

Bulgaria in Summer

Naturetrek Tour Report

1 - 8 August 2009



Melnik



Sombre Tit



Nutcracker



Rock Nuthatch

Report and images compiled by Chris Kehoe



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Day 1

Saturday 1st August

Outbound to Sofia; en route to Melnik via Iskar Valley

Weather: sunny and warm/ hot, dry, still

Our outbound BA flight from Heathrow T5 left on time at 08.30 (BST) and a little under three hours later air we touched down in Sofia 20 minutes ahead of schedule at 13.15 (BST+2). After clearing immigration and collecting our bags we met Assen and Mario in the arrivals hall and were in the bus (driven by Grassi) and on our way south by 13.50. After about an hour we pulled into the attractive Iskar Valley near Passarella. Plans for a short stop were scuppered by a puncture and the need to wait for a replacement spare to be delivered which meant we ended up staying for a couple of hours. Butterflies were prominent with several each of Scarce Swallowtail and White Admiral, a couple of Lattice Browns and large numbers of Silver-washed Fritillaries (plus a few Queen of Spain's), Marbled Whites and others. Birds seen before we continued our journey at 17.20 included Honey Buzzards overhead and a family of Red-backed Shrikes, the first of very many seen on this tour. We arrived at the Boliarky Hotel in the attractive town of Melnik on the south side of the Piren Mountains at 20.20.

Day 2

Sunday 2nd August

Struma Valley; Kresna Gorge

Weather: hot and sunny, dry with a light breeze

A pre-breakfast stroll near the hotel produced several Cirl Buntings, a Middle Spotted Woodpecker and a couple of Subalpine Warblers amongst many other birds. Our day began in earnest though at 09.00; heading west towards the main road we had an hour long visit to sun-drenched small valley near Hotova where avian highlights included Black Stork and Long-legged Buzzards overhead with Corn, Cirl and Black-headed Buntings in the bushes as well as the ubiquitous Red-backed Shrikes and others. Southern White Admirals and Little Tiger Blues were the pick of the butterflies but many species were on the wing in such conditions.

Pressing on, we arrived at Kresna Gorge by 11.00 and had a 90 minute walk there which produced great views of a Golden Eagle, several Crag Martins, Blue Rock Thrush and a Black-eared Wheatear with insect interest in the shape of Banded Demoiselles and other dragonflies and a nice mix of butterflies including Blue Argus and Spotted Fritillary. Other highlights here were a Greek Tortoise, Wall Lizards and Balkan Green Lizards and a Yellow-bellied Toad.

Back at the bus we returned south before turning east into the hills above Sandanski where we ate our picnic lunch near Ilidentsi in a shady spot with a refreshing cool spring. Nearby, a couple of Western Rock Nuthatches put on a good show and another Black Stork flew over before we retreated to the air conditioned bus on what had, by now, become a rather hot afternoon. Our final stop was at a small gravel pit-cum fish pond at Marena where Mario found several species of dragonflies while we watched White Storks and European Bee-eaters overhead and more Black-headed Buntings in the bushes. We were back at the hotel in ample time to shower and change before completing the day's checklist and sitting down to dinner at 19.30. After dinner a short walk in the town produced some Kotschy Gecko's.

Day 3

Monday 3rd August

Rupite

Weather: very hot, sunny, still

Birding before breakfast provided Alpine Swift, Little Owl, Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, Wood Warbler and a Syrian Woodpecker amongst previously seen species. After breakfast we set off at 09.00 towards Rupite but stopped briefly en route to admire some Golden Orioles in roadside trees. Once at Rupite we spent a couple of hours slowly walking below the hills there but almost immediately were distracted by a couple of Eleonora's Falcons, one of which showed very well; other raptors seen in the area were a couple of Lesser Kestrels, a Hobby, several Common Buzzards, a couple of Honey Buzzards, Short-toed Eagle, Marsh Harrier and Levant Sparrowhawk. Insects seen this morning included Eastern Rock Grayling and Small Bath White.

