

Croatia & Slovenia – Spring in Istria

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 11 May 2017



Carthusian



Duke of Burgundy



Green-underside Blue



Tawny Pipit

Report compiled by Paul Tout & Paul Harnes
Images courtesy of Paul Tout



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Note:

When two place names are given, these are toponyms in Croatian and Italian or Slovene and Italian (or, in Italy, Italian and Slovene). Like the Italian region of Alto Adige – South Tyrol, the area in question is governed by international agreements enshrining bilingualism in law. Local people use the names interchangeably depending upon the language they are speaking at that moment and their mother tongue.

Day 1

Wednesday 4th May

Stansted to Trieste and transfer to Istarske Toplice in Croatia

Sixteen tour participants met with Paul H at the departures gate at Stansted Airport for the early afternoon Ryanair Flight FR168 to Trieste in north-east Italy. Upon our arrival, just after 5pm, we passed through passport control and collected our luggage before making our way to the arrivals hall, where we met up with Paul T, our local tour leader. With the luggage loaded into our minibuses, we set off travelling towards Istria, passing through the attractive historic centre of Trieste before joining the motorway beyond the city towards Koper in Slovenia. Crossing the border without stopping (both Italy and Slovenia are within the Schengen Area), we headed south towards the Sočerga border, crossing beneath the spectacular limestone cliffs of the Osp valley. Before long we reached the border crossing, showed our passports and were into Croatia. From here the hotel was just a brief 20-minute drive along a small valley carrying one of the feeder streams of the Mirna river, overlooked by the ruins of Pietra Pelosa castle. Arriving at the hotel, we quickly checked in. At 7.30pm we were off for our splendid evening meal in the Konoba Dolina, about a kilometre away. When we returned to the hotel it was already getting dark and the Nightingales and Scops Owls, nightly features of the area, were already in fine voice.

Day 2

Thursday 5th May

Around the hotel grounds, the Motovun-Montona Forest and meadows at Škuljari

Beginning rather cloudy, the weather brightened considerably later with one brief but intense shower in the late afternoon. After breakfast at 8am, we met up outside the hotel at 9:30am before embarking on our first full day. Our objective was to explore the areas around the hotel which are rich in flora and fauna and reachable on foot. While we waited for the group to assemble, there was plenty to watch including the Alpine Swifts that nest in the quarry above the hotel and the Wrynecks that use the old trees around the grounds. The dry and rather cool spring meant that the Adriatic Lizard Orchids on the hotel's mini-golf course were not yet in flower. They first appeared in 2010 and there are more than 200 spikes. Many had been cut to clear the holes but this does not seem to affect their viability. Like the closely related Lizard Orchid in the UK, this is a species that is increasing in numbers and range, perhaps as a result of climate change and/or land use changes.

The male of the local pair of Blue Rock Thrushes was on show on the hotel roof, favouring the satellite dish over the local crags. At the beginning the walk there was a Cirl Bunting in song. This is the commonest bunting in Istria by a long way as soon as there are trees and scrub. Corn Bunting like more open, cultivated areas while Yellowhammer replace Cirl Bunting in the cooler areas of the interior. A pair of Wrynecks gave brief views and were making plenty of noise. The local pair of Red-backed Shrikes had not yet arrived but a rather uncooperative

Melodious Warbler was making plenty of noise. There were plenty of plants to look at and butterflies too including several Glanville Fritillaries, the earliest of the local *Melitaea* species, and Common Swallowtail. Passing close to the eastern edge of the forest a Grey-headed Woodpecker was heard calling and brief glimpses were obtained of Hawfinch, although some of the group had far better views later.

A picnic lunch was had on the tables under the trees close to our hotel, a pleasant setting with Wood White butterflies bobbing about around us and Wall Browns, now so rare in UK, sunning themselves on the rocky walls.

After lunch we set off across the road about 500 metres from the hotel to a damp valley called Mlaka that carries a tributary of that name into the Mirna-Quieto river. This site is always good for butterflies and amphibians and, sure enough, we added an excellent number of butterflies to the checklist including Duke of Burgundy and Chequered, Short-tailed and Baton Blues. A series of puddles and silt-traps along the stream yielded Yellow-bellied Toad, Marsh Frog and Smooth Newt. Birds were very quiet in the hot, sultry afternoon, but a Cuckoo was very vocal for much of the time and a Honey Buzzard was seen.

