

Romania's Danube Delta & Carpathian Mountains

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 - 26 May 2008



Black Woodpecker by Bob Willis



Red-backed Shrike by Bob Willis



Rose-coloured Starling by Bob Willis

Report compiled by Chris Kehoe
Images courtesy of Bob Willis



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Day 1

Saturday 17th May

Outbound to Bucharest; en route to Zarnesti

Weather: sunny and hot in Bucharest

Our flight took off at 10.45am – about an hour late – after delays at Heathrow. We had a smooth flight to Bucharest and touched down almost on schedule at 3.30pm, local time. Immigration formalities were quick and simple and we soon collected our luggage and met Daniel in the arrivals hall. After a short delay waiting for a replacement bus we set off north towards the Carpathian Mountains at 5.00pm. Our route took us through unremarkable agricultural land for an hour or so before we began to climb into the foothills, stopping for drinks near Sinaia for half an hour. At 8.30pm we arrived at Pension Elena in Zarnesti Village, our base for the first three nights of the tour, and had a little time to freshen up before dinner.

Day 2

Sunday 18 May

Strimba Valley

Weather: dry and mostly sunny and hot apart from some thundery rain for an hour at lunchtime

Half a dozen early risers took a stroll through the village towards the nearby national park and were rewarded with Common and Black Redstarts and a Serin before breakfast at 8am. At 9am we set off for a day at Strimba Valley where we arrived 40 minutes later. Within the first 20 minutes we managed to see several Lesser Spotted Eagles and Honey Buzzards rising on the first thermals. We also saw a pair of Great Grey Shrikes working their way along some wires as Woodlarks flitted about and Red-backed Shrikes sat on nearby bushes.

Moving further up the valley we enjoyed some excellent views of more Honey Buzzards and a few Common Ravens. We had a brief glimpse of Wryneck and Middle Spotted Woodpecker, too. A thunderstorm forced us to retreat to the coach to eat our packed lunches, but as the rain eased off after an hour or so we carried on with our walk up the valley – the highlight being a White-backed Woodpecker. Before beginning our return journey to Zarnesti a few hours later we added several more species to our list, including Lesser Spotted, Great Spotted, Green and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, more Lesser Spotted Eagles, our first Lesser Grey Shrikes and a Corncrake, which called near the road but remained hidden. Back at the pension half of the group had a quick turnaround in order to visit a bear hide in the national park with one of the local rangers, but sadly their vigil proved fruitless.

Day 3

Monday 19th May

Zarnesti Gorge; Bran area

Weather: thundery rain until 9.30am; dry and sunny thereafter

With thunder and lightening either side of breakfast, plans for a pre-breakfast stroll were cancelled and we had a slightly delayed departure to nearby Zarnesti Gorge at 9.30am. On arrival it was fine and dry. We watched Common Buzzards and Crag Martins soaring overhead before crossing a small stream and walking up a well-wooded path towards some meadows. The forest here was full of birdsong and our attention was soon attracted to a singing Wood Warbler – we caught a couple of brief views of it. Then we spotted a male Red-breasted Flycatcher that, after a patient wait, posed beautifully at eye level. Up at the meadows we had a good view of the surrounding mountains and Daniel did well to locate a Chamois sitting on a distant crag that gave some good scope views. A Goshawk showed briefly a couple of times here and several Alpine Swifts appeared in the distance.

We then returned to the bus, collected our packed lunches and began to walk up the steep sided gorge in search of Wallcreepers. After a considerable amount of scanning we eventually located a couple of male Wallcreepers and got reasonable scope views on and off for 15 minutes. We then returned to the coach with Alpine Swifts hurtling around overhead. Back at Zarnesti Village it was the turn of the other half of the group to try for Brown Bear at the bear hide and this time they were in luck as a male bear appeared and gave some excellent views.

Day 4

Tuesday 20th May

En route to Tulcea

Weather: dry, bright and warm

Today was basically a travelling day as we transferred by coach to Tulcea, the gateway to the Danube Delta. We set off at the civilized hour of 9am and initially retraced our route back towards Bucharest before turning east at Ploesti and crossing the wide Baragan Plain. We had lunch at a small poplar plantation at the roadside. A large rookery was in full swing here with some of the nests occupied by Common Kestrels. Overhead, a handful of Red-footed Falcons and a Hobby hawked for insects while some nearby bushes gave us great views of European Bee-eaters and some very showy Golden Orioles, among others. Pressing on, we eventually reached the Danube crossing at 4.15pm and soon after stopped for an hour or so to look for birds at and around a large roadside lake.

