

# Romania – The Wildlife of Transylvania

Naturetrek Tour Report

7th – 14th June 2022



Wallcreepers

Tour report and images by Andy Foster



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Tour participants: Andy Foster and Ionut Bordea (leaders) with six Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Tuesday 7th June

The group met up at Heathrow Airport to depart on our British Airways flight to Bucharest. Having left 30 minutes late we made up good time and landed just 10 minutes late at 17.30 local time, Romania being two hours ahead of the UK.

We met Simona, the Naturetrek ground agent upon arrival and quickly loaded up the minibus and made our way out of a rush hour Bucharest. It wasn't long before we were moving at a better pace and making our way into the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. The further we travelled the more beautiful the scenery became, quite breathtaking at times! After a journey of three and a half hours, we arrived at our accommodation for the week, the stunningly located Mosorel Guesthouse. Tired, but happy to have arrived, we were allocated our rooms and met up soon afterwards for a meal and a quick briefing prior to retiring for the evening.

## Day 2

Wednesday 8th June

We woke to a beautiful clear morning with stunning views overlooking the Zarnesti Gorge. Prior to breakfast, a couple of us took a walk along the track near the guesthouse, seeing Alpine Swift, Jay and hearing a distant Yellowhammer calling. Upon scanning the limestone mountains opposite the Guesthouse, we soon picked up our first Chamois of the trip. After breakfast, we returned to our "scanning spot" and to our delight, picked up a mother Brown Bear together with her cub, what a wonderful sight and an amazing start to the tour, with great scope views for the whole group!

Our local guide for the week, Ionut, arrived and soon afterwards we departed for our morning excursion to Zarnesti Gorge, just a 20 minute drive away from the Guesthouse. Ionut was clearly a hive of information regarding local wildlife and the Piatra Craiului National Park where we were to spend our first full day.

We had decided to visit the gorge on the first day as our target here was the much sought after Wallcreeper, so we wanted to allow ourselves a couple of trips just in case we couldn't find the bird on our first visit. We took the 1km walk into the gorge, such an impressive location with steep limestone cliffs either side of us. There were plenty of wild flowers to look at along the way together with a Coal Tit and couple of Grey Wagtails.

We arrived at the nest site that Ionut had thankfully staked out for us and waited for several minutes, scanning the gorge around us in case the Wallcreeper was feeding close by. Suddenly, the bird appeared, there was a slight panic as we all rushed to try to see this stunning little bird. Amazingly, the male flew in close to the nest, called for the female to come, she appeared as he happily passed over the spider he had caught as she then vanished into a crack in the rocks - what an amazing sight!

As the morning warmed up, butterfly activity was starting to increase as we saw our first Orange Tip, Camberwell Beauty and Comma. We soon picked up a Peregrine Falcon that eventually perched up on a dead tree giving good scope views, followed by a small group of Alpine Swifts and a couple of Common Buzzards.

We arrived back at the minibus and took a short drive to a beautiful picnic spot where a wonderful picnic lunch was served before we drove on to the other entrance for the National Park. We took a nice leisurely walk through some stunning meadows full of wild flowers, picking up a Black Woodpecker and White Wagtail along the way.

Clouds were now building and as we arrived back at the minibus the rain arrived, perfect timing! It was a short shower as we made our way back to Zarnesti where we made a quick stop to enjoy great views of a White Stork together with nest and chick! A great end to a great day!