We ate our packed lunch in the grounds of a small cafe near the hot springs; just before leaving there Mario took us to see a Balkan Terrapin on a nearby stream. A short visit to the nearby Struma Valley produced the hoped-for Levant Sparrowhawks but activity was otherwise rather subdued in what was turning out to be a particularly hot afternoon, though we did see a Syrian Woodpecker and a splendid Emperor Dragonfly. A few stops were made as we took the scenic route back to Melnik but nothing of especial note was encountered though Scarce Swallowtails and other butterflies put on a decent show and we rescued a Herman's Tortoise that was attempting to cross the road.

Day 4

Tuesday 4th August

En route to Bansko

Weather: sunny and warm/hot, still

Icterine Warbler was new for the list before breakfast, after which we loaded the bus and began the journey to our next destination in the pine forests above Bansko. We took the scenic route which meant heading east just south of the Greece border, visible in the distance, along a quiet mountain road. A couple of 30 minute stops before lunch produced several new butterflies such as Camberwell Beauty, Apollo, Nettle Tree Butterfly and Woodland Ringlet. Birds noted included Short-toed Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard and Marsh Tit.

We ate our lunch at a roadside picnic spot at Papatzchair as a spectacular migration of Painted Lady's was in full swing. A stroll through a nearby meadow before we continued our journey produced several more new butterflies, most notable of which was Higgins' Anomalous Blue.

Descending from the uplands we entered the Mesta Valley where we spent an hour or so visiting a large fish pond at Gotse Delchev where Common Kingfishers, Penduline Tit and Squacco Heron were new and several dragonflies were seen. From there it took about an hour to drive north along the Mesta Valley, where a Black Stork was on the river, to Bansko and our hotel, the Katarina, in the pine forest a few kilometres beyond there.

Day 5

Wednesday 5th August

Piren Mountains above Bansko

Weather: overcast with sunny spells and occasional light showers, still, warm

A pre-breakfast wander near the hotel produced several Firecrests, a Willow Tit and a Wood Warbler. After breakfast a 30 minute drive delivered us to the Vihren Hut at 2790m, close to the treeline and we walked slowly back down the road from there. Common Crossbills were conspicuous throughout the morning and after a short while we began to see Nutcrackers in the treetops. Other birds seen included a couple of Ring Ouzels, a Black Redstart, a brief Alpine Accentor and some distant flocks of Alpine Accentors. Butterflies proved conspicuous too with several species of Ringlets and Blues including a taxon of Anomalous Blue which is not yet formally described (so Anonymous Anomalous Blue seems a suitable if tongue-twisty provisional name!) and is so far only known from a tiny area in the Pirin Mountains.

We ate our picnic lunch at the Banderitsa Hut where a couple of Dippers were briefly on the river and followed this with a short walk nearby during which our first Serins were seen and new butterflies included the hoped-for local specialities that had so far been elusive, Black Ringlet and Balkan Fritillary. Heading back down the mountain we made a short stop at an area of meadow above Bansko where a Goshawk was seen before thunderstorms threatened. Back at the hotel those who opted to take a walk nearby were rewarded with a Crested Tit amongst the numerous Coal Tits and Nuthatches.

Day 6

Thursday 6th August

Dobrinishte region; Bansko

Weather: heavy overnight rain ceased by 08.30 then overcast but bright with sunny spells, a shower late afternoon then steady rain in the evening, warm and still

Rain curtailed plans for some pre-breakfast birding. After breakfast we set off into the lowlands to hopefully avoid further rain and concentrated our efforts in the Dobrinishte region where pine forests, broadleaf woodland, and meadows converged. Insect interest came in the form of our first Scarce Coppers and Meleager's Blue plus several other species while the pick of the birds were Crested Tits and a Lesser Grey Shrike.

We ate our picnic lunch at the base of the chair lift to Bezbog Mountain before retracing our route to Bansko via two extended stops in roadside meadows where Great Banded Graylings and Purple Shot Coppers were particularly cooperative. At Bansko we explored an area of hedgerow lined small fields where a couple of Wrynecks and a Hoopoe were new and a Nightingale showed briefly.