Highlights here included a pair of Ruddy Shelducks (the only ones we saw), our first Ferruginous Ducks and Purple Herons. A Spanish Sparrow posed on a nearby fence, along with a Red-backed Shrike and Corn Bunting. Arriving at Tulcea at 7pm, we boarded the comfortable floating Hotel that would be our home for the next four nights and were soon settling down to dinner.

Day 5

Wednesday 21st May

Danube Delta: northern backwaters near Maliuc, Sulina Chanel, Old Danube (east section)

Weather: dry, bright and warm

After a leisurely breakfast on the floating hotel we packed up our lunch things and set off into the delta. After half an hour we turned off north from the main Sulina Channel. We then spent the rest of the morning exploring backwaters and lakes before meeting the floating hotel, which had been towed to Maliuc Village. Even before we turned off the Sulina Channel the first of the morning's eight Black Woodpeckers had been seen and we all eventually enjoyed great views of one of these charismatic birds in a bare treetop.

As we travelled deeper into the delta the numbers of water birds steadily increased. We saw numerous Pygmy and Great Cormorants and Whiskered Terns and also had our first encounters with Glossy Ibis and many others, including a Little Bittern. Overhead, White Pelicans took to the warming air and a handful of much rarer Dalmatian Pelicans were seen, including a couple of swimming birds as we crossed Lake Furtana where our first Red-necked Grebes were noted. All in all it was a very busy morning!

After lunch on the floating hotel the tug pulled us east along the Sulina Channel to our overnight mooring point on a quiet stretch of the Old Danube near Letea. Highlights this afternoon were several hawking Red-footed Falcons and Hobbies, a handful of White-tailed Eagles and a flyby Great Black-headed Gull among the commoner Caspian Gulls.

From our mooring we had access to a dyke where a short walk produced distant views of a White-tailed Eagle nest and more Red-footed Falcons and Hobbies. After dinner we were lulled to sleep (or not!) by a frog chorus.

Day 6

Thursday 22nd May

Danube Delta

Weather: mostly dry, bright and warm with a period of light-moderate thundery rain either side of lunch

Early risers took a short walk along the dyke near the floating hotel and enjoyed good scope views of a perched White-tailed Eagle, numerous Marsh Harriers and other species. After breakfast we travelled by launch along narrow waterways to Letea Village. Among the many birds seen en route were a Little Bittern perched obligingly as we passed, and a male Penduline Tit that we watched constructing its elaborate nest.

At Letea we took a short walk through the village before boarding a tractor-pulled trailer that delivered us to Letea Forest half an hour later. Here Daniel pointed out some of the characteristic plants of the area while the birders enjoyed their first really good views of perched Red-footed Falcons.

Darkening skies and light rain arrived as we returned towards the launch and we arrived back at the floating hotel just in time to avoid a soaking.

Not long after lunch the skies had cleared nicely and we were towed back to the Sulina Channel and westwards to an overnight mooring on the western section of the old Danube near Mila 23. On arriving at our overnight stop we enjoyed views of Black and Whiskered Terns feeding over an area of nearby lily pads and a singing Savi's warbler was located in the reed-bed opposite. We had decent scope views of it as a Grey-headed Woodpecker came and went from a dead tree just behind us.

Day 7

Friday 23rd May

Danube Delta

Weather: mostly dry and bright with a few sharp showers in the afternoon

Early risers were treated to a feast of birds from the observation deck of the floating hotel that included no fewer than half-a-dozen Little Bitterns. After breakfast we boarded the launch and made our way through a long succession of narrow channels and small lakes that were particularly rich in birdlife. Small colonies of Black and Whiskered Terns were a regular sight and most contained small groups of Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes. A single Gull-billed Tern flew around the launch a couple of times.

During the preceding days we had seen flying flocks of Rose-coloured Starlings on several occasions but this morning we finally found some settled in trees where they gave excellent views. A Little Owl was also new to our list and a Black Woodpecker (one of three seen this morning) gave stellar views on a tree stump just before we arrived at the floating hotel for lunch. The afternoon was spent slowly returning to Tulcea with a couple of White-tailed Eagles and many other typical delta birds seen en route.