To round off the day a trip was made to some fine damp meadows near Škuljari, a village close to one of the larger feeder streams for the Mirna-Quieto River. Most of the meadows in Istria are rather dry as befits the climate and the geology, but here on the flysch (a type of mudstone) there are numerous small springs and wet runnels crossing the nutrient-poor meadows which support a range of rather scarce orchids including Military, Lax-flowered and Tongue Orchids. There were also a few butterflies including a fly-by Spotted Fritillary and a much more cooperative Marsh Fritillary that remains a very common species in this area.

By now it was becoming very humid and with rain threatening, it was time to head back to the hotel for a well-earned shower before heading off for another meal of superb Istrian cuisine in our restaurant with Edi and Mirjana.

Day 3

Friday 6th May

Punta Kamenjak and along the Mirna Valley

Today was cloudy with the odd sunny spell in the afternoon. Cloud built up and there was rain later. After an early morning walk around the hotel, we headed off to Premantura and Punta Kamenjak, the southern tip of Istria about 90 minutes from the hotel and one of the driest places around the Adriatic.

Arriving at the start of the peninsula, we were able to get good views of Tawny Pipit from the vehicles, feeding in the open grassland which was dotted with a profusion of wild flowers. The season was less advanced than in other years with fewer flowers of the two species of *Cistus* (*Cistus* sp.), but there were plenty of plants to admire including Ploughshare Tongue Orchid, Bertlonii's Bee Orchid, Bumblebee Orchid, the attractive *Bellardia trixago*, and Bythinian Vetch. Parking up, we headed off slowly (botanists) or more rapidly (birders) towards the southern tip of the peninsula itself, with views of Linnet and Sardinian Warbler. Mediterranean Shags passing offshore together with the odd Yellow-legged Gull represented the sole bird passage at sea. The former have increased immensely since the fall of Yugoslavia (they were systematically persecuted at the breeding colonies) and are now very numerous right around Istria. The latter seem to be declining, perhaps as EU recycling and urban waste

directives come into force in Croatia. Sadly, the Pallid Swifts were not yet visiting one of the sea-caves they use for nesting although a single bird was seen close by. The usual Tawny Pipit was present, absolutely oblivious to the crowds of people around this part of the park. Dalmatian Wall Lizards were almost as tame, scuttling along the paths in front of us.

Continuing through the scrubland, we encountered other typical plants of the Mediterranean scrub that cover the reserve area. The fairly deep sea on three sides of the peninsula means that winter temperatures rarely fall below zero while total annual rainfall, at 400 millimetres, is less than a third of that which falls in Rijeka which is visible across the Kvarner Gulf. The scrub included Myrtle, Mastic Bush, Spiny Ivy, Broad-leaved Phillyrea and Tree Heath – all evergreen species showing just how mild the climate here is in winter. Orchids were well-represented and in addition to the species already mentioned we found Dark Spider (*O. sphegodes* subsp. *atrata*, formerly *O. incubacea*) Pink Butterfly and Man Orchids.

At this point we took a break for lunch and were able to watch the Barn Swallows flying in and out of the concrete military bunkers on the peninsula's highest point, reminding us that the only reason for this marvelous area's survival from tourist development (it fills with thousands of visitors in July and August) is that it was an important Yugoslav military base until 1991, dominating access to the entire northern Adriatic from a single point.

After the rather late lunch we moved on, stopping to see the huge Roman arena of Pula, among the six largest surviving Roman arenas in the world. This vast structure was partially restored when Istria fell under Italian occupation (1918 – 1945) to strengthen Mussolini's claims to much of what became part of Yugoslavia after the end of the Anglo-American occupation of the city in 1954, part of a series of events that led to a tragic exodus of 300,000 ethnic Italians from the country.

Finally it was time to leave and head back to the hotel, but not without a journey up the river Mirna-Quieto from its mouth near Novigrad-Cittanova. At this time of the year with migration in full swing there is a high turnover of birds as migrants arrive from the south and leave towards the north. Poor visibility and rain tend to increase these numbers. Sure enough, as soon as we began our journey up the river it was clear that there were a lot of birds around with a single Spoonbill and lots of Squacco Herons close to the mouth. Further up the river, where it opens into farmland, were three Western Marsh Harriers and a Montagu's Harrier together with some migrant Whinchats and commoner local species such as Corn Bunting, Zitting Cisticola and Melodious Warbler.