Day 7

Friday 7th August

Piren Mountains above Bansko, Bansko

Weather: overcast with sunny spells, light showers late morning and evening, a little chilly at higher elevations, otherwise warm and still

Before breakfast the hotel area produced the by now usual fare of Firecrests, Crested Tits and others. As most of the group had expressed misgivings about taking the chairlift to reach Bezbog Mountain, and as weather conditions were unfavourable too, the decision was made to return to the area of the Vihren Hut after breakfast. Once there some of the group joined Mario on a short but quite steep hike to the Otoko Lake while the rest remained along the road near the Hut. In rather gloomy but initially dry weather, avian highlights included repeat encounters with plenty of Nutcrackers, Crossbills, Ring Ouzels and others, though butterfly sightings were at a premium today in the dull and slightly chilly conditions. After an hour or so the cloud closed in and it began to rain so we retreated to the hut for a hot drink (and pondered how grim it must be on top of Bezbog at that moment!) before returning to the hotel where we ate our picnic lunch while watching Firecrests and our first Goldcrest in the car park.

As the weather remained gloomy in the mountains we returned to the open country near Bansko and had a very pleasant and productive stroll in sunny weather that produced our only Weaver's Fritillary while birds included Levant Sparrowhawk, Wood and Barred Warblers, Honey Buzzards and Black Storks as Common Quails called in the distance.

Day 8

Saturday 8th August

En route to Sofia via Rila Monastery, inbound to UK

Weather: overcast with sunny spells, warm, dry

Breakfast at 07.00 preceded our 07.45 departure towards Sofia. After a couple of hours we pulled into the picturesque Rila Monastery for a 30 minute stop to admire the architecture and the breeding Pallid Swifts and Crag Martins. Continuing our journey we arrived at a cafe near Sofia at 12.20 and had a short lunch stop before proceeding to the airport where we checked-in quickly and were soon boarding the plane that took off on time at 14.30. Three hours later we touched down at sunny Heathrow and soon collected our bags before dispersing to our respective corners of the UK.

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Systematic Lists

Figures in brackets refer to the number of days a species was seen out of 8 days we were in the field

BIRDS (126 species)

Species order, nomenclature and taxonomy follow the International Ornithological Congress list of the species of the world (v 1.7), available online at: <http://www.worldbirdnames.org/>

Subspecies names are those used in the Handbook of the Birds of the World (Lynx Edicions), available online as the Internet Bird Collection at: <http://ibc.lynxeds.com/>

Species heard only are designated (H), those seen only by the tour leader or guides only (l/o) and those seen by neither leader or guides (n/l)

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H)

A couple were heard near Bansko

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus r. ruficollis* (1:8)

One was on the fish pond at Gotse Delchev

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* (4:8)

After the first over the Hotovo Valley another was at Ilidentsi, four were at Rupite, one on the Mesta River and four near Bansko; a good haul!

White Stork *Ciconia c. ciconia* (5:8)

Frequently seen in the lowlands, over 100 were recorded in total; nesting birds were in several of the towns and villages we drove through

Grey Heron *Ardea c. cinerea* (2:8)

Three were seen in the Struma Valley

Purple Heron *Ardea p. purpurea* (1:8)

One was seen in flight in the Struma Valley near Rupite

Little Egret *Egretta g. garzetta* (2:8)

Three were on the Struma near Rupite and another was seen as we returned towards Sofia

Squacco Heron *Ardeola heroides* (2:8)

One was at the fish pond at Gotse Delchev

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* (1:8)

One was seen briefly in flight at Gotse Delchev (l/o)

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* (1:8)

A small handful were seen in the Struma Valley

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* (1:8)

Two were seen hawking for insects at Rupite

Common Kestrel *Falco t. tinnunculus* (6:8)

One or two were seen occasionally

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* (2:8)

One of two at Rupite gave some nice views and a couple more showed distantly above the Vihren Hut; an unexpected bonus

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* (1:8)

One hurried by at Rupite

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* (1:8)

One was seen briefly at Rupite (n/l)

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* (3:8)

Three or four were at Iskar Valley, two at Rupite and two near Bansko

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* (3:8)

One near Sandanski briefly was followed by one or two obliging birds at Rupite and another between Melnik and Gotse Delchev

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (2:8)

One was seen from the bus between Sofia and Melnik, one flew over at Rupite

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* (1:8)

A female was seen from the moving bus between Sofia and Melnik

Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes* (3:8)