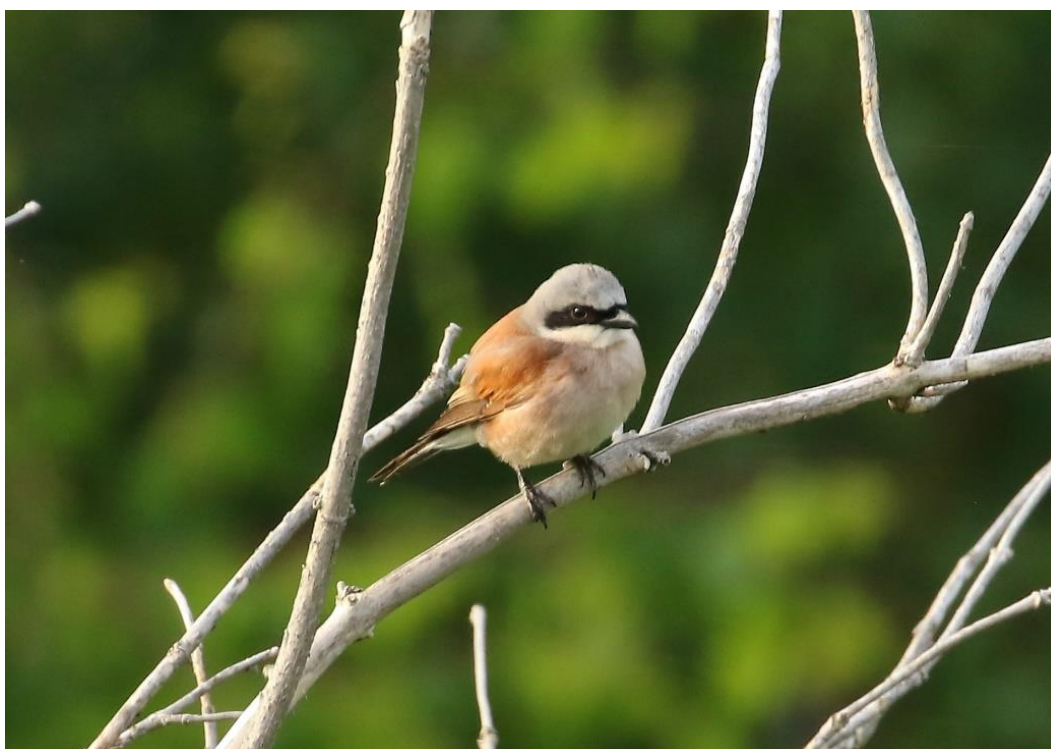
We arrived back at the guesthouse at 18.00 where we were greeted by a male Black Redstart!

A delicious dinner was served at 19.30, followed by our daily checklist.

## Day 3

Thursday 9th June

We awoke to another glorious morning with some of the group taking an early morning walk prior to meeting up for breakfast. Ionut arrived and we set off towards an area in the lowlands called Poiana Narciselor, just over an hour away from our guesthouse. On the road down we finally caught up with a Dipper on the stream that runs along the edge of the road. Thankfully there was a fair amount of cloud cover today, which kept the temperature down on what can usually be a very hot day. It was quite windy so unfortunately the butterflies were laying low but it wasn't long before we had our first views of Red-backed Shrike, Yellowhammer, Peregrine Falcon and some Common Buzzards.



Red-backed Shrike

As we made our way along the road we spotted a Hoopoe in flight, followed by a Great-grey Shrike perched on top of a dead tree. We were also lucky enough to come across an impaled cricket that had been skewered onto a

nearby bush, probably by the Red-backed Shrike! Moments later we spotted a Black Stork drifting over the nearby forest, a wonderful sight.



Sand Lizard

We continued along the road picking up a distant Tree Pipit whilst Helen spotted a Golden Oriole in the nearby forest, unfortunately this didn't stick around but we all caught up with this spectacular species later in the day. A large raptor was next on the menu as it slowly drifted towards us, Ionut identified it as a Lesser spotted Eagle, one of our main target birds of the day. Val also had a fly through Hobby and we managed to locate a couple of Sand Lizards.

Lunch was served in a forest glade and shortly afterwards the Golden Oriole was relocated, followed by brief but good views of a Middle-spotted Woodpecker. We set off walking along the road that runs parallel with the adjoining forest picking up a small family group of Tree Sparrows and another White Stork that gave us a nice close view as it drifted past in front of us. It was now mid-afternoon as we all boarded the minibus again and set off towards a local monastery that was surprisingly located in a cave, quite a sight. Upon arrival at the monastery, we were lucky enough to see three European Bee-eaters, stunning scope views were had by all!