Day 4

Saturday 7th May

Hrastovlje, Škocjanski zatok, Tar-Torre and along the Mirna Valley

A bright and sunny start to the day saw cloud build up with rain later. Today we followed a broadly circular route, exiting Croatia where we had entered at the the Sočerga border crossing and re-entering Slovenia. Here we turned east to visit the beautiful walled church at Hrastovlje where world-famous frescoes by the artist John of Castua were uncovered from beneath layers of whitewash in the 1950s. The frescoes, painted in 1492, include a famous "Dance of Death" and were used to teach illiterate peasants about the scriptures. They also feature a bird which, with its indigo plumage and down-curved crimson beak resembles none other than a Bald Ibis. These birds were first mentioned by Gesner in 16th century Salzburg, and for Istria by the Italian naturalist Aldrovandi

a century later, so were probably familiar to John of Castua, but confirmation of their presence in Medieval Europe did not arrive until their bones were discovered in middens of the period in Salzburg itself!

Moving on, we quickly arrived at the nature reserve of Škocjanski Zatok-Val Stagnon near the city of Koper-Capodistria, a wetland area saved from drainage and development just a few years ago and managed by DOPPS, the Slovene partner of Birdlife International. After a quick lunch we made our way around the reserve's circular path and quickly added a large number of new birds for the trip including Shelduck, Garganey, Little and Great Crested Grebes, Glossy Ibis, Pygmy Cormorant, Ruff, Yellow Wagtail and Great Reed Warbler, while the ditches around the reserve were filled with Marsh Frogs and the Eastern Mosquitofish *Gambusia holbrooki*, introduced into Europe from the USA early in the last century in an attempt to control the spread of malaria. Another introduced fish noticed from the observation tower's underwater viewpoint was a Pumpkinseed *Lepomis gibbosus*. Rather like a large, brightly-coloured and deep-bodied Ruffe *Gymnocephalus cernuus*, this species was introduced into Europe from North America for sport and is now widespread across southern Europe.

Moving on and back into Croatia on our return journey, we stopped just beyond the river Mirna-Quieto at Tar-Torre where one of Croatia's richest men, Ivica Todoric, has large land-holdings. These include some meadows grazed by donkeys and mules that contain a superb display of thousands of Pink Butterfly Orchids as well as hybrids between that species and the usually much commoner Green-winged Orchid. The sward is tightly grazed and there were other interesting elements including large stands of Prickly Juniper with its large, brown and inedible seed cones. Birds were not missing and included nesting Spanish Sparrows and a pair of Woodchat Shrikes, an extremely rare breeding bird in this part of the world.

Our journey back towards the hotel again took us along the Mirna-Quieto river and another chance to check for migrant birds. Once again Western Marsh and Montagu's Harriers were seen, but perhaps the best birds observed were the local pair of Short-toed Eagles and a small flock of Red-footed Falcons. These birds passed through the northern Adriatic in large numbers in 2017 and several groups hung around for much of May while waiting for the Rooks in Hungary and Ukraine to finish their nesting before being able to occupy "their" colonies.

Day 5

Sunday 8th May

Učka Nature Park, Poklon Pass, Kotli & Hum

Early morning mist cleared quickly, giving way to a warm and sunny morning but, as on other days, cloud began to build and gave way to heavy and persistent rain after lunch, however the afternoon thunderstorm missed us. Today we explored the uplands of Inner Istria that rise to 1400 metres above sea level with the peak of Učka Vela, beneath which passes the Poklon Pass. The road traffic down to Rijeka and Dalmatia is now served by the Učka tunnel passing under the mountain, but until the 1980s all traffic had to use the pass which was not without its problems. The great British explorer Sir Richard Burton lived in Trieste for the last 19 years of his life. Persuaded by his wife to pass Christmas 1888 at Opatija-Abbazia near Rijeka, a well-known Austro-Hungarian resort, a severe blizzard and freezing winter which began shortly after their arrival in Opatija meant they finally managed to return to Trieste, just 45 miles away, in late March! Burton wrote a harshly sarcastic piece on the "joys" of his three-month stay for the English language *Vienna Weekly News*.