One at Rupite was followed by three more at the nearby Struma Valley, one at Gotse Delchev and another near Bansko

Northern Sparrowhawk *Accipiter n. nisus* (4:8)

One at the Iskar Valley was followed by two near Dobrinishte, one above Bansko and one at Rila Monastery

Goshawk *Accipiter g. gentilis* (1:8)

A rather distant bird tussled with a Common Buzzard above Bansko

Common Buzzard *Buteo b. buteo* / *vulpinus* (8:8)

Up to 15 per day were seen throughout

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* (2:8)

A couple were seen at Hotovo Valley and another between Melnik and Gotse Delchev

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* (1:8)

One was sitting in a roadside field as we travelled from Sofia to Melnik

Golden Eagle *Aquila c. chrysaetus* (1:8)

An adult showed well at Kresna Gorge

Common Moorhen *Gallinula c. chloropus* (1:8)

About 10 were on the fish pond at Gotse Delchev

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (1:8)

One flew over at the fish pond at Gotse Delchev

Stock Dove *Columba o. oenas* (1:8)

One flew over at Iskar Valley

Common Woodpigeon *Columba p. palumbus* (4:8)

Three or four were in the forests near Bansko and Dobrinishte and a large flock were in open country near Bansko

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia t. turtur* (5:8)

Small numbers were seen from time to time in the lowlands, mostly in flight

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (4:8)

Ones and twos were occasionally seen or heard in built-up contexts

Little Owl *Athene noctua indigena* (2:8)

Singles were seen at Melnik before breakfast on successive mornings (1/o)

Common Swift *Apus a. apus* (2:8)

A couple appeared over Melnik at dusk one evening and two more were seen near Bansko

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus brehmorum* (1:8)

Up to 10 flew around at Rila Monastery

Alpine Swift *Apus m. melba* (2:8)

After a couple were seen from the bus between Sofia and Melnik another was over Melnik gorge one early morning

European Roller *Coracias g. garrulus* (2:8)

Singles were seen near Melnik and at Rupite

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo a. atthis* (2:8)

One was heard but not seen along the Struma River near Rupite and a couple were at the fish pond at Gotse Delchev

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* (3:8)

Frequently seen and even more often heard during the early part of the tour when we were in the hot southern lowlands

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa e. epops* (1:8)

One posed for the scope near Bansko

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx t. torquilla* (1:8)

Two were seen near Bansko one afternoon

Middle-spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos m. medius* (2:8)

One was seen at Melnik before breakfast one morning and another was at Kresna Gorge

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos s. syriacus* (2:8)

After one at Melnik early one morning another was seen at Struma Valley, a couple more were heard near Melnik

Great-spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major candidus* (3:8)

A few were seen, and others heard, in the forest above Bansko

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis karelini* (H)

Heard but not seen at Melnik, Rupite and above Bansko; a bird seen flying away at Gotse Delchev was either this species or Grey-faced (headed) Woodpecker *Picus c. canus*

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius c. collurio* (8:8)

Very frequently seen, as many as 25 per day were found in lowland areas, many were in family groups

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* (2:8)

One was seen in meadows near Dobrinishte and another was near Bansko

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius s. senator* (4:8)

Ones and twos were seen on four dates, mainly in the Melnik area

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* (1:8)

An adult showed briefly but well at Rupite

Golden Oriole *Oriolus o. oriolus* (5:8)

Frequently heard and seen daily in small numbers in the south with another heard at Bansko

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius graecus* (*Glandarius* group) (6:8)

Small numbers were seen or heard regularly, replaced by Nutcrackers at higher elevations

Eurasian Magpie *Pica p. pica* (5:8)

Small numbers were seen occasionally in open country

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* / 'wolfj' (4:8)

A few were heard and one seen briefly between Melnik and Gotse Delchev but this species was rather common in the pine forests above Bansko where about 50 were seen in total, some very well

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax g. graculus* (1:8)

Up to 50 flew around the summit of Mt. Vihren during our first visit to the Vihren Hut

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula soemmerringii* (1:8)

A few were seen near Sofia

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix sharpii* (3:8)

Small numbers were seen in the lowlands, mainly as we travelled to and from Sofia

