Bird – Watching Holiday

To

BULGARIA

MAY 16TH – May 24TH 2016

TRIP REPORT

DAY 1 – 16TH MAY 2016

FLIGHT LONDON TO SOFIA - TRANSFER TO YAGODINA IN THE WESTERN RHODOPES - LUNCH AND BIRDING NEAR PAZARDZIK QUARRY

A punctual flight found us at Sofia at 11am where we met Dancho our Bulgarian guide and two more of the group. It was 11C and it was raining hard. After collecting our mini-bus we drove to the Western Rhodope Mountains making a few stops along the way. We noted Raven, Hooded Crow, Common Buzzard, White Stork and lots of common species along the way.

At Pazardzik we stopped to buy picnic supplies and then we drove just outside of the town near some quarries to eat our lunch. The rain eased off and it brightened up as we arrived at the quarries and very soon we were listing a nice variety of species. Black-headed Buntings and Calandra Larks were the most abundant but Spanish Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Corn Bunting and Crested Larks were also numerous. We found Black-eared Wheatear, Northern Wheatear, Little Owl, Common Whitethroat, Long-legged Buzzard, Short-toed Eagle, Marsh Harrier, distant Eurasian Hoopoe and European Bee-eaters as well as two fantastic Montagu's Harriers. What a great introduction to Bulgarian Birding!

Further along the journey we stopped to look for Wryneck, instead we found Golden Oriole, Isabelline Wheatear, Lesser Grey Shrike and more Common Buzzards. Another impromptu stop was made to look at Souslik, a small hamster-like rodent and just after that we found a beautiful European Roller on a roadside fence and another Isabelline Wheatear.

We drove down the Vaca Valley passing the huge lake and three impressive dams, at the southern end we turned off to Yagodina. The road narrowed passing through a beautiful gorge where a fast flowing stream ran alongside the road. We stopped to watch Grey Wagtail and Dipper. Finally, at the village we had time to scan the hillside and local environs from our balconies. We added Eurasian Serin, Black Redstart, White Wagtail and Crag Martin to our list.

We ate delicious fresh trout for dinner and at 9pm we retired for the night, it had been a long day.

DAY 2 – 17TH MAY 2016

YAGODINA - TRIGRAD GORGE - PREVALA MOUNTAIN PASS - KRUMOVGRAD

We had a 'cracker' of a day, literally! Nutcracker was our bird of the day by a long shot, what a great bird and most-wanted by the group.

It was a roller-coaster of a day, the weather was good all day, very chilly in the morning, about 5C but it was clear with little wind. We met at 6am for our morning walk in and around the village of Yagodina. Both Willow and Sombre Tit were the outstanding sightings, both were seen very well. Generally, it was quiet but we did see Black Redstart, Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer, Common and Pallid Swifts, European Serin, Red-rumped Swallows, White Wagtail and a few common species.

After breakfast we set off for the Trigrad Gorge passing through some magnificent scenery along the way, we saw Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Eurasian Jay and Cirl Bunting from the bus. At the gorge we hit a low point on our 'roller-coaster' or more appropriately 'big dipper' as we dipped big time on our main target bird, WALLCREEPER. It was small consolation to hear from other birders that this elusive gem had been missing for a few weeks! Nevertheless, we had a good time listing more Tits, both Marsh and Coal went on the list, together with Peregrine Falcon, Honey Buzzard, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Alpine Swift, Crag Martin, Common Raven and lots of House Martins.

The middle of day was spent high up in the pine forest of the Prevala Mountain Pass, the scenery was just stunning. We drove through the forest up to 2000 meters into alpine meadows of extreme beauty. A different set of bird species entertained us in the cold for a couple of hours. Ring Ouzels were common and along with Eurasian Bullfinch, Mistle Thrush, Dunnock, Common Crossbill, Eurasian Jay and both Goldcrest & Firecrest we were kept very happy.

However, our main target the NUTCRAKER eluded us, not even a distant call was heard. We ate our picnic lunch before we set off back down the mountain. After stopping to watch Red-backed Shrikes we turned a corner and bumped into a NUTCRACKER feeding on the ground with a Eurasian Jay, it flew up into a nearby tree and sat for a few minutes before it flew off, we all got in-the-scope views, what a great stroke of luck.

It was now late afternoon so we had to press on, we made two more stops, where we added Pygmy Cormorant, Great Egret, Night Heron, Great Cormorant, Common Nightingale, Cirl Bunting and Syrian Woodpecker to our list.

We arrived at Krumovgrad at 6:30pm and went straight to our hotel, checked in and had a lovely relaxed evening meal. Guess what bird of the day was?

DAY 3 – 18TH MAY 2016

KRUMOVGRAD – DONA KULA VALLEY – TRANSFER TO MADZHAROVO - BIRDING CRATER AREA

A full-on programme for today saw us visit many different habitats and amass a sizable list of species……

Our early morning walk was to a local park in Krumovgrad which has in the past delivered a good selection of woodpeckers as well as regular Scop's Owl sightings. Today was a big disappointment! We only saw Syrian Woodpecker and no owls. So we decided to visit some waste ground near the hotel, there we fared much better seeing: Olivaceous Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Golden Oriole, Eurasian Hoopoe, European Bee-eater, Common Nightingale and loads of Eurasian Jackdaws. It was strange to hear such a wonderful chorus of melodic bird song in this post-communist dereliction, where crumbling and decaying buildings have become literally an 'urban jungle'.