With the highest peak out of bounds to vehicles, we made our way to the lower Mali Učka, a north-facing slope grazed by sheep and goats. On our arrival we were surprised to see several circling Northern Ravens and Griffon Vultures. These provided excellent views as they descended to what was obviously a carcass. Indeed one of the Griffon Vultures, a juvenile with a creamy neck-ruff, perched in a Black Pine about 400 metres away and provided excellent views through the telescope. The subalpine flora of Mali Učka was excellent, in spite of the late season, and included a fine display of Spring Gentian, Frog Orchid, Heart-leaved Globularia and Early Penny-cress. One of the joys of Istria is the manner in which one can travel in time with regards to the season. Early Penny-cress and Heart-leaved Globularia are both common Karst species including the area close to the hotel, but at hotter sites they have finished flowering by late March whereas just a short distance away at altitude the same species can be found in flower in early May!

Moving on we paused at some meadows on Poklon Pass where there were further displays of Spring Gentian, the large local subspecies of Cowslip, Wood Anemone still in flower, Tormentil and Coralroot Bittercress. A Black Woodpecker was heard and a Northern Goshawk seen but there was no sign of the local pair of Golden Eagles. Istria has a dense population of this species but it is in long-term decline as forested land spreads and the eagles' hunting areas become scrubbed over. Goshawks, on the other hand, have much more cover and have thus increased.

At this point heavy rain was threatening and it was decided, like cricket, to take an early lunch, preferably under cover at Kotli, a millstream running off the flysch where Paul T knew there was shelter available. There was a quick stop at some 'badlands' en route. These are hills and hummocks made up of extremely fine and friable mudstones created millions of years ago by mudslides off the continent and into the (then) Tethys ocean. The settling out of fine clay particles has created these deposits which are extremely prone to erosion and thus plants find it difficult to find a footing and they remain bare and unvegetated. Where plants do become established, competition is low and orchids are often common.

The rain did indeed come down heavily but no one got wet. Some plant species were added to the list including Toothed and Military Orchids and the umbellifer Lovage. Lunch was taken under cover at the Kotli restaurant overlooking the river, whose kind owner allowed us to use the outdoor facilities for a picnic.

Our final stop was a cultural visit to the walled city of Hum, population 14. This is the smallest of Istria's walled towns which once each had their own town council and defence against raiding Turks from Bosnia. Hum was also the centre of the use of the Glagolitic script (visible also in the church at Hrastovlje) created in the 9th century by Saint Cyril, a Byzantine monk from Thessaloniki. He and his brother, Saint Methodius, were sent by the Byzantine Emperor Michael III in 863 to Great Moravia to spread Christianity among the West Slavs in the area. The brothers decided to translate liturgical books into the Old Slavic language that was understandable to the general population, but as the words of that language could not be easily written by using either the Greek or Latin alphabets, Cyril decided to invent a new script, Glagolitic, which he based on the local dialect of the Slavic tribes from the Byzantine Salonika region. Although it fell into disuse in administration and communication, the script continued to be used into the 20th century in north-west Croatia!

Day 6

Monday 9th May

Cerkniško Jezero and River Obrh

A cloudy and cool morning gave way to brighter weather later, although it remained chilly throughout the day. In the mid-afternoon persistent rain returned, by which time we were already on our way back to the hotel. Today's trip was the longest of the holiday and one of the most interesting from a landscape and cultural perspective, as it lies well into Slovenia and far from the Venetian, Italian and Croatian influence one feels in Istria, and has more in common with central Europe and the Alps. After stopping at Postojna to buy material for lunches, we passed from one major watershed (the Adriatic) to another (that of the Black Sea). We now made our way to Cerkniško Jezero, the lake of Cerknica, one of a series of flat *polje*, hydrological 'steps' down through the Karst, many underground and each lower than the last, starting high up towards the Croatian border and popping out as the Ljubljanica river passing through the capital, Ljubljana.

The lake itself is a vast *polje* covering 30 square kilometres that can vary in depth by as much as four metres in the course of a day or two. We took a walk along the shore with views of Fieldfare (a common breeder here), Yellowhammer, Ashy-headed Yellow Wagtail and Whinchat. Plants included Summer Snowflake, Shrubby Violet and Bog Orchid almost open. The latter species is closely related to the Lax-flowered Orchid in Istria but unlike them prefer lowland, marshy sites in continental climate, not drier, Mediterranean habitats. Moving round the lake by road, there were very few waterfowl apart from Little Egret, Great Crested Grebe, a few pairs of Coot and Mallard. Black Woodpecker was heard briefly on the island of Otok. Along the forest track there was a splendid display of ground flora including the yellowy-brown endemic legume *Vicia oroboides*, Christmas Rose (seed-heads), Cornelian Cherry, Common Twayblade, large amounts of Asarabacca or European Wild Ginger whose small purple flowers open at ground level, often under the leaves, Shrubby Milkwort, Sanicle and Blue-eyed Mary. The shrub layer included a large amount of Bladdernut, a small tree native to the Balkans with attractive panicles of white flowers, which was new for most of the group.

