of ducks including Garganey, Ferruginous Duck, Common Pochards, Teals, Pintails, Shovelers and Gadwalls, also Three Ruddy Shelducks and dozens of Shelducks. At this location we observed and Hobby, Water Rail, Mediterranean Gull and Little Gull. In the evening near the hotel we saw several Alpine Swifts .

Day 3 Tuesday 22nd September

Area of Kaliakra steppe reserve;

After breakfast we visited Batova forest and looked for Woodpeckers. We were very lucky to find 5 species just at one point - Grey-headed, Green, Great-spotted, Middle-spotted and Lesser-spotted. Just about 500m away we got number 6 - Black Woodpecker. We managed to see Short-toed Treecreeper and Red-breasted Flycatcher. In the afternoon we birded the area around Cape Kaliakra. Here we saw Tawny Pipit, Paid Wheatear, Short-toed Eagle, Hobby, Shag, Kingfisher, Red-backed Shrike and Levant Sparrowhawk. Many Red-throated Pipits flew over our heads. We finished the day with very good shots of two Rolers sitting on a wire.

Day 4 Wednesday 23rd September

Area near Pomorie;

Today we made a transfer to Pomorie, of course with several stops on the way to the next hotel. Our first stop was at the Eagle Owl place. The Owl was at home and we enjoyed the bird. We also saw our first raptor for the day - Red-footed Falcons above town of Balchik. After refueling the car in Varna we headed to our next spot in Diulino pass.

Our main goal was to see how the migration was going. It wasn't long before the first Honey Buzzards appeared above our heads. We also saw Black Storks, Lesser Spotted Eagles, many Red-footed Falcons and Levant Sparrowhawk. We stopped in the valley for a flock of White Pelicans, that migrated to South. In the surrounding field we saw several Common Buzzards, two Ravens, Red-footed Falcons again and Lesser Gray Shrike, that waited on post for pray.

Day 5 Thursday 24th September

Atanasovsko Lake;

We spend the entire day at the vantage point at Atanasovsko Lake. Many raptors migrated over here. The weather changed during the day and that was a significant push for the migration. The most numerous migrating birds were the Black Storks, about 500 and some White Storks, we also saw hundreds of Red-footed Falcons, Lesser Spotted Eagles, Steppe Buzzards, Honey Buzzards, Short-toed Eagles, Booted Eagles. One male Steppe Harrier, two Great Spotted Eagles - the identity was confirmed by pictures, Levant Sparrow Hawks and Ospreys. Many passerines were on the move too. We observed thousands of Spanish Sparrows, tens of Red-throated Pipits, several Red-rumped Swallows. It was a really exciting day.

Day 6 Friday 25th September

Burgas wetlands;

We birded the wetlands around Burgas that day. Of course we started from Lake Pomorie, our hotel was right on the shore. We managed to see many ducks including Ferruginous Duck, Herons, Gulls including Slender-billed Gull, Great Cormorant, Pygmy Cormorant, Grebes and Waders. 4 Red-necked Grebe were present in the Sea. The highlight at Atanasovsko Lake were Dalmations Pelicans, Penduline Tit, 4 Flamingos, Black, Whiskered and White-winged Terns. This time of the year Burgas Lake produces several hundrads Pelicans of both species, Ferruginous Ducks, Pygmy Cormorants, Black and Whiskered Tern. Mandra Lake gave us much more interesting birds - Squacco and Night Heron, at least 4 White-tailed Eagles at different age, Little Crake, Sombre Tit, Black Tern. The rest of the day we watched the migration at lake shore, there were many raptors and Black Storks.

Day 7 Saturday 26th September

Pomorie Lake;

We had a good start of day with Marsh Sandpiper, that worked on the shore on Lake Pomorie. The highlight of the day was a Water Rail – it enjoyed a small snake for breakfast and watched at Poda reserve. Of course many of the “common” birds for the area were around the lakes. New species for the trip were Cetti’s Warbler, Little Tern and Gray Plover.

Day 8 Sunday 27th August

Pomorie Lake – Varna;

We had little time for birding, just for a short check at the shore of Lake Pomorie, we found the usual suspects there - Pygmy Cormorants, Slender-billed Gulls, Sandwich Terns, Ferruginous Ducks and many others. After breakfast we headed to Varna airport.

The 8 days tour total came to 60 species of birds which is a very good number for a fall trip!