After checking-out of the hotel we drove a short distance to one of my favourite Bulgarian birding spots, it is a hidden valley a few kilometers out if town. A wide flat valley where the landscape rises on one side to steep sided cliffs, a river runs through the middle and open grassland, scrub, poplar woods, rocky scree and hedgerows form most of the valley floor and cultivated fields cover most of the land on the far side of the river.

We had a lovely day in which to visit this marvellous place, a cloudy start developed into a beautiful spring morning with plenty of sunshine. I have yet to count but we must had heard about 20 species of birds singing in that valley, that's no exaggeration it was fantastic. Imagine Common Cuckoos, Turtle Doves, Eurasian Hoopoes, Golden Orioles and Bee-eaters competing with Common Nightingale, Olivaceous, Orphean, Olive-tree, Barred Warblers and Common Whitethroats. Cirl, Corn

and Black-headed Buntings added to the chorus whilst Red-backed & Lesser Grey Shrikes, Hawfinch and Rollers, chipped in too.

After an hour or so we had also listed some excellent raptors, a brief sighting of Levant's Sparrowhawk topped a nice list: Eurasian Hobby, Peregrine Falcon and Common Kestrel, Common Buzzard, Griffin & Egyptian Vultures along with both Black and White Storks. We walked a good way, the road climbed to reach a wonderful place to view the river and surrounding fields, we added Chukar, Green Woodpecker, Black-eared Wheatear and we searched for Rock Nuthatch without success.

We really had to move on it was so hard to drag ourselves away because apart from the superb birding the array of colourful wild flowers and the emergence of some wonderful butterflies made this place so special.

Back on the road we headed east to Madzharovo, our picnic stop was up in the hills above a small village where a Vulture Feeding Station had been established. We viewed the carcass of a cow from quite a distance where only crows and a single Egyptian Vulture fed.

Moving on we made a successful stop near a huge rock face where we watched a pair of Rock Nuthatches visiting their mud nest, a Blue Rock Thrush and a mighty Golden Eagle sighting were bonuses. At Madzharovo we visited a track than ran high above a river and gave a wonderful panoramic views of the surrounding mountains, you could easily see the huge ancient Caldera that is

a major feature of Madzharovo. Our target here was Bonelli's Warbler but whilst we heard a couple we never actually saw one. Raptors again featured in our sightings we added Booted Eagle to a growing list and enjoyed watching buzzards, vultures and storks.

Our final venue before driving to the hotel for dinner was the Caldera itself, it must measure 5 kilometers in diameter and about fifty percent of the old 'rim' still rises up some 100 meters or so. Great volcanic pinnacles provide nest sites and perches for the numerous vultures whilst Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting and Ortolan Buntings nest in nooks and crannies. We saw all of those plus Chukar, Peregrine Falcons, Crag and House Martin, Barn and Red-rumped Swallows.

Our guest house accommodation was another 10 km down the road, we arrived around 6pm and ate a lovely dinner on the terrace which overlooks a huge lake. A White Stork's nest with its compliment of nesting Spanish Sparrows was just a few meters away in the garden.

After dinner we went back to Madzharovo for an 'owl prowl', as we arrived we noted a Little Owl on a building, we heard several Scop's Owl calling and a Barn Owl 'screaming'. Soon we had both of the latter in the bins under torch-light. It was a great experience, in particular the group enjoyed seeing the Scop's Owl fully out in the open and awake!

Our journey back to the guest house was just as exciting as we encountered several European Nightjars along the lane, one or two were perched on the tarmac and allowed a close approach again under torch-light, a lovely end to a very long day.

DAY 4 – 19TH MAY 2016

BORISLAVTSI – LEVKA - TOPOLOVGRAD – BOZHURA – BOURGAS LAKE

We headed out of the Rhodope Mountains to the Black Sea Coast, the weather got warmer, new birds kept on coming. It was 'Eagle-day' today.....

We were surprised to see a thick veil of mist this morning as we left the guest house for our morning birding but it did not deter us. We went back up the road towards Madzharovo and stopped in an area where open bushes covered the grassy hillside. Our target bird was the Subalpine Warbler and any other warbler willing to show itself in the mist. A Woodlark sang from the top of a bush, as did Corn and Black Headed Buntings, but it was quite a while before we saw or heard our target bird.

When it did eventually show we all got satisfactory views and by 7:30am the mist began to clear and the sun shone through.

It was a clear beautiful day as we set off after breakfast, both Olivaceous and Orphean Warblers were singing in the garden and Golden Oriole could be heard calling from nearby trees. We drove towards Bourgas making stops as and when we saw birds of prey, after just 2km we pulled over to watch our first Black Kites of the trip, we also saw European Rollers and Red-backed Shrikes. Our first scheduled roadside stop was at a known Levant's Sparrowhawk's nest site, unfortunately the birds were not at home, however we did see our first Masked Shrike.