## White Stork

We continued our journey, now heading back towards Zarnesti seeing a Little Owl and a few more White Storks along the way. Ionut had mentioned about a local site for Beavers, so we decided to stop and see if we could find any recent evidence of their activities. Just outside of Zarnesti we stopped by the side of a small river and Robin located a recently built dam together of evidence of where the Beavers had been coppicing the willow along the riverbank. Robin had a good knowledge of Beavers which he was happy to share with a much appreciative group. There was also some bird activity in the area with good views of Yellow Wagtails and after a lot of effort, several Garden Warblers.

## Day 4

## Friday 10th June

Another fun day lay ahead of us as we met for breakfast before setting off from the guesthouse for a walk through the local village down towards Zarnesti Gorge. The wild flower meadows were amazing with plenty of wonderful plant species to keep us occupied. Unfortunately, it was quite cloudy and cooler today, so there was little butterfly activity. We soon came across a Marsh Tit followed by several Common Redstarts that were breeding in the surrounding meadows. One of the most conspicuous plants this morning was the Spreading Bellflower followed by some beautiful Fragrant Orchids and further on, some Bird's Nest Orchids.



The beautiful view from our guesthouse

As we continued through the meadows we came across several Fieldfares, Alpine and Common Swifts overhead and some Black Redstarts. Our driver met us further along our route and greeted us with another wonderful picnic lunch.

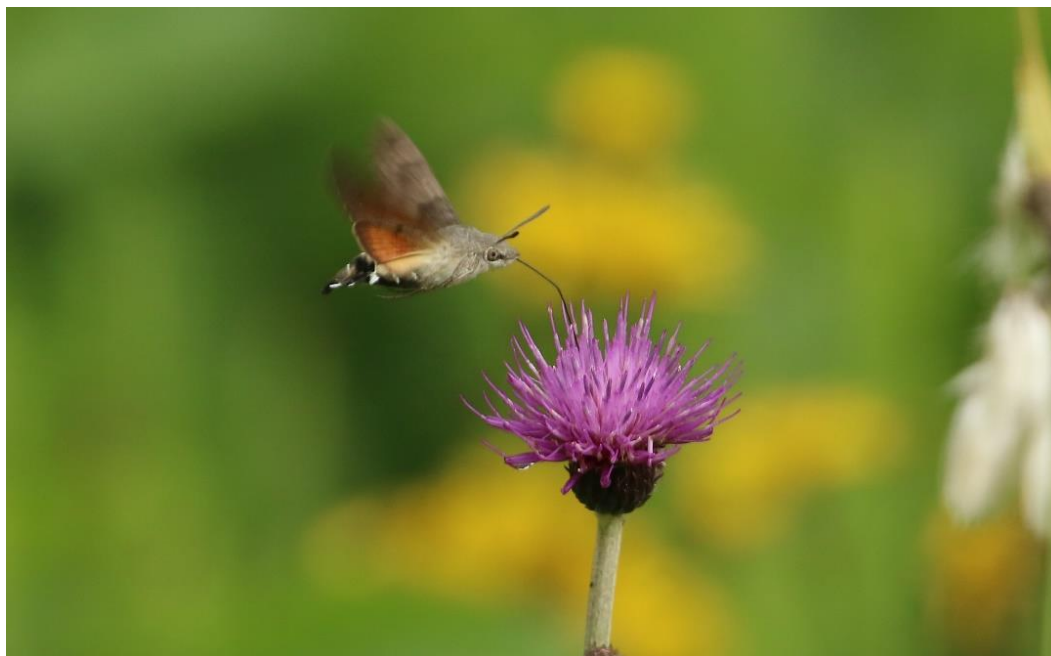


Spreading Bellflower

The weather was starting to deteriorate as we finished lunch and boarded the minibus for a visit to the well known Bran Castle, the “home” of Dracula. Our guide Ionut gave us an interesting talk about the history surrounding the castle and shortly afterwards we arrived in the local square at Bran. By this point the heavens had opened as we made our way to purchase our entrance tickets. Bran Castle is an impressive building, steeped in history with informative displays as you walk around inside, the whole visit took around 1.5 hours.