Northern Raven *Corvus corax* (7:8)

Ones and twos were seen regularly and a group of four were at Papaztchair

Marsh Tit *Poecile p. palustris* (1:8)

One was seen near our lunch stop at Papaztchair

Sombre Tit *Poecile l. lugubris* (3:8)

Ones and twos were seen a couple of times at Melnik, a pair were at Hotovo Valley and a couple more were near Bansko

Willow Tit *Poecile m. montanus* / 'rbodopeus' (*Montanus* group) (3:8)

About six were seen in the forests above Bansko, a few more were heard there

Coal Tit *Parus a. ater* (4:8)

Very common in the pine forests above Bansko

European Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus bureschi* (4:8)

At least six were seen and several more heard in the forests above Bansko, especially in the vicinity of our hotel there

Great Tit *Parus m. major* (8:8)

Regularly seen in fairly small numbers, especially above Bansko

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes c. caeruleus* (5:8)

Quite scarce, ones and twos were occasionally recorded

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* (1:8)

One was seen in flight at the fish pond at Gotse Delchev

Barn Swallow *Hirundo r. rustica* (7:8)

Frequently seen in the south and in the lowlands further north but absent from the higher reaches above Bansko

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne r. rupestris* (5:8)

Up to 10 at Kresna Gorge were followed by a similar number at Ilidentsi; about 30 were at Rupite, 50 above Bansko and a few at Rila Monastery

Common House Martin *Delichon u. urbicum* (8:8)

Frequently seen, large numbers were breeding at Melnik and at several other towns and villages and many were present in the mountains

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica rufula* (6:8)

Regularly seen in reasonable numbers, especially in the hotter south

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus macedonicus* (1:8)

A couple were at Kresna Gorge

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata meridionalis* (2:8)

Small numbers were seen from the moving bus near Melnik

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus a. arundinaceus* (1:8)

One was seen at Rupite

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais e. elaeica* (1:8)

One was seen briefly between Melnik and Gotse Delchev (1/o)

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* (1:8)

One was seen during a pre-breakfast walk at Melnik (1/o)

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita abietinus* (4:8)

Most of the dozen or so seen were in the forest above Bansko

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis* (3:8)

Three or four were seen during pre-breakfast walks at Melnik with another near Bansko (1/o)

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* (3:8)

Two were seen at Melnik, two at our hotel above Bansko and two more in open country near Bansko

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (7:8)

Small numbers were regularly encountered

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* (1:8)

One showed briefly near Bansko

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia c. curruca* (5:8)

Common at and around Melnik with a few more further north

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia c. communis* (5:8)

Small numbers were seen throughout

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans albistriata* (2:8)

Three were seen at Melnik and one between there and Gotse Delchev (1/o)

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus* (4:8)

Several were heard and a few seen in the pine forests above Bansko, at least one family group was regularly found at the Hotel Katarina car park

Goldcrest *Regulus r. regulus* (1:8)

One was seen at our hotel above Bansko one lunchtime

Winter Wren *Troglodytes t. troglodytes* (2:8)

Heard but not seen at Melnik; a couple were seen around our hotel above Bansko where others were heard

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta e. europaea / caesia* (7:8)

Small numbers were at Melnik, Kresna Gorge, Rupite and above Bansko

Western Rock Nuthatch *Sitta n. neumayer* (2:8)

Two showed well at Ilidentsi with others heard at Rupite

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia f. familiaris* (2:8)

One was near the Vihren Hut with a couple more around the Hotel Katarina

Common Starling *Sturnus v. vulgaris* (7:8)

Fairly commonly seen in lowland areas

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquata alpestris* (2:8)

Two or three showed well near the Vihren Hut

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula aterrimus* (8:8)

Regularly seen in quite small numbers

Song Thrush *Turdus p. philomelos* (4:8)

Two were at Melnik and a nesting pair were at our hotel above Bansko

Mistle Thrush *Turdus v. viscivorus* (2:8)

About five were in the uplands above Bansko

European Robin *Erithacus r. rubecula* (6:8)

Small numbers were seen and, more often, heard, throughout

Common Nightingale *Luscinia m. megarynchos* (3:8)