The next stop was near a small lake not much further on, we were there to scan the sky for eagles and before long we found our first Imperial Eagle of the trip, it hung around for 20 minutes circling above us before drifting off. During this 'sky-watch' we added Honey Buzzard, Common Buzzard and Common Kestrel to the list.

Next we visited a very new and enterprising conservation project in a small village called Levka. It was a well thought out reintroduction project for Lesser Kestrels and it seemed to working very well. The 'Kestrel stock' was imported from Spain and now 10 pairs are breeding freely they even migrate and 8 pairs returned this year. We watched the birds free flying and we saw web-cams of their eggs and chicks, the Lesser Kestrel has returned to Bulgaria, hooray! A Little Owl was using a nest box in the compound and we saw both Booted and Imperial Eagle high above us.

A disused airfield was our next venue and after failing a second time to see Levant's Sparrowhawk we were getting to think that this species was going to be one that got away, we enjoyed watching Bee-eaters, European Roller, Black-headed Bunting, Red-rumped Swallow and lots of Common Buzzards. Another unscheduled roadside stop produced LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE, fantastic! A pair of them performed well for us.

Our lunch 'break' was taken as a picnic next to the radio tower just outside of Topolovgrad, it has been a regular venue for our tours and one that usually produces Eastern Imperial Eagle, today was no exception. Isabelline Wheatears were everywhere, Orphean Warblers showed well and a Eurasian Hobby was a nice sighting.

We put some time in on the road and it was about 3pm when we reached our last venue, an oak woodland campsite called Bozhura. We had several target birds to look for but the main one was Semi-collared Flycatcher. The beautiful woodland was surprisingly alive with birds during this late afternoon walk, Short-toed Treecreepers were visiting a nest box, Middle-spotted Woodpeckers were also feeding young and Common Redstarts flitted all over. We got good views of Spotted Flycatcher and our first Blue Tit went on the list, Green Woodpecker and Great Spotted Woodpecker were flashes through the trees.

High above us we saw Booted Eagle and a single Honey Buzzard. But time was not on our side so we had to go before we had a sighting of the Semi-collared Flycatcher but other sites for them were still ahead of us.

We arrived in Bourgas at 5pm passing a number of lakes and marshes, we noted Common Pochard, Ferruginous Duck, Pygmy Cormorant, Little Egret and lots of Mute Swans and gulls. One field had five Eurasian Hobbys and one Common Kestrel feeding over it, a lovely sight. We took a short detour to avoid the traffic in rush-hour Bourgas and drove around the western side of Lake Bourgas where we saw many Squacco Herons, a Night Heron and to Dancho's amazement a Cattle Egret which is a rare sighting for Bulgaria.

After that excitement we called it a day and drove to our hotel, a cold beer and a lovely dinner ensued.

DAY 5 – 20TH MAY 2016

BOURGAS WETLANDS – PODA RESERVE – BOURGAS SALINAS

We spent all day in and around Bourgas, there are so many places to visit and so many birds to look for…….
Before breakfast we went for a walk in the strip of woodland next to the beach, it was quiet but we did see a few species. Cetti's Warbler was new for us and a possible Thrush Nightingale would have been a great addition to the list but we never got good enough views. Golden Orioles, Olivaceous Warblers, Common Nightingales and common woodland birds filled the air with their songs.

We ate an English style fry-up for breakfast before setting off to Bourgas Lake for our morning's birding. It was a beautiful sunny day, no clouds and no wind, perfect.

Out on the lake hundreds of Pelicans crammed onto concrete platforms or sat on the flat calm water, the majority of them were White but a few Dalmatian were amongst them. They were joined by hundreds of Great and Pygmy Cormorants and lots of Mute Swans which fed out on the water. We also saw good numbers of Common Pochard, Great Crested Grebes and Common Terns. A few Night Herons flew over, Great Reed Warblers sang from the reeds and a pair of Bearded Tits flitted about in nearby reeds.

A second stop further south produced Purple Heron, Ferruginous Duck, Common Shelduck and Little Grebe. We then drove inland to visit the western side of the lake and it was there that we found our second Lesser Spotted Eagles, it was lovely to see them so well. Honey Buzzards, Marsh Harrier and Eurasian Hobby added to the raptor tally.

Another site further along the lake shore produced nothing new but better views of a lot of species, we also added a few passerines to the day-list such as Yellow Wagtail, Lesser Grey Shrike, Turtle Dove and Black-headed Bunting.

At a dam not far away we found Glossy Ibis with Little Egrets but a major find was a flock of about 10 ROSE-COLOURED STARLINGS!! This was a major find we had great views or them feeding and bathing in a pool, fantastic! We tried to get nearer to photograph them using the bus for a hide but they flew off never to return.