After lunch, enriched with views of Red-backed Shrike, Sedge Warbler, Whinchat and White Stork, we headed off around the lake toward a farm-track that leads down to the extensive grasslands on the lake-bed. On the way we stopped to admire a White Stork on its nest in the village of Gorenje Jezero. White Stork seems to be increasing in south-west Slovenia in recent years. A single pair not far from the lake in the 1980s did not return in 1990 and we had to wait until the mid-1990s for a new pair in the town of Martinjak. Now there are at least three nests directly around the lake and another three in surrounding villages, so the species seems to be doing very well and is spreading towards the Italian border.

Moving to the *polje*, crossing a stretch of wide open grassland and hay meadows where Eurasian Skylarks were singing, we were treated to excellent views of a flock of Red-footed Falcons, another record of a species present in high numbers in 2017. Associated with the 'red-foots' and perched on a low pole was a very pale kestrel species. Close examination (such as wing-to-tail length) suggested Lesser Kestrel but without seeing the white claws, the identification of juveniles and females is almost impossible at 50 metres. This species nested in Slovenia until 1992 when the central European population rapidly declined to extinction. In recent years the Mediterranean ecotype of the species has increased enormously in southern Italy, it has colonized the island of Pag in Croatia and birds are once again being seen in Slovenia.

Our final part of the visit took us across a large set of hay meadows on the northern edge of the lake. As well as Common Kestrel and a large number of singing Eurasian Skylarks, an immature Montagu's Harrier was seen hunting over the meadows, gliding into the stiff breeze. This species does not breed in Slovenia but the area around the lake supports good numbers of non-breeding birds during the summer months. With the weather worsening, it was time to head back to the hotel.

Day 7

Tuesday 10th May

Sveti Lucija, Šterna, Nova Vas and the Mirna Valley

Like our first full day, today, our final full day, we had another trip close to home on the plateau above the hotel, where a mix of geologies (flysch: a type of mudstone and limestone) make for a high level of biodiversity. Plenty of Lady, Adriatic Lizard and Common Spotted Orchids, the latter strangely the rarest of the orchids in this part of Istria, were on show as we made our way up by vehicle.

Arriving up on the plateau and parking at Sveta Lucija, we made our way along a gravel road towards the village of Laganiši. Large parts of inner Istria have undergone massive rural depopulation and abandonment, and Laganiši is no exception with just a single old farmer managing all the land around the village; keeping sheep, growing vegetables and maintaining vineyards and olive groves. These islands of continued grazing and cultivation maintain the local biodiversity, which rapidly declines when people leave. Walking along the track there were plenty of plants to see including (again) Lady Orchid and Adriatic Lizard Orchid (with one plant finally in flower). The low vegetation along the track had a few butterflies including Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, Green Hairstreak and a few Marsh Fritillaries.

Whitethroat, Eastern Subalpine Warbler, and Woodlark were all present around the grazing meadows a little further from the village, as well as a different range of plants including Golden Alyssum, Carthusian Pink, Yellow Bartsia and Clove-scented Broomrape, with Burning-bush/Dittany coming into its own. Most plant guides show the white form of this species but throughout the Karst and Istria, the flowers of this species are a deep pink and vinously veined. A member of the Rutaceae, it produces an oil which is strongly photosensitizing like that of Giant Hogweed and is best avoided. Passing through the village, we moved on along the track that re-entered light woodland as far as the village of Jadroni, now completely abandoned. As the years pass the state of dilapidation of the buildings increases and many are now in danger of collapse. All along the road (like elsewhere throughout Istria) there were the droppings of Beech Martens, filled at this time of year with the remains of Rose Chafers and cherry stones and the seeds of Mulberry. This is a species strongly associated with human habitation and was probably using the abandoned buildings for shelter.