Day 8

Saturday 24th May

Tulcea: day trip to Macin Mountains National Park, via Somova

Weather: dry, sunny and hot

After a final night on the floating hotel we set off westward in the bus at 8.30am. After about 30 minutes we arrived at a small valley overlooking the wide Danube flood plain (and Ukraine beyond) at Somova. We then began searching for Barred Warblers in the low bushes either side of the path. An Ortolan Bunting was quickly seen and several Red-backed Shrikes appeared before we eventually heard, and then saw, a couple of Barred Warblers. Long-legged Buzzards and a Short-toed Eagle soared overhead. A short stop was made to admire the view as we returned to the main road and continued westwards. Next stop was at a nearby area of steppe forest (Somova Forest) where we spent an hour watching migrating Honey Buzzards, our first Levant Sparrowhawks, more Ortolans and a pair of Red-rumped Swallows.

Pressing on we stopped briefly to watch some Bee-eaters at a roadside quarry (where a Little Owl was also in residence), before arriving at a shady spot at the base of the arid Macin Mountains for our packed lunch. A couple of hours were spent here which allowed us to watch the Isabelline Wheatears in the steppe below the hills and the Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes inhabiting the higher slopes.

Also seen were more Levant Sparrowhawks and several flocks of migrating White Storks. Further south along the Macin Mountain chain we made a final stop near Greci where Stone Curlews and Isabelline Wheatears inhabited the steppe, and Woodlark and Middle Spotted Woodpecker the steppe forest below the mountains proper.

We returned to Tulcea by 7.30pm, quickly settled into our rooms at the Ibis Tours Guesthouse and had dinner.

Day 9

Sunday 25th May

Tulcea: Babadag, Istria and Vadu

Weather: mostly dry, sunny and warm/hot with a moderate breeze at times and a light shower around lunchtime

Our final day was spent exploring sites to the south of Tulcea. First stop was at Babadag Forest, 40 minutes away, where a short walk allowed several interesting plants to be seen; birds included Honey Buzzard and Lesser Spotted Eagle. Half an hour later we arrived in the extensive coastal grasslands near Istria where a few marshy pools held numerous Black-winged Stilts and Avocets with a few Kentish Plovers and Collared Pratincoles. Breezy conditions hampered attempts to locate Paddyfield Warblers, though one was photographed. Most of us caught a glimpse or two of Bearded Tits here and Black-headed Yellow Wagtails were conspicuous.

We ate our packed lunch during a period of light rain, but it soon cleared up and we continued our journey southwards to Vadu and the Black Sea coast. Shallow lagoons at Vadu held a small selection of migrant waders such as Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints and a Ruff, while a large roost of Common Terns attracted a few Little and Mediterranean Gulls. At the coast some ritual toe dipping was carried out! New birds came in the shape of Sandwich and Caspian Terns and a couple of Tawny Pipits. Scattered bushes in the area held a few late migrants, such as Spotted Flycatchers and Blackcaps. Back at the guesthouse we were treated to a performance by some local musicians after dinner.

Day 10

Monday 26th May

En route to Bucharest; inbound to London

Weather: dry bright and hot

After breakfast we boarded the bus at 8.30am and began the journey back to Bucharest for our flight home. All went smoothly and our driver managed to find a route that avoided the worst of the Bucharest traffic, meaning we arrived at the airport shortly before the check-in opened at 1.30pm. Bad weather in London led to a delay to our flight, but we eventually arrived there at 7.15pm, an hour and a half late.

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Species Lists

Birds

Taxonomy, nomenclature and species order generally follows the widely used Collin's Bird Guide except when changes have been announced by major taxonomic bodies.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Large numbers were seen throughout the Danube Delta, especially at larger lakes where gatherings of up to 1,000 birds (presumably immatures) formed an impressive sight.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser rubirostris*

Up to 10 per day were noted in the Danube Delta, mostly in flight.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

A pair on a roadside lake near the Danube crossing were the only ones seen.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

A couple of small flocks over the Danube Delta were followed by about 30 on the lagoons at Vadu.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*

Small numbers were regularly seen in the Danube Delta with a few others at various wetlands in Dobrogea.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Up to 20 per day were recorded on the Danube Delta.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

About 15 were recorded in the Danube Delta; one flew over at Somova and eight were at Istria.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Two were seen briefly at Lake Furtana in the Danube Delta.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Singles were seen in flight on two occasions in the Danube Delta.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

About 60 were recorded in the Danube Delta and another 20 were at Vadu.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

About 130 were recorded in the Danube Delta with a handful more at Vadu and on the lake near the Danube crossing.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

A couple were seen from the moving bus on a roadside lake near Urzigeni and a pair was seen in the Danube Delta.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Two singles were seen in flight on our first morning in the Danube Delta, this species has begun breeding in the area in very small numbers in recent years.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus ssp.*

A handful were seen and heard in the Danube Delta.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis ruficollis*

Two were noted in the Danube Delta.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus cristatus*

Fairly common in the Danube Delta where up to 30 per day were noted; a few more were on the roadside lake near the Danube crossing.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena grisegena*

A total of 35 were recorded in the Danube Delta where a couple of pairs were seen with young.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis nigricollis*

After spotting a couple of birds in the Danube Delta earlier on, up to 40 were recorded during our final day there, mostly in the vicinity of gull and tern colonies, the grebes using these larger species as bodyguards.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*

Common in and around the Danube Delta with others at the Black Sea coast.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

Abundant in the Danube Delta where many hundreds were seen each day.