We ate our picnic lunch overlooking the lake, we spent time watching butterflies, dragonflies and birds of prey flying over. The rest of the afternoon was spent at Poda Reserve which consists of huge reed beds, open lagoons, shore-line on the Black Sea and a visitor's centre. After stopping at the visitor's centre we spent 2 hours walking the main track and visiting the raised hides. We added lots of new sightings including Little and Sandwich Terns, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Black-winged Stilt, Little Bittern, Lesser Whitethroat and many more.

A very distant White-tailed Eagle sat on top of a tree, a single Black-necked Grebe sat out in the bay and Squacco Herons, Eurasian Spoonbills and Night Herons tended their nests in a small colony with Little Egrets.

For our last venue we visited another part of the wetlands to the north where large salt pans could be scanned from a raised bank. We added a few new species there such as Eurasian Curlew, Pied Avocet and Slender-billed Gull but generally it was very quiet. Good numbers of Common Terns were using the breeding platforms, lots of Eurasian Spoonbills were feeding too and a flock of roosting gulls included Mediterranean, Black-headed and the Slender-billed.

We were back at the hotel just after 6pm with time to take a leisurely shower before dinner. Tomorrow we are heading north towards the Romanian border to complete the final stage of this super tour. We have seen 166 species so far. Rose-coloured Starling was voted bird of the day.

DAY 6 – 21st May 2016

TRANSFER FROM BOURGAS TO KRAPETS WITH STOPS AT NORTHERN SALT PANS

Transfer days never produce big lists and at this stage of the tour we see very few new birds …….

We began the day with an early morning walk to an area of the Bourgas Wetlands beyond the Airport, a few small pools with reed-beds and bushy scrub. Our target bird was soon in our sights as a pair of PENDULINE TITS were found visiting their beautifully constructed hanging nest. In the area we had a bonus find when a MARSH WARBLER started singing deep in the scrub, after some time we got reasonable views of it. Golden Oriole showed very well as did Common Cuckoo, Great Reed Warbler and several fly-over species made up the rest of our pre-breakfast list.

We packed our bags and set off for the trip northward, we planned to be out all day birding in several places along the way. The first stop was at Pomorie a developed area where a small nature reserve has been established along a bay of the Black Sea. Several tern colonies held hundreds of birds of three species, Sandwich, Common and Little Terns. We also saw lots of Great Cormorants with a few Pygmy Cormorants too, Kentish Plover, Ruddy Turnstone and a distant Black-necked Grebe were the best of other sightings.

Next we searched the northern salt pans for more wader species and we struck gold when we found a larger flock of BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPERS. We counted over fifty of them, a great find, there were also Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints feeding with them.

Further north we made two stops to look for Semi-collared Flycatcher a must-see bird missing from our list, the first woodland we visited produced the goods. We had reasonable views of a pair but they were not showing well, but what we did see well was Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Nuthatch, Common Nightingale and we heard a Yellowhammer singing.

After we had eaten our picnic lunch, on the beach just south of Varna, we walked alongside a dense woodland hoping to see Black Woodpecker but one never showed. A Hawfinch sat out well and we had great views of a male Semi-collared Flycatcher, a Common Chiffchaff was also seen.

Some chalk cliffs near Belchik was our next port-of-call, we scanned the cliffs for an Eagle Owl, this is a regular spot for them and we have seen them there several times in the past. But after searching for an hour or so we never found one.

The last part of the journey took us off the main road and through some lovely agricultural land along a coastal strip. We were hoping to see Red-footed Falcons or Rose-coloured Starlings but none were about. Lesser Grey Shrikes were abundant and lots of Calandra Larks flew over the fields. We also saw European Roller, European Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Black-headed Bunting, Red-rumped Swallows, we had a close encounter with a Marsh Harrier and a Montagu's Harrier flew high over the road a little earlier.

We arrived at Krapets for our two-night stay at around 6:30pm, the usual cold beer and a lovely dinner awaited us, our bird count revealed that we had seen just under 180 species, it's going to be a push to clock up 200 but we are going to try.

DAY 7 – 22nd MAY 2016

KRAPETS – DURANKULAK – SHABLA LAKE – CAPE KALIAKRA – BOLATA QUARRY

Our last full day was as exciting as the first we had plenty of new birds still to find and a couple of surprises were in store for us……

At 6:30am we met for a pre-breakfast walk along the cliffs next to the hotel we hoped for a few new sightings but it wasn't to be. Sea-watching was a disappointment it was very quiet not even a Black-throated Diver was out there. A colony of Bee-eaters kept us entertained as they flew around our heads at their cliff-top nest colony. Bird song and calls were led by Common Cuckoo and Golden

Oriole joined Barred Warbler, Common Whitethroat and both Greenfinch and Goldfinch. A family of Black Redstarts fed around the hotel compound whilst the air was always alive with House Martins, Barn Swallows and the occasional party of Common Swifts.

We enjoyed a Bulgarian breakfast before setting off to Durankulak which is a coastal nature reserve a short drive away near the Romanian border. The reserve comprises of a series of lagoons, reed-beds, a large lake and agricultural fields lie immediately behind the beach, a great habitat for *Acrocephalus* warblers. We stopped to watch a couple of Red-footed Falcons on the approach track, such a beautiful bird received a lot of admiration from the group. A little further on we a very nice surprise sighting of a Red-breasted Goose, this bird should have migrated north a couple of months ago, a feral bird perhaps? We think not by the way it acted, very shy and wary, it flew over us and landed in a field, what a beauty.