Getting back to the vehicles, it was time to find a place for lunch. Sveta Marija Snježna is a church perched high on a cap of limestone, overlying the surrounding flysch mudstone. As such, and with very thin soils, it has survived much of the ploughing and agricultural intensification in the area around it, but the meadows are cut regularly. The flora is magnificent with many, many thousands of Green-winged Orchids, hundreds of Toothed Orchids and a fine show of nice flowers of Istrian hay meadows including masses of Yellow Rattle and, as such, it is a splendid spot for a picnic. There were a few birds to see including Melodious Warbler and Cirl Bunting, as well as Cuckoo and Whitethroat for some of the group. Butterflies included Small and Adonis Blues together

with Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and the odd Marsh and Glanville Fritillaries in the wide meadows behind the church.

The final stop up on the plateau was behind the village of Čepić, a track down into a well-developed *polje* – typical of the Balkans– a flat plain that forms where water enters and erodes the surrounding limestone, leaving behind a fertile *terra rossa* soil. Here the water from the *polje* feeds into a swallowhole, passing underground and emerging, at 30°C and mildly radioactive, in the springs behind our hotel. The walk down was rich in flora, with the surviving leaves of *Cyclamen purpurascens* and Christmas Rose. The rocky cutting giving access to the *polje* is cold and dark and with an interesting flora on the walls, including Mossy Sandwort. On the *polje* itself, where the water drains away into sinkholes only to re-emerge at our hotel (Istarske Toplice is a thermal springs resort), there was a large Grass Snake under a sheet of corrugated iron, as well as Smooth Newt and Marsh Frog in one of the small ponds.

Passing back through the village of Zrenj-Stridone we were finally treated to some fine views of a pair of Hoopoe close to the cemetery. Surprisingly, this is not a common bird in Istria although it seems more frequent than some years ago. Passing back towards the mouth of the river for a final pass, Paul T mentioned a Cornflower field some years previously near the village of Nova Vas, overlooking the Mirna-Quieto valley. As we passed the site (which was no longer cultivated) Paul noticed a cornfield on the opposite side of the road with some tell-tale blue patches and a scattering of poppies. This proved to be a gold mine with not only Cornflowers but also Corn Cackle, Large Venus's-looking-glass, Prickly Poppy and Corn Gromwell: five endangered agricultural weeds and all now very rare in the UK.

The Mirna-Quieto river never disappoints at this time of the year and our final trip along it yielded two excellent birds with a definite (adult male) Lesser Kestrel and a probable female. Also a group of Red-footed Falcons and two, perhaps three male Black-headed Buntings! The latter are the only European migrant which winters exclusively in Asia (usually India) and the Mirna Valley population is the most north-westerly in the world! It is a very late migrant and many of the birds do not turn up until early June so we were indeed fortunate to find them as early as 10th May. We were back at the hotel not long after 6pm and the rest of the day proceeded as normal with dinner in the restaurant.

Tonight was our final meal at the Dolina restaurant. The food this week had been superb and thanks go to Edi, Mirjana and the kitchen staff.

Day 8

Wednesday 11th May

Carsiana Botanic Garden, Isola della Cona NR and Trieste - Stansted

Our final day in Istria was overcast and breezy, with rain beginning in the late morning and becoming persistent. We began as usual with breakfast, and time for packing. Then, with the bills quickly settled, we made our way out of Croatia, across a short stretch of Slovenia and into Italy, to the botanical gardens of Carsiana close to Trieste. These are themed botanical gardens with more than 500 species of plant, all labeled. Paul T has known the garden since 1992 and worked there intermittently since 2011, particularly in its restoration. Paul took us around, showing us the various habitats laid out within the 6000 square metres, providing an opportunity for participants to do some revision of the identification of some of the plants seen during the week. A new species of reptile

(Dalmatian Algyroides) and a new species of amphibian (Italian Great Crested Newt) were added to the checklist and a Marsh Tit was seen. The calling Hawfinch and Golden Oriole, both of which nest in the garden, remained frustratingly out of sight.

Next we headed to Isola della Cona for lunch. By now the weather was worsening with persistent rain, but there were plenty of wetland birds to see. These included a wide range of herons, ducks and geese, including Little and Great Egrets, Squacco and Grey Herons, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Gadwall, Mallard and Northern Shoveler, together with Pygmy Cormorant. Waders included Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Northern Lapwing, Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Common Greenshank and Wood Sandpiper.

