

# Spring migration in South-East Europe

Bulgaria, with its biodiversity, is indeed a unique birding destination with visits to marshes and lakes and the riverside habitats of the River Danube and the Black Sea with its diverse habitats. Our tour starts in Sofia and then goes south towards the border with Greece and the Rhodope Mountain range, home to Wallcreeper and other mountain birds. Our tour then meanders towards the Black Sea coast via the attractive interior of Bulgaria, which is dotted with picturesque villages and churches. This tour should produce around 200 species of birds and a selection of mammals.

**Day 1:** Morning flight from the UK to Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. On arrival we transfer to the Rhodope Mountains. En route we should encounter European Honey Buzzard, White Stork, Red-backed Shrike and Black-headed Buntings recently arrived from their wintering grounds in India. Transfer to our hotel in a quiet and remote location for two nights.

**Day 2:** The focus of our explorations today is the Trigrad gorge near the Greek border. Beside a swiftly flowing river a spectacular valley gradually narrows into a steep-walled gorge. Our main target here is the butterfly-like Wallcreeper which feeds on sheer rock faces. We should also find Pallid Swift, Eurasian Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Black Redstart and Spotted Nutcracker.

**Day 3:** Today we travel through some magnificent mountain scenery to Krumovgrad for three nights. Krumovgrad is located in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains, an area of rich biodiversity, and is widely considered to be one of the best places to find large birds of prey. During the transfer there are opportunities to find Black Stork, Spanish Sparrow, Lesser Grey Shrike, Red-rumped Swallow and Eurasian Scops Owl. Other species we are likely to encounter include European Turtle Dove, Grey and White Wagtails, Firecrest, Eurasian Jay, European Serin and Rock Bunting.

**Day 4:** Today a visit to Stouden Kladenets.

## Dates

Monday May 4th – Thursday May 14th 2020

Leader: Assen Ignatov

Group Size: 8

Birds: 180-210

Perhaps the greatest attractions of the day are Eurasian Griffon, Egyptian and Cinereous Vultures attending a feeding station. Other possible birds include Short-toed Eagle and Black Kite. The rocky habitats and stunted trees attract Black-eared Wheatear, Woodchat and Masked Shrikes and a range of warblers - Sardinian, Eastern Subalpine, Eastern Olivaceous, Barred, and Eastern Orphean.

**Day 5:** Dolna Kula is a scenic area with woodland and bushes. It is important for Hawfinch, Blue and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes and Rock Nuthatch. Small trees and scrubby slopes attract Cirl, Ortolan and Corn Buntings, Eurasian Golden Oriole, European Roller, Eurasian Wryneck, and Common Nightingale. We also search for the scarce Sombre Tit and Chukars calling from rocky hillsides.

**Day 6:** This morning we head towards Burgas on the Black Sea coast for a two-night stay and stop en route for Eastern Imperial Eagle and to explore dry hillsides, home to Isabelline Wheatear and Olive-tree Warbler. Gradually the landscape flattens out and becomes more intensively



**White Stork** Photo: Jo Finn

farmed, the cereal crops being ideal habitat for Montagu's Harriers. Burgas is a large port and main harbour for Bulgaria's fishing fleet. During our stay in the area we explore the surrounding freshwater lakes, brackish lagoons and salt pans.

**Day 7:** Our morning starts with a visit to Pomorie salt pans where we expect to locate Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Sandwich and Common Terns and Kentish Plover. The pans are situated on the Via Pontica migration route, a stopover for a considerable number of birds. The Bourgas Lakes have extensive reed beds, flooded meadows, marshes, low hills, and oak forests. Colonies of Pygmy Cormorants, Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis and Eurasian Spoonbills are found in the reeds. Over 500 pairs of Pied Avocets nest whilst Mediterranean Gull and Yellow-legged Gulls are numerous. Gull-billed Terns can be found among Sandwich Terns which are encouraged to nest on artificial islands. Also present in the reeds are Great Reed, Savi's and Cetti's Warblers and Bearded Reedlings with Eurasian Penduline Tits utilising the willow trees. Other species we should see around Burgas include Little Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron, Garganey, White-tailed and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Gull, Little Tern, Black-headed Wagtail and Spotted Flycatcher.

**Day 8:** We drive northwards to Kavarna for a two-night stay. On the way an oak woodland has Semi-collared Flycatcher. This is also a good area for Levant Sparrowhawk, Short-toed Treecreeper, Black and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers.

**Day 9:** This morning we visit Lake Durankulak, which holds a selection of birds including Squacco Heron, Ferruginous Duck and Collared Pratincole. The prime attraction is Paddyfield Warbler, here at the westernmost limit of its range. In complete contrast are the dramatic limestone cliffs at Cape Kaliakra which has Pied Wheatear, Alpine Swift, Calandra and Greater Short-toed Larks and nomadic Rosy Starlings. Off the coast we should see European Shag and Yelkouan Shearwaters. At the end of the day we may find Eurasian Eagle Owls on the cliff.

**Day 10:** We have time for birding in the Kavarna area before driving west to Vetren for an overnight stay. Srebarna Nature Reserve is famous for the endangered Dalmatian Pelican. Various waterfowl occur including Ferruginous Duck. The dead trees attract White-tailed Eagles. In the evening Eurasian Scops Owl call in the lodge grounds and Golden Jackal is present in the area.

**Day 11:** Transfer to Bucharest and departure back to the UK

## Prices

Ground Price: £1,795  
 Single room: £0  
 Deposit: £200  
 \*Air Fare: £150

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, guidance and taxes.

**Not included:** drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature.

*\*Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*