Our morning birding just got better and better, the weather helped a lot, lovely sunshine and no wind the reed beds were perfectly still and full of sound. Within minutes we found a pair of Paddyfield Warblers, they showed intermittently but very well, that was number one target species on the list. Reed and Great Reed Warblers quickly followed then we heard a Savi's Warbler buzzing, it took a while but the bird excelled itself by showing in the top of a dead bush!

During the first hour we were amazed at how much was going on around us, three male Common Cuckoos vied for the best perch, one of them even perched on a Crow's nest! Seven Squacco Herons flew around the marsh posing nicely at times, Purple Herons and Ferruginous Ducks were not so obliging. Our first Rook of the trip flew over and two Whiskered Terns quartered the ponds, also a trip first.

Walking further along the beach we found Reed Bunting, more Paddyfield Warblers and we tried to track down a party of Bearded Tits but only one of the group saw them well.

In addition to all the excitement in the reed beds a lot was going on along the beach and out at sea. We notched a Gull-billed Tern flying along the shore whilst dozens of Great Cormorants, Gulls, Terns, Swans and Grebes kept us occupied on the water. A pair of Little Stints and a Little Ringed Plover fed along the shoreline whilst White Wagtail and several birds of prey flew over the best of which was Eurasian Hobby and Marsh Harrier, a sighting of White-tailed Eagle was anticipated but never materialised.

From Durankulak we drove south to Shabla noting European Roller, lots of Lesser Grey Shrikes and to our great joy we found a couple of very confiding Grey Partridges. We ate our picnic lunch at the beach and whilst doing so we found our only Black-throated Diver of the trip, a summer plumaged bird sat for quite a while preening. Sandwich Terns were also noted.

At Shabla Lake we never found anything new but we enjoyed the walk and saw about fifteen species in and around the water, the best of which was; Ferruginous Duck, Eurasian Spoonbill, Black-winged Stilt and in the scrub we found Lesser Whitethroat, Marsh Warbler (heard), Cetti's Warbler and several Common Nightingales.

We then took the coast road to Cape Kaliakra making several stops along the way to look at perched birds or raptors in the sky. We stopped for a walk on the heath just outside of the village of Kaliakra and after about 30 minutes we had found our threes target species. On the track itself we saw both Short-toed Lark and Tawny Pipit within minutes or our arrival but we had to walk quite a way to locate the star bird, Stone Curlew.

The Cape was heaving with tourists it was a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon what else did we expect? It was difficult to park but once we did we never looked back. Pied Wheatears showed well despite the number of people walking passed them. We then had two surprises, firstly we found two Willow Warblers, a non-breeding migrant species which should passed through weeks ago, then we found a Red-breasted Flycatcher as a result of Dancho's superb hearing skills.

This livened us up somewhat and after watching Mediterranean Shags (sub-species *desmarestii*) sitting on a rock we walk to the point of the Cape to sea-watch for a while. A long distance sighting of a Yelkouan Shearwater was our best effort although we did enjoy seeing Sandwich, Common and Gull-billed Terns. Bottle-nosed Dolphins and Harbour Porpoise.

We left the Cape at 5pm and for our last birding session of the day we visited a disused quarry called Botala found nearby. We had hoped for an Eagle Owl sighting but apart from hearing a strange owl-like call from the quarry rock-face we never had a sniff. But the light was fantastic and many other species were on show to be admired, a frequently seen species on the tour was Eurasian Hobby there was two of them in the quarry showing really well perched and in flight. Golden Orioles called constantly we saw a male, the 'song' of the Great Reed Warbler reverberated around the enclosed area whilst Common Nightingales put in their fair share of noise.

We left at 7pm, no owl put in an appearance, dinner was a little later but it was worth waiting for, yummy!

DAY 8 - 23RD MAY 2016

TRANSFER FROM KRAPETS TO SOFIA VIA TOPOLA, VARNA & POBITI KAMANI

There was not much time for birding today as we travelled 500km from east to west across the Central Plain and Central Balkan Mountains.

We set off at 6am taking our ‘picnic breakfast’ with us, typically it was the best day weather-wise, a cloudless clear sky all day with mid-twenties temperature. We planned to visit a number of sites around Varna for a few target species before setting off for Sofia around 11am.

Our first birding venue was a return to Topola to search for the Eagle Owl again. Once more we were disappointed the owl was nowhere in sight, we enjoyed views of European Bee-eater, Golden Oriole, Barred Warbler and plenty of common species.

Next we drove to a woodland site to look for woodpeckers, this was a speculative visit and it was thwarted by a bad track. We had to stop before reaching the mature forest because of the bad state of the track. So we ate our breakfast whilst watching Woodlark and we heard Common Pheasant and Wood Warbler, two birds yet to be seen on the trip.