By the time we left the castle, the rain had eased. Castle we headed back towards the guesthouse to take a walk through the village in the other direction to which we had walked during the morning. Unfortunately, the weather soon closed in again and with heavy rain falling, we were forced to retreat back to the minibus, but not before we had great views of a Hummingbird Hawk-Moth. We arrived back at the guesthouse just before 17.30.



Hummingbird Hawk-moth

Just as dinner was being served, the owner of the guesthouse spotted the mother and cub Brown Bears on the craggy mountains in front of the guesthouse, so dinner was delayed whilst we all took prolonged looks through the telescope. We completed our checklists after dinner and retired ready for a long day tomorrow.

## Day 5

Saturday 11th June

After breakfast we took an hour drive back towards the area of Sinca Noua that we had passed through on Thursday. We arrived around 10.00 and transferred to a horse and cart (a traditional form of transport in Romania) to be taken further into the flowering meadows where we spent the remainder of the morning.

As soon as we pulled off of the main road, we found a Lesser-spotted Eagle perched up in a nearby tree, giving the group some great views. The meadows in this area were amazing and so diverse, so many beautiful flowers and nobody around, just so peaceful. Carthusian Pink was numerous as was Field Scabious with their beautiful blue flowers. We also came across a stunning male Large Copper butterfly, whilst in the distance Golden Orioles were calling with a nice male flying over the distant forest. Common Spotted Orchids were also common in this area.





Lesser-spotted Eagle



Carthusian Pink

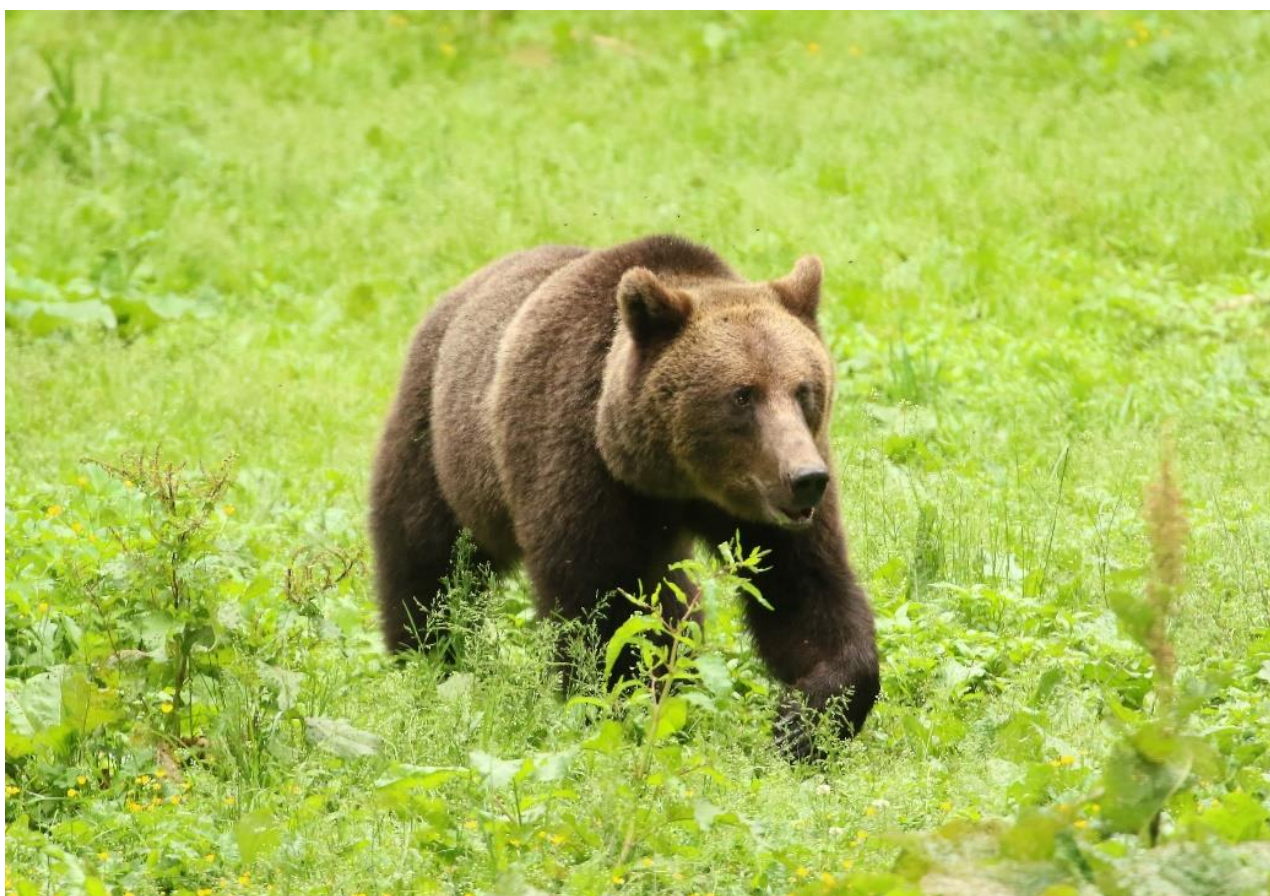
We then heard a Corncrake calling some distance away, we used some playback and the bird responded well. We walked closer to where the bird was, using a little playback along the way. It felt like we were now right “on top” of the bird, but alas, we just couldn’t see it! It then amazingly had relocated some 10 metres away, again we tried to get closer to see it, but no joy, this went on for some time, frustrating, but quite amusing at the same time! We did however manage to get good views of Corn Bunting.