Eurasian White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

Up to 500 per day were recorded in the Danube Delta, mostly in flight, with similar numbers near Istria and others over Tulcea.

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*

About 25 were recorded in the Danube Delta.

(Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris stellaris*)

Heard but not seen on several occasions in the Danube Delta.)

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus minutus*

After three earlier single birds at least eight were seen on our final day in the Danube Delta, mostly from the floating hotel before breakfast.

Black-crowned – Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax*

Very common in the Danube Delta where up to 150 per day were noted; a couple more were seen elsewhere.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Up to 50 per day were seen in the Danube Delta.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta garzetta*

Fairly common in the Danube Delta and other wetlands in Dobrogea.

Great Egret *Ardea alba alba*

Fairly common in the Danube Delta and other wetlands in Dobrogea.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea cinerea*

Up to 20 per day were seen in the Danube Delta with a few others elsewhere.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea purpurea*

After the first two at a roadside lake near the Danube crossing this species was seen daily in the Danube Delta with a total of about 70 recorded; a few more were at Istria and Vadu.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Singles were seen in flight on three occasions in the Danube Delta.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia ciconia*

Several were seen from the moving bus as we travelled about, including several attending nests in villages. Up to 30 per day were recorded in the Danube Delta and about 100 moved north at the Macin Mountains.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus falcinellus*

Fairly common in the Danube Delta where about 300 were recorded.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia leucorodia*

A total of 25 in the Danube Delta, followed by half a dozen at Istria and Vadu.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

About 10 at Strimba Valley, one at Zarnesti Gorge, 15 moved north at Somova Forest and a final bird was seen at Babadag.

Black Kite *Mihus migrans migrans*

One was seen from the moving bus just before we crossed the Danube while en route to Tulcea from the mountains.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Apart from one in flight at Somova Forest the remaining 12 recorded were all in the Danube Delta. An active nest there contained three well grown young.

Short-toed Snake-eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

Three adults showed well at Strimba Valley, one was at Somova and another at the Macin Mountains.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

An average of 15 per day were recorded in the Danube Delta with a handful more at Istria and Vadu and an apparent migrant north at Babadag.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

An immature showed briefly on two occasions at Zarnesti Gorge.

Northern Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus nisus*

One was recorded at the Danube Delta.

Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*

An accipiter seen high over the Danube Delta was probably this species but three, (one male) over Somova Forest and another male at Macin Mountains, definitely were.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo buteo* and *vulpinus*

Fairly common in the Carpathians where about 25 were recorded and a handful more were seen in Dobrogea.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus rufinus*

About eight were seen in steppe contexts west of Tulcea.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*

Between six and eight were at Strimba Valley where they showed very well; two more distant birds were at Somova and Babadag.

Booted Eagle *Aquila* (formerly *Hieraaetus*) *pennatus*

Two were seen distantly over the Macin Mountains near Greci.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus*

One or two were seen most days with twice that number in the Danube Delta.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco verspertinus*

Half a dozen were at our lunch stop en route to Tulcea and about eight per day were recorded in the Danube Delta and elsewhere in Dobrogea.

European Hobby *Falco subbuteo subbuteo*

About 20 were recorded in the Danube Delta and elsewhere in Dobrogea.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Two flew over at Zarnesti Gorge.

(Corncrake *Crex crex*)

One was heard at Strimba Valley.)

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus chloropus*

One or two were seen or heard each day in the Danube Delta.

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Up to 100 per day were recorded in the Danube Delta with others at a few wetlands in Dobrogea.