From there we drove to a geological site called Pobiti Kamani, which a little further west from Varna, it looked like a petrified forest, but was in fact columns of petrified stone some reaching 6 meters high. The prevailing theory is that the “stone forest” was formed some 50 million years ago, at that time it was a part of the sea bottom and after the receding of the water the inorganic sediments eroded, thus attaining the marvellous forms seen today.

Regardless of how this natural phenomenon was formed it now hosts a number of species of birds including ROCK THRUSH, so we were told. We paid our entrance fee and met a coach load of French Tourist in the ‘forest’, this didn’t bode well for birding! However, there were several Eurasian

Hoopoes and family parties of Northern Wheatears on the stones but alas no sign of the Thrush. A distant Booted Eagle and a Eurasian Hobby flew over just before we left.

We then headed westward for about 50km stopping just south of the motorway near some hills with steep sided faces, where we looked for Golden Eagle having seen them there in past visits. Driving down to the site we saw Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, European Bee-eater and Golden Oriole. Our eagle watch lasted 30 minutes, the nest site looked deserted but before we left we noted Honey Buzzard, Common Buzzard and Long-legged Buzzard it's no wonder that the eagle buzzed off!

It was now 11am and we had long journey ahead of us so we headed back onto the motorway and made the journey to Sofia. We stopped for coffee and lunch and fuel, arriving at Sofia at 4:30pm.

We decided not to go birding but to spend a relaxed evening at the hotel, we ate out on the terrace where the beer was cold and the food was excellent, it was a very enjoyable last evening.

DAY 9 – 24TH MAY 2016

TRANSFER TO SOFIA AIRPORT

No-one got up for the early morning walk so we ate a leisurely breakfast before setting off for the airport. The trip was over we had recorded 198 species of birds, it had been another great trip to this superb Balkan Country, can't wait to go back there!

Places Visited

MON 16TH **FLIGHT LONDON TO SOFIA – TRANSFER TO YAGODINA WITH STOPS IN PARA VOCHA VALLEY**
TUES 17TH **YAGODINA – TRIGRAD GORGE – PREVALA MOUNTAIN PASS - KRUMOVGRAD**
WEDS 18TH **KRUMOVGRAD – DONA KULA VALLEY – TRANSFER TO MADZHAROVO - BORISLAVTSI**
THURS 19TH **BORISLAVTSI – LEVKA - TOPOLOVGRAD – BOZHURA – BOURGAS LAKE**
FRI 20TH **BOURGAS WETLAND AND SALT PANS - PODA RESERVE**
SAT 21ST **TRANSFER FROM BOURGAS TO KRAPETS WITH STOPS AT POMORIE – NORTHERN SALT PANS – GORITSA - TOPOLA**
SUN 22ND **KRAPETS – DURANKULAK – SHABLA LAKE – CAPE KALIAKRA – BOLATA QUARRY**
MON 23RD **TRANSFER FROM KRAPETS TO SOFIA STOPS AT TOPOLA – VARNA**
TUES 24TH **TRANSFER TO SOFIA AIRPORT**

SPECIES RECORDED 17TH – 24TH MAY 2016

	SPECIES	*Scientific Name*	DATE SEEN								
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1	Black-throated Diver	*Gavia arctica*							X		
2	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*					X		X		
3	Great Crested Grebe	*Podiceps cristatus*					X	X	X		
4	Black-necked Grebe	*Podiceps nigricollis*					X	X			
5	Yelkouan Shearwater	*Puffinus yelkouan*							X		
6	White Pelican	*Pelecanus onocrotalus*					X	X			
7	Dalmatian Pelican	*Pelecanus crispus*					X				
8	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
9	European Shag	*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*							X		
10	Pygmy Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax pygmeus*		X		X	X	X			
11	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*		X	X	X	X	X	X		
12	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*					X		X		
13	Great White Egret	*Egretta alba*		X			X	X			
14	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*				X	X	X			
15	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*				X					
16	Squacco Heron	*Ardeola ralloides*				X	X		X		
17	Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*		X		X	X	X			
18	Little Bittern	*Ixobrychus minutus*					X		X		
19	Black Stork	*Ciconia nigra*			X	X					
20	White Stork	*Ciconia ciconia*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
21	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*					X				
22	Eurasian Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*					X		X		
23	Mute Swan	*Cygnus olor*				X	X	X	X		
24	Red-breasted Goose	*Branta ruficollis*							X		
25	Common Shelduck	*Tadorna tadorna*					X	X	X		
26	Gadwall	*Anas strepera*					X	X	X		
27	Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*		X	X	X	X	X	X		
28	Common Pochard	*Aythya ferina*				X	X		X		
29	Ferruginous Duck	*Aythya nyroca*				X	X		X		
30	Griffon Vulture	*Gyps fulvus*		X	X						
31	Egyptian Vulture	*Neophron percnopterus*			X						
32	Honey Buzzard	*Pernis apivorus*		X	X	X	X			X	
33	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*				X	X			X	
34	White-tailed Eagle	*Haliaeetus albicilla*					X				
35	Short-toed Eagle	*Circaetus gallicus*	X								
36	Montagu's Harrier	*Circus pygargus*	X					X			
37	Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*	X				X	X	X		
38	Levant Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter brevipes*			X						
39	Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter nisus*		X							
40	Common Buzzard	*Buteo buteo*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