Once again, a delicious picnic lunch was served shortly after 13.00, after which we continued to walk the meadows looking for wild flowers and birds. Unfortunately, it had now started to rain but we pressed on, picking up good views of a Woodlark along the way. We then stumbled across a wonderful patch of orchids, containing Fragrant Orchid, Lesser-butterfly Orchid and Common-spotted Orchid, a wonderful sight!



Today we were to have an early dinner as we were to visit a local bear hide. We arrived at a rural house and were greeted by a local lady who had prepared a wonderful dinner for us, washed down with <sup>Large Copper</sup> homemade wine and tuica (pronounced swika), the local brandy made from plums. She then showed us around her garden, it was quite amazing, all sorts of crops, chickens and various fruit trees which made her almost self-sufficient, very impressive.

We set off for a further 25 minute drive arriving around 18.00 at the meeting point where we were to be taken to a hide to watch Brown Bears. I don't think anything had prepared us for what was to come. As we climbed out of the minibus and glanced into the forest, we saw this large Brown Bear heading down through the trees. We were guided into the hide by two rangers and right there in front of us were no less than six Brown Bears, including two cubs!



Brown Bear

We sat in silence for the next hour watching bears come and go, it was a great experience watching how the bears interact and the hierarchy between them. After a great experience we returned to the minibus and took the one hour drive back to the guesthouse arriving just after 21.00.

Some of the group met in the restaurant for tea, coffee and beer before retiring to recharge ready for another busy day head tomorrow.

## Day 6

Sunday 12th June

We awoke to a very windy morning with heavy clouds enshrouding the surrounding mountains. Thankfully as we dropped down into the lowlands as we headed towards our first stop of the day (Dumbravita) the weather started to improve, with even the sun making an appearance early on. For the rest of the day, we encountered “scattered showers” but thankfully this didn’t disrupt our day too much.

We spent the morning at the Dumbravita lakes just outside of Brasov. This was a habitat we hadn’t previously visited so far, so new birds and wildlife were plentiful. Both Yellow-legged and Black-headed Gulls were in abundance, together with Marsh Harrier, Great-crested Grebe, Pochard, Grey Heron, Common Buzzard, Lesser-spotted Eagle, Black-crowned Night Heron, Great Reed Warbler, Squacco Heron, Penduline Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Savi’s Warbler, Pygmy Cormorant, Great Egret and Whiskered Tern.