Singles were seen at twice at Melnik and near Bansko; many others were heard in the lowlands

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochrurus gibraltariensis* (3:8)

Two were near the Vihren Hut, one was near Bansko and another at Rila Monastery

Redstart *Phoenicurus p. phoenicurus* (1:8)

One was seen between Melnik and Gotse Delchev

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica* (2:8)

One was seen at Rupite and a couple more at Gotse Delchev

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica melanolenca* (1:8)

One was at Kresna Gorge

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola s. solitarius* (1:8)

One was at Kresna Gorge

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa s. striata / neumanni* (3:8)

A total of five were seen at Kresna Gorge, near Melnik and at Rupite

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus aquaticus* (1:8)

Two were along the stream at the Banderitsa Hut (1/o)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (7:8)

Common in built-up areas with a few in more countrified parts of the lowland areas visited

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* (3:8)

Small numbers were seen in the lowlands around Melnik

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer m. montanus* (4:8)

Small numbers were seen throughout

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris subalpina* (1:8)

One was seen briefly near the Vihren Hut (n/l)

Dunnock *Prunella modularis meinertzhageni* (1:8)

A couple were seen near the Vihren Hut

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava feldegg* (1:8)

Three were seen in flight at Rupite; they gave the buzzy calls of the black-headed race *feldegg*

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla c. cinerea* (2:8)

A couple were near the Vihren Hut and another at Rila Monastery

White Wagtail *Motacilla a. alba* (4:8)

One was at Melnik, about 20 were along the river at Gotse Delchev and a few more were in Bansko

Tree Pipit *Anthus t. trivialis* (2:8)

Two were seen in the Bansko area

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla c. coelebs* (8:8)

Frequently seen throughout

European Serin *Serinus serinus* (3:8)

About six were seen in the uplands above Bansko with a couple more in Bansko town

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (3:8)

One was at Melnik and a couple more at and around Bansko

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus* (1:8)

Three were near the Vihren Hut

European Goldfinch *Carduelis c. carduelis* (6:8)

Small numbers were seen at most sites

Common Linnet *Carduelis c. cannabina* (3:8)

Two were at Hotovo Valley with a couple more in agricultural land near Bansko

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* (4:8)

Common in the pine forests above Bansko, particularly at the higher elevations near the Vihren Hut

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula p. pyrrhula* (3:8)

A few were heard near Melnik and others, including a couple seen briefly, were above Bansko

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes c. coccothraustes* (3:8)

Flying birds were seen at Kresna Gorge, near Papaztchair and at the Vihren Hut

Corn Bunting *Miliaria c. calandra* (2:8)

Locally common in the hot southern lowlands around Melnik

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella erythrogenys* (1:8)

Two or three were in meadows near Dobrinishte

Rock Bunting *Emberiza c. cia* (1:8)

A couple were seen briefly from the moving bus between Melnik and Gotse Delchev (1/0)

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirius* (3:8)

Common around Melnik where about 10 were seen on each pre-breakfast walk, a few more were in the Hotovo Valley

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* (1:8)

About 10 were seen at Hotovo Valley and at Marena fish pond in the Struma Valley

BUTTERFLIES (67 species)

Taxonomy and scientific nomenclature follows 'The Butterflies of Bulgaria' by Zdravko Kolev, available online at: <http://www.butterfliesofbulgaria.com/intro.html>

English names follow Tolman and Lewington's 'The Collins Guide to the Butterflies of Europe' (1997); the scientific names used in that book sometimes differ from those used by Kolev, these alternative names are given after the English name as appropriate

Thymelicus acteon (2:8)

Lulworth Skipper

A couple were seen above Bansko and at Dobrinishte

Ochlodes sylvanus (1:8)

Large Skipper *Ochlodes venatus faunus*

Only seen at Iskar Valley near Sofia

Erynnis tages (1:8)

Dingy Skipper

Only seen near Dobrinishte

Carcharodus alceae (1:8)

Mallow Skipper

Only seen at Rupite

Pyrgus alveus (1:8)

Large Grizzled Skipper

Seen at Iskar Valley and above Bansko

Parnassius apollo (1:8)

Apollo

One posed for scope near Papatzchair

Iphiclides podalirius (6:8)