41	Long-legged Buzzard	*Buteo rufinus*	X		X				X	X	
42	Lesser Spotted Eagle	*Aquila pomarina*				X	X				
43	Imperial Eagle	*Aquila heliaca*				X					
44	Golden Eagle	*Aquila chrysaetos*			X						
45	Booted Eagle	*Hieraaetus pennatus*			X	X	X				
46	Lesser Kestrel	*Falco naumanni*				X					
47	Common Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	X	X	X	X		X		X	
48	Red-footed Falcon	*Falco vespertinus*							X		
49	Eurasian Hobby	*Falco subbuteo*			X	X	X	X	X		
50	Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*		X	X						
51	Grey Partridge	*Perdix perdix*							X		
52	Chukar	*Alectoris chukar*			X						
53	Common Pheasant	*Phasianus colchicus*								H	
54	Common Quail	*Coturnix coturnix*				H			H		
55	Common Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*					X		X		
56	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*				X	X	X	X		
57	Oystercatcher	*Haematopus ostralegus*					X				
58	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*					X	X	X		
59	Pied Avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*					X	X			
60	Stone Curlew	*Burhinus oedicnemus*							X		
61	Collared Pratincole	*Glareola pratincola*					X	X			
62	Northern Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*				X		X			
63	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*			X				X		
64	Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*						X			
65	Eurasian Curlew	*Numenius arquata*					X				
66	Ruddy Turnstone	*Arenaria interpres*						X			
67	Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*						X	X		
68	Curlew Sandpiper	*Calidris ferruginea*						X			
69	Broad-billed Sandpiper	*Limicola falcinellus*						X			
70	Lesser Black-backed Gull	*Larus fuscus*				X					
71	Yellow-legged Gull	*Larus michahellis*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
72	Caspian Gull	*Larus cachinnans*					X				
73	Mediterranean Gull	*Larus melanocephalus*					X	X			
74	Black-headed Gull	*Larus ridibundus*					X				
75	Slender-billed Gull	*Larus genei*					X				
76	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybridus*							X		
77	Gull-billed Tern	*Gelochelidon nilotica*							X		
78	Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*					X	X	X		
79	Little Tern	*Sterna albifrons*					X	X			
80	Sandwich Tern	*Sterna sandvicensis*					X	X	X		
81	Rock Dove	*Columba livia*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
82	Wood Pigeon	*Columba palumbus*			X	X					
83	Turtle Dove	*Streptopelia turtur*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
84	Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
85	Common Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*	X	H	X	H	X	X	X		
86	Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*			X						
87	Scops Owl	*Otus scops*			X		H				
88	Little Owl	*Athene noctua*	X		X	X					
89	European Nightjar	*Caprimulgus europaeus*			X						

90	Alpine Swift	*Tachymarptis melba*	X	X					X		
91	Pallid Swift	*Apus pallidus*		X							
92	Common Swift	*Apus apus*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
93	European Bee-eater	*Merops apiaster*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
94	European Roller	*Coracias garrulus*	X		X	X		X	X		
95	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	X		X	X		X	X		
96	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos medius*				X		X			
97	Syrian Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos syriacus*		X	X			X	X		
98	Great Spotted Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos major*			X	X					
99	Green Woodpecker	*Picus viridis*			X	X		H			
100	Calandra Lark	*Melanocorypha calandra*	X			X		X	X		
101	Short-toed Lark	*Calandrella brachydactyla*							X		
102	Crested Lark	*Galerida cristata*	X			X		X	X	X	
103	Woodlark	*Lullula arborea*		X		X					
104	Eurasian Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*	X			X	H	X	X		
105	Sand Martin	*Riparia riparia*				X	X		X		
106	Crag Martin	*Hirundo rupestris*	X	X	X						
107	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
108	Red-rumped Swallow	*Hirundo daurica*	X	X	X	X		X	X		
109	House Martin	*Delichon urbica*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
110	Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*	X			X	X	X	X		
111	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*	X	X							
112	Tawny Pipit	*Anthus campestris*							X		
113	Tree Pipit	*Anthus trivialis*						H			
114	Pied/White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
115	Red-backed Shrike	*Lanius collurio*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
116	Lesser Grey Shrike	*Lanius minor*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
117	Woodchat Shrike	*Lanius senator*			X	X					
118	Masked Shrike	*Lanius nubicus*				X					
119	Dipper	*Cinclus cinclus*	X	X							
120	Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*		H				H			
121	Dunnock	*Prunella modularis*		X							
122	European Robin	*Erithacus rubecula*	H	X		H					
123	Common Nightingale	*Luscinia megarhynchos*	H	X	X	H	X	X	X	H	
124	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	X	X				H	X		
125	Common Redstart	*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*				X					
126	Common Stonechat	*Saxicola torquata rubicola*				X					
127	Northern Wheatear	*Oenanthe oenanthe*	X	X		X			X	X	
128	Black-eared Wheatear	*Oenanthe hispanica*	X		X	X					
129	Pied Wheatear	*Oenanthe pleschanka*							X		
130	Isabelline Wheatear	*Oenanthe isabellina*	X			X			X		
131	Blue Rock Thrush	*Monticola solitarius*			X						
132	Ring Ouzel	*Turdus torquatus*		X							
133	Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
134	Song Thrush	*Turdus philomelos*		H		H		X		X	
135	Mistle Thrush	*Turdus viscivorus*		X		X				X	
136	Bearded Tit	*Panurus biarmicus*					X		X		
137	Cetti's Warbler	*Cettia cetti*					H	X	X		
138	Savi's Warbler	*Locustella luscinioides*							X		