After lunch it was time to make our way towards the airport, just 20 minutes away, where minibuses were returned and goodbyes were said after what had been a very successful holiday on all fronts. We then flew back to the UK where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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Cornflower



Hybrid GW x Pink Butterfly

Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard; LO = leader only; PO = possible)

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>								✓
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
5	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>				✓				✓
6	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>							✓	
7	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓		H	H			
8	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				✓		✓		
9	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓		✓		
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>						✓		
11	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>				✓				✓
12	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			✓				✓	
13	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>						H		
14	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>								✓
15	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			✓	✓			✓	
16	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓
17	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓				
18	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
19	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>				✓				
20	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>			✓					
21	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓			✓	
22	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		✓						
23	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>					✓			
24	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>				✓			✓	
25	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>					✓			
26	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			✓	✓			✓	
27	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			✓	✓		✓		
28	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
29	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>						✓		✓
30	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓		✓		✓
31	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				✓				✓
32	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>								✓
33	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>								✓
34	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			✓	✓				
35	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓	✓				✓
36	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>				✓				✓
37	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓	✓			✓	
38	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>								✓
39	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>								✓
40	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>				✓				
41	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>				✓				
43	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>								✓
44	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓							
45	Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia feral</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			✓	✓		✓		
47	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>				✓		✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
48	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
49	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		H		H	✓	H	H	H
50	Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
51	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
52	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>			✓					
54	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>			✓				✓	✓
55	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			✓	H			✓	
56	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		✓		H	H	H	H	H
57	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>					✓			
58	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓		H		✓	
59	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>					H	H		
60	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H	✓	H		H	✓	H
61	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>		H		✓	H			
62	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>						po.	✓	
63	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
64	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>				✓		✓	✓	
65	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>						✓		
66	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
67	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>				✓	✓			
68	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		H	H	✓	✓	H	✓	✓
69	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓			✓		
72	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H
74	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	H	H			✓	✓	✓	
75	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>						✓		
76	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
77	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>					✓		✓	
79	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				✓		✓	✓	
80	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			✓	✓				
81	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				H				
84	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		H	✓					✓
85	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H	H		H	H	H	
86	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>			✓	H		H		✓
87	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>				H		✓	H	
88	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				H		H		
89	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>		H	✓	✓			✓	
90	Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>			✓					
91	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			H	✓			✓	
92	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	H	H	✓	✓		H	✓	H
93	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>						H		
94	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>					H			
95	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			✓		✓	✓		
96	Eastern Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans albistriata</i>		✓	✓					
97	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>			✓					

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			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
98	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>					H	✓		
99	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		H					✓	
100	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		H			H	H		
101	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
104	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
105	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	H	✓	H	✓	H	✓	H	H
106	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	H	✓	H	✓	H	H	✓	H
107	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓			✓	H	H	
108	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		✓	✓	H	✓			
109	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
110	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
111	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			✓			✓	✓	
112	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
113	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓	✓			✓	
114	Ashy-headed Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava cinereocapilla</i>				✓		✓		
115	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓			✓	✓		
116	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
117	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>			✓					
118	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>					✓			
119	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>						✓		
120	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	H	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
121	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓		✓			✓	
122	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	H	H	H
123	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓	✓		✓		
124	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
125	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
126	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
127	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>						✓		
128	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		✓			✓			
129	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	H	✓	H
130	Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>							✓	

Mammals (s=signs of; D=dead)

1	Eastern Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus roumanicus</i>			✓					
2	Mole	<i>Talpa europaea</i>						S	D	
3	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		S			S	S	S	
4	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>				✓				
5	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>								✓
6	Red Squirrel	<i>Scuirus vulgaris</i>								✓
7	Coypu	<i>Myocastor coypus</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓

Reptiles & Amphibians

1	Smooth Newt	<i>Lissotriton vulgaris</i>		✓						
2	Yellow-bellied Toad	<i>Bombina variegata</i>		✓						
3	Marsh Frog	<i>Rana ridibunda</i>		✓		✓		H		
4	European Pond Terrapin	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>		✓						
5	Red-eared Slider	<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>				✓				

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			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
6	Italian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis sicula</i>				✓					
7	Dalmatian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis melisellensis</i>			✓						
8	Eastern Montpellier Snake	<i>Malpolon insignitus</i>			✓						