Scarce Swallowtail

One of the more widespread species with a few seen each day

Papilio machaon (2:8)

Swallowtail

Ironically much scarcer than the last species, only seen in the hotter areas near Melnik

Leptidea duponcheli (4:8)

Eastern Wood White

Seen daily in the Bansko area

Colias croceus

Clouded Yellow (7:8)

Fairly common and widespread in lowland areas

Gonepteryx rhamni (1:8)

Brimstone

Only seen at Iskar Valley near Sofia

Pieris brassicae (7:8)

Large White

Fairly common and widespread

Pieris rapae (8:8)

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Common and widespread

Pieris ergane (1:8)

Mountain Small White *Artogeia ergane*

Only seen during our lunch stop at Papatzchair

Pieris chloridice (1:8)

Small Bath White *Pontia chloridice*

Only seen at Rupite

Lycæna phlaeas (2:8)

Small Copper

Small numbers were in the Melnik area

Lycæna virgaureae (2:8)

Scarce Copper

Several were seen near Dobrinishte

Lycæna tityrus (1:8)

Sooty Copper

Only recorded near Dobrinishte

Lycaena alciphron (1:8)

Purple-shot Copper

A couple were seen in meadows in the Dobrinishte region

Thecla betulae (1:8)

Brown Hairstreak

Only seen at Hotovo Valley

Tarucus balkanicus (2:8)

Little Tiger Blue

Several were seen in the hot lowlands of the south after the first near Hotovo

Celastrina argiolus (5:8)

Holly Blue

Fairly widespread in the lowlands

Scolitantides vicrama (1:8)

Eastern Baton (Vicrama) Blue *Pseudophilotes vicrama*

Recorded at Kresna Gorge

Glaucopsyche arion (1:8)

Large Blue *Maculinea arion*

Seen near our lunch stop at Papatzchair

Glaucopsyche alcon (1:8)

(Mountain) Alcon Blue

Only recorded above Bansko

Plebeius anteros (1:8)

Blue Argus *Ultraaricia anteros*

Recorded at Hotovo Valley

Plebeius agestis (4:8)

Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*

Most of those seen were in the Bansko area

Plebeius semiargus (4:8)

Mazarine Blue *Cyaniris semiargus*

Not uncommon around Bansko

Plebeius icarus (5:8)

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

Mostly seen in the hotter areas of the south

Plebeius eroides (2:8)

False Eros Blue *Polyommatus eroides*

A few were seen above Bansko

Plebeius dorylas (1:8)

Turquoise Blue *Plebicula dorylas*

Only seen near the Banderitsa Hut

Plebeius coridon (1:8)

Chalk Hill Blue *Lysandra coridon*

Only seen near Bansko

Plebeius daphnis (1:8)

Meleager's Blue *Meleageria daphnis*

A couple were seen near Dobrinishte

Plebeius admetus (1:8)

Anomalous Blue *Agrodiaetus admetus*

Only seen in the Dobrinishte region

Plebeius nephohiptamenos (1:8)

Higgins' Anomalous Blue *Agrodiaetus nephohiptamenos*

Only recorded during our lunch stop at Papaztchair

Libythea celtis (1:8)

Nettle Tree Butterfly

Several were seen at our lunch stop at Papaztchair

Pararge roxelana (1:8)

Lattice Brown *Kirinia roxelana*

A couple were found at the Iskar Valley

Pararge aegeria (2:8)

Speckled Wood

Occasional

Pararge megera (2:8)

Wall Brown *Lasionmata megera*

A few were near Bansko

Coenonympha rhodopensis (2:8)

Eastern Large Heath

A few were around Bansko

Coenonympha pamphilus (6:8)

Small Heath

Fairly common in the lowlands

Maniola tithonus (4:8)

Gatekeeper

Widespread in small numbers

Maniola jurtina (5:8)

Meadow Brown

Widespread in small numbers

Aphantopus hyperantus (1:8)

Ringlet

A couple were at Iskar valley and near Bansko

Erebia ligea (2:8)

Arran Brown

Only seen above Bansko

Erebia euryale (2:8)

Large Ringlet

A handful were seen after we left Melnik

Erebia medusa (1:8)