Marsh Harrier

We had a wonderful picnic lunch before moving onto a small fishing lake some 30 minutes drive away. Val spotted a Little Bittern flying over and it wasn’t long before we managed to get great views of this cool bird. Up next, Helen spotted a Kingfisher, this wonderful little bird finally sat up out in the open, giving the whole group unbelievably good scope views of this stunning bird.

It was mid-afternoon as we set off for a 25 minute drive to Brasov for a visit to the Black Church and a look around the town.

We left Brasov at 17.45 and headed back towards the guesthouse, just over an hours drive away. As we reached the start of the road that takes us into the National Park, I spotted a Ural Owl sat right up against the side of a

pine tree. I asked our driver to stop a little further up the road and we all walked down to try and see this beautiful bird. Unfortunately, the bird had different ideas and took off, heading down deeper into the forest, Helen was the only person to catch a glimpse as the bird vanished into the trees.



Penduline Tit



Marsh Frog



Little Bittern

## Day 7

Monday 13th June

Unbelievable that today was our last full day of the tour. We set off from the guesthouse and 30 minutes later arrived at a beautiful wild flower meadow the other side of Zarnesti, just opposite the National Park headquarters. The rain from yesterday was a distant memory as the sun beamed down across the meadows with the most spectacular views of Piatra Craiului National Park. It wasn't long before we started seeing our first Buzzards of the day and then a real surprise was a Common Rosefinch vocalising in the distance, it took a while

to locate it but soon enough the group were getting scope views. This individual was seen on the Naturetrek tour the previous week and constituted the first record ever for the National Park! As we continued our way through the meadows there were several Blackcaps calling and a distant Corncrake which was also vocalising. Several Mistle Thrushes crossed our path and there were also a handful of Red-backed Shrikes sat up on top of the bushes together with several Tree Pipits.

The meadows were glorious and full of Meadow Salvias together with Lesser Butterfly Orchids.



Meadows near Zarnesti

We continued along the track until around 13.15 when we arrived back at the minibus where Helen, the wonderful lady who had been preparing all of our picnic lunches was waiting with more lovely food. We had a short break after lunch and then took an uphill walk to a local Monastery, such a wonderful location and felt really quite remote as we headed into the shrine that was located deep inside a rather chilly cave.

We came across a couple of Lesser Whitethroats and some wonderful Globe Orchids. We started trying for Spotted Nutcracker but had no luck. Robin dropped back on the trail and then came running to catch us up

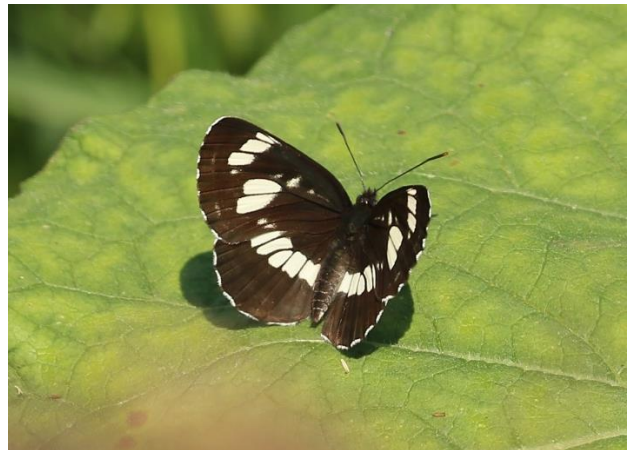
saying he heard a Nutcracker. We dashed back and the bird was calling, but unfortunately from some distance away. Suddenly Ionut called us over, he had located the bird in a distant tree, we quickly set the scope up and had brief but good views of this strange looking bird. Good team work all round!

We arrived back at the minibus feeling quite tired after what had been a wonderful last day, arriving back at the guesthouse in time to have showers prior to dinner. We had our usual after dinner ritual to go through photos of plants and butterflies, checking on the identity of various species, a nice way to end each day.