139	Paddyfield Warbler	*Acrocephalus agricola*							X		
140	Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*					X	X	X		
141	Marsh Warbler	*Acrocephalus palustris*				H		X	H		
142	Great Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*				X	X	H	X		
143	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	*Hippolais pallida*			X	X	X	H	X		
144	Olive-tree Warbler	*Hippolais olivetorum*			X						
145	Willow Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochilus*							X		
146	Eurasian Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*		H				X			
147	Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	*Phylloscopus bonelli*			X						
148	Wood Warbler	*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*								H	
149	Blackcap	*Sylvia atricapilla*		H				X		H	
150	Common Whitethroat	*Sylvia communis*	X		X	X		X	X		
151	Lesser Whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca*					X		X		
152	Barred Warbler	*Sylvia nisoria*			X			X	X	X	
153	Eastern Orphean Warbler	*Sylvia crassirostris*			X	X					
154	Subalpine Warbler	*Sylvia cantillans*				X					
155	Firecrest	*Regulus ignicapillus*		X							
156	Goldcrest	*Regulus regulus*		X							
157	Spotted Flycatcher	*Muscicapa striata*				X			X		
158	Red-breasted Flycatcher	*Ficedula parva parva*							X		
159	Semi-collared Flycatcher	*Ficedula semitorquata*						X			
160	Long-tailed Tit	*Aegithalos caudatus*			X						
161	Penduline Tit	*Remiz pendulinus*						X			
162	Marsh Tit	*Parus palustris*		X							
163	Sombre Tit	*Parus lugubris*		X		X					
164	Willow Tit	*Parus montanus*		X							
165	Coal Tit	*Parus ater*		X							
166	Great Tit	*Parus major*	X	X	X	X		X			
167	Blue Tit	*Parus caeruleus*				X		X			
168	Eurasian Nuthatch	*Sitta europaea*			X	X		X			
169	Rock Nuthatch	*Sitta neumayer*			X						
170	Short-toed Treecreeper	*Certhia brachydactyla*				X					
171	Corn Bunting	*Miliaria calandra*	X	H	X	X	X	X	X	X	
172	Yellowhammer	*Emberiza citrinella*	X	X		X		H			
173	Rock Bunting	*Emberiza cia*			X						
174	Ortolan Bunting	*Emberiza hortulana*			X						
175	Cirl Bunting	*Emberiza cirlus*		X	X	X					
176	Black-headed Bunting	*Emberiza melanocephala*	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
177	Reed Bunting	*Emberiza schoeniclus*							X		
178	Common Chaffinch	*Fringilla coelebs*	X	X	X	X		X		X	
179	European Serin	*Serinus serinus*	X	X							
180	European Greenfinch	*Carduelis chloris*		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
181	European Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
182	Eurasian Linnet	*Carduelis cannabina*	X			X					
183	Common Crossbill	*Loxia curvirostra*		X							
184	European Bullfinch	*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*		H							
185	Hawfinch	*Coccothraustes coccothrauste*						X			
186	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
187	Spanish Sparrow	*Passer hispaniolensis*	X		X	X	X	X	X		

188	Tree Sparrow	*Passer montanus*	X	X	X	X					
189	Rose-coloured Starling	*Sturnus roseus*					X				
190	Common Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
191	Golden Oriole	*Oriolus oriolus*	X		X	X	H	X	X	X	
192	Eurasian Jay	*Garrulus glandarius*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
193	(Spotted) Nutcracker	*Nucifraga caryocatactes*		X							
194	Common Magpie	*Pica pica*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
195	Eurasian Jackdaw	*Corvus monedula*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
196	Rook	*Corvus frugilegus*							X		
197	Common Raven	*Corvus corax*	X	X	X	X	X				
198	Hooded Crow	*Corvus cornix*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
199											
MAMMALS			**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**
1	Souslik	*Spermophilus citellus*	X								
2	Brown Hare	*Lepus europaeus*		X	X			X			
3	Hedgehog	*Erinaceus roumanicus*				X					
4	Golden Jackal	*Canis aureus*						X			
OTHER SPECIES											
5	Spur-thighed Tortoise	*Testudo graeca*								X	
6	Bottlenose Dolphin	*Tursiops truncatus*							X		
7	Harbour Porpoise	*Phocoena phocoena*							X		