Woodland Ringlet

Quite common at our lunch stop at Papaztchair

Erebia ottomana (1:8)

Ottoman Brassy Ringlet

Several were noted below the Vihren Hut

Erebia melas (1:8)

Black Ringlet

A couple were seen near the Banderitsa Hut above Bansko

Melanargia galathea (5:8)

Marbled White

Regularly seen in lowland areas

Melanargia larissa (1:8)

Balkan Marbled White

Only recorded near Papaztchair

Hipparchia syriaca (3:8)
Eastern Rock Grayling
Only seen in the hot south

Hipparchia semele (1:8)
Grayling
Only recorded near Bansko

Hipparchia circe (2:8)
Great Banded Grayling *Kanetisa circe*
Fairly common in the meadows at Dobrinishte

Limenitis camilla (1:8)
White Admiral
Several were seen at Iskar Valley just south of Sofia

Limenitis reducta (3:8)
Southern White Admiral
Kresna Gorge and Hotova Valley near Melnik held several

Vanessa atalanta (4:8)
Red Admiral
A handful were seen at and around Bansko

Vanessa cardui (7:8)
Painted Lady
Common throughout with a spectacular migratory movement noted during our lunch stop at Papaztchair when at least 10 per minute were moving northeast along the road

Nymphalis urticae (1:8)
Small Tortoiseshell
A couple were seen near Bansko

Nymphalis c-album (4:8)
Comma Butterfly *Polygonia c-album*
Occasional

Nymphalis antiopa (1:8)
Camberwell Beauty
Only seen near Papaztchair as we travelled from Melnik to Bansko

Melitaea trivia (1:8)
Lesser Spotted Fritillary
Only recorded near Dobrinishte

Melitaea didyma (3:8)

Spotted Fritillary

Mostly in hotter areas in the south

Argynnis paphia (5:8)

Silver-washed Fritillary

The most frequently seen and widespread fritillary, common at Iskar Valley with smaller numbers in the lowlands further south

Clossiana selene (3:8)

Queen of Spain Fritillary

Occasionally seen after the first at Iskar Valley

Boloria dia (1:8)

Weaver's Fritillary *Clossiana dia*

One was seen near Bansko

Boloria graeca (1:8)

Balkan Fritillary

One was seen near the Banderitsa Hut above Bansko

DRAGONFLIES (22 species)

List compiled by Mario Langourov

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens* (4:8)

Beautiful Demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo* (2:8)

Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans* (3:8)

Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura pumilio* (2:8)

Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma viridulum* (1:8)

Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula* (1:8)

White-legged Damselfly *Platycnemis pennipes* (3:8)

Norfolk Hawker *Aeshna isoceles* (2:8)

Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* (1:8)

Common Hawker *Aeshna juncea* (1:8)

Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator* (1:8)

Small Pincertail *Onychogomphus forcipatus* (1:8)

Sombre Goldenring *Cordulegaster bidentata* (1:8)

Downy Emerald *Cordulia aenea* (1:8)

White-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum albistylum* (1:8)

Keeled Skimmer *Orthetrum coerulescens* (3:8)

Southern Skimmer *Orthetrum brunneum* (1:8)

Banded Darter *Sympetrum pedemontanum* (1:8)

Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum* (2:8)

Yellow-winged Darter *Sympetrum flaveolum* (1:8)

Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii* (3:8)

Scarlet Darter *Crocothemis erythraea* (2:8)

OTHER FAUNA

Apart from some unidentified small bats in the vicinity of both hotels the only mammal seen was a single Red Squirrel near the Banderitsa Hut. Reptiles were better represented with both Greek and Herman's Tortoises seen in the south and unidentified Wall Lizards, Sand Lizard and Balkan Green Lizard at a few sites, Kotschy and Naked-fingered Geckos in Melnik and a Balkan Terrapin at Rupite. Marsh Frogs were noisy at some wetland areas, Tree Frogs were heard at a couple of sites and Mario caught a Yellow-bellied Toad at Kresna Gorge. A Hummingbird Hawkmoth was classed for our purposes as an honorary butterfly and several other largely unidentified day flying moths were encountered as were some impressively large crickets and a variety of glamorous bugs.