A small number of the group took an after dinner walk up above the guesthouse, getting spectacular views along the Zarnesti gorge, lit up by a full moon!



Globe Orchid



Hungarian Glider

## Day 8

Tuesday 14th June

Today saw an early start meeting for breakfast at 06.15 so that we could depart at 07.00 for our journey to Bucharest for our flight home. The journey down was uneventful and we arrived on time at the airport. It was a smooth flight and we arrived 30 minutes ahead of schedule at Heathrow airport.

It had been a wonderful week in the Carpathian Mountains with great company, fantastic wildlife, good food and accommodation, which had made it a thoroughly enjoyable tour.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	June 2022							
		7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>						✓		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>						✓		
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>						✓		
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>						✓		
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>								
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>		✓		✓			✓	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	2	✓	✓	✓		
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		H	H	H	H	1	H	
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>						✓		
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Corn Crane	<i>Crex crex</i>					H			
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>						✓		
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>						✓		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>						✓		
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>						✓		
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>						3		
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			1					
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		3	✓		✓	✓		
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>						3		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>						✓		
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>						4		
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>						✓		
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>						2		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			1		1	2		
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>						2		
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>						✓		
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>			2		2	1		

Common name	Scientific name	June 2022							
		7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			2			4		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			H					
Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>						1		
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			1					
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			1					
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>						2		
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>			3					
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>				H				
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>			1					
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			1		H			
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		1						
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			H					
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1	1	1	1	2	1	
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			3					
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		2	1					
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>			✓	1	✓	1	✓	
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>			1					
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>			2		4			
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>							1	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			5					
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>		1				1	2	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			2		2	4	2	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		1	1					
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>				1		1		
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		1	1	1			2	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		1	2	1			H	
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>						1		
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>					1			
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			4					
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>						✓		
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H	2	1	H	H	H	
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>						2		
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			H			1		
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>						1		
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H		H	H		H	
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			✓					
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>							1	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>					H			
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>						1	H	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				H	H		H	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			1		H		H	
Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>		2						
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			✓	✓				
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	1	2	✓	
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>						1		



Common name	Scientific name	June 2022							
		7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>				✓	2			
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		2						
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓		1	✓	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				✓				
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			4	1	2			
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		2	1	4	1		1	
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>				✓		1	1	
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>			1					
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			3					
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>			✓					
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		4		4				
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		2	2	1	2	1	2	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			1					3
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		1	✓	1	2	2	1	
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				1	1			
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>							1	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>					2			
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>								1
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		5	✓	✓				✓
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>					2			
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		H	✓	1	2			2
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>						1		

## Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	June 2022							
		7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<b>Papilionidae</b>									
Clouded Apollo	<i>Parnassius mnemosyne</i>								1
<b>Pieridae</b>									
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓						
Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>		2						1
Large Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>					2			
Little Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>				1				
Mazarine Blue	<i>Cyraniris semiargus</i>					1			
<b>Nymphalidae</b>									
Hungarian Glider	<i>Neptis rivularis</i>			1					2
Camberwell Beauty	<i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>		2						
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>								1
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>								1
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>								2
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		1			1			2
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>		1						
Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary	<i>Clossiana selene</i>			✓		3			
<b>Satyridae</b>									
Woodland Ringlet	<i>Erebia medusa</i>				2				

Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓					1	
<b>Moths</b>									
Hummingbird Hawk Moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>				1				

## Others

Common name	Scientific name	June 2022							
		7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<b>Mammals</b>									
Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>		2		2	8			
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>					3		2	
Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>		5	1	✓	✓			
<b>Reptiles</b>									
Sand Lizard	<i>Lacerta agilis</i>			4		1		1	
Slow Worm	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>		1						
<b>Amphibians</b>									
Alpine Newt	<i>Triturus alpinus</i>					✓			
Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>						2		
Yellow-bellied Toad	<i>Bombina variegata</i>							✓	
Marsh Frog	<i>Rana ridibunda</i>						✓		
Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>			1		1			