Fish

1	Pumpkin Seed Fish	<i>Lepomis gibbosus</i>				✓				
2	Mosquito Fish	<i>Gambusia holbrooki</i>				✓				

Butterflies

1	Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		✓		✓				
2	Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>				✓	✓			✓
3	Southern Festoon	<i>Zerynthia polyxena</i>					✓			
4	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>		✓						✓
6	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		✓						✓
7	Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>								✓
8	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	
9	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
10	Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>			✓		✓			✓
11	Sooty Copper	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>								✓
12	Short-tailed Blue	<i>Cupido argiades</i>		✓						
13	Little Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>								✓
14	Green-underside Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>			✓					✓
15	Baton Blue	<i>Pseudophilotes baton</i>		✓						
16	Chequered Blue	<i>Scolitantides orion</i>		✓						
17	Silver-studded Blue	<i>Plebejus argus</i>		✓						✓
18	Reverdin's Blue	<i>Plebejus argyrognomon</i>								✓
19	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agrestis</i>								✓
20	Adonis Blue	<i>Iysandra bellargus</i>					✓			✓
21	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>			✓	✓				
22	Duke of Burgandy Fritillary	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>		✓						✓
23	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>					✓	✓	✓	
24	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓		✓	✓			
25	Glanville Fritillary	<i>Melitaea cinxia</i>		✓						✓
26	Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea didyma</i>		✓						
27	Marsh Fritillary	<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>		✓						✓
28	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>				✓				
29	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
30	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria tircis</i>		✓						
31	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>		✓	✓					
32	Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>					✓			
33	Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>					✓		✓	

Micro Moths

1	Plum Tortrix	<i>Hedya pruniana</i>				✓				
2	Crambid	<i>Chrysocrambus cassentiniellus</i>					✓		✓	

Macro Moths

1	Tau Emperor	<i>Aglia tau</i>					✓	✓		
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	Common name	Scientific name	May								
			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
2	Franconian Lackey caterpillar	<i>Malacosoma franconica</i>								✓	
3	Wayfarer	<i>Emmiltis pygmaearia</i>		✓	✓						
4	Latticed Heath	<i>Chiasmia clathrata clathrata</i>		✓				✓	✓	✓	
5	Speckled Yellow	<i>Pseudopanthera macularia</i>								✓	
6	Common Heath	<i>Ematurga atomaria atomaria</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth	<i>Hemaris tityus</i>								✓	
8	Pine Processionary Moth bivouac	<i>Thaumetopoea pityocampa</i>						✓	✓		
9	Silver-Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>		✓							
10	Mother Shipton	<i>Callistege mi</i>					LO				
11	Burnet Companion	<i>Euclidia glyphica</i>						✓	✓		

Other Invertebrates

1	Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>		✓		✓					
2	Desert Cricket	<i>Melanogryllus desertus</i>						✓			
3	Dark Bush-cricket	<i>Pholidoptera griseoptera</i>		✓						✓	
4	Fire Bug	<i>Pyrrhocoris apterus</i>		✓		✓					
5	Pond-skater	<i>Aquarius najas</i>				✓					
6	Red-and-black Froghopper	<i>Cercopis vulnerata</i>				✓				✓	
7	Wood Ant	<i>Formica rufa</i>		✓							
8	Scorpion Fly	<i>Panorpa communis</i>		✓				✓			
9	Hornet	<i>Vespa crabro</i>		✓							
10	Carpenter Bee	<i>Xylocopa violacea</i>			✓						
11	Early Bumblebee	<i>Bombus pratorum</i>							✓	✓	
12	Burying Beetle sp.								✓		
13	Dor Beetle	<i>Geotrupes stercorarius</i>									
14	Cockchafer	<i>Melolontha melolontha</i>			✓				✓	✓	
15	Pollen Chafer	<i>Oxythyrea funesta</i>		✓							
16	a Chafer	<i>Cetonia cuprea</i>				✓					
17	Ladybird sp.					✓					
18	Musk Beetle	<i>Aromia moschata</i>			✓						
19	Cucumber Spider	<i>Araniella cucurbitina</i>		✓				✓			
20	Zebra Spider	<i>Salticus scenicus</i>				✓					
21	Walnut Orb Weaver	<i>Nuctenea umbratica</i>				✓					

Molluscs

1	Garden Snail	<i>Helix aspera</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
2	Roman Snail	<i>Helix pomatia</i>								✓	
3	Brown-lipped Banded Snail	<i>Cepaea nemoralis</i>				✓					
4	Clusilid Dor Snail sp.			✓							
5	Black Slug	<i>Arion ater</i>							✓		

Worms

1	Giant Worm	<i>Octodrilus istriacus</i>		S		✓					
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