Eurasian Stone Curlew *Burbinus oedicnemus*

Four were seen in steppe below the Macin Mountains.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus himantopus*

Most of the 60 or so recorded were at Istria and Vadu with a couple more in the Danube Delta.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

About 30 were seen at Istria and Vadu.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola pratincola*

Half a dozen at Istria were followed soon after by about 20 at Vadu.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius curonicus*

Two were on one of the lagoons at Vadu.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

All of the 30 seen were at Istria and Vadu.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

A couple were seen from the moving bus and half a dozen per day were recorded in the Danube Delta.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Four were at Istria and another four at Vadu.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

All of the 15 seen were at Vadu.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

One was at Vadu.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa*

One was at Vadu.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Three were at Vadu.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

One was seen along the Sulina Chanel in the Danube Delta.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

Two adults flew over the floating hotel during our first evening at Tulcea and three immatures were on the lagoons at Vadu.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

Four were recorded at and around Vadu.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus ridibundus*

Fairly common in the Danube Delta with a few more at scattered sites in Dobrogea.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

A couple were over a river near Sinaia; common in the Danube Delta and on the Black Sea coast. Formerly regarded as a subspecies of Herring Gull and then Yellow-legged Gull but now accepted as a species in its own right, indeed thought to be the ancestral large white-headed gull species based on molecular evidence.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus fuscus*

An adult flew past in the Danube Delta.

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus Ichthyaetus* (Pallas's Gull)

And adult flew past the floating hotel as we were being towed along the Sulina Channel during our first evening in the Danube Delta.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

One flew past at the Black Sea coast near Vadu.

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*

One was seen in the Danube Delta.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus hybridus*

Many hundreds were seen each day in the Danube Delta with others over various wetlands in Dobrogea.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger niger*

Most of the 200 or so recorded in the Danube Delta were part of one large breeding colony seen on our final morning there; another was at Vadu.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus* (formerly *Sterna*) *sandvicensis sandvicensis*

One was over the Black Sea near Vadu.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Common in the Danube Delta where about 300 per day were seen, Vadu held a roosting flock of several hundred birds and a few others were seen elsewhere in Dobrogea.

(Feral Rock Pigeon/Dove *Columba livia 'domestica'*)

Present in urban contexts.)

Stock Pigeon/Dove *Columba oenas oenas*

Occasionally seen in the Danube Delta where about 20 were recorded; a couple of birds were seen earlier in the Carpathians.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Regularly seen in small numbers in the Danube Delta, mostly in flight.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto decaocto*

Common in urban contexts.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur turtur*

Heard but not seen at Strimba Valley before a handful were seen briefly at Babadag.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus canorus*

Half a dozen at Strimba Valley were followed by up to 20 per day in the Danube Delta and elsewhere in Dobrogea; a few hepatic phase birds were noted.

Little Owl *Athene noctua indigena*

One was seen in the Danube Delta, another at Somova and a third at a roadside quarry near the Macin Mountains.

(Long-eared Owl *Asio otus otus*)

A medium-sized owl seen in flight as we returned to Tulcea in the floating hotel was most likely this species.)

Common Swift *Apus apus apus*

Fairly common at Zarnesti Village with a few more in Dobrogea.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba melba*

About 20 were seen at Zarnesti Gorge.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Locally common in the Danube Delta where up to 15 per day were noted.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster apiaster*

A handful were at Strimba Valley and at our lunch stop en route to Tulcea, thereafter good numbers were found in the Danube Delta and a large breeding colony was found along the road to the Macin Mountains, with many others elsewhere in Dobrogea.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus garrulus*

A few were seen from the bus as we travelled to Tulcea but up to 10 per day were found in the Danube Delta with several others elsewhere in Dobrogea.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops epops*

Up to five per day were seen in the Danube Delta and Dobrogea.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

One was seen and a couple more heard at Strimba Valley.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

A couple were seen briefly at Strimba Valley and a total of 10 were recorded in the Danube Delta.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

One was seen at Strimba Valley.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*

A male gave some excellent views at Strimba Valley where one or two more were glimpsed.

Great-spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major pinetorum* and *candidus*

Five were recorded in the Danube Delta after an earlier bird at Strimba Valley.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

Six in the Danube Delta followed a probable sighting at Zarnesti.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

Two were seen at Strimba Valley.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*

One showed briefly at Strimba Valley; a couple more were seen in flight at Somova Forest and finally one posed well in a bare treetop near Greci.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius martius*

Most of the 15 recorded in the Danube Delta were seen in flight only, but a couple gave great views perched out in the open.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra calandra*

One or two were seen in flight from the moving bus as we travelled through Dobrogea.

(Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla brachydactyla*

Heard but not seen at the Macin Mountains as we looked for Stone Curlews.)

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

About six were recorded in Dobrogea.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea pallida*

About 15 at Strimba Valley were followed by a couple more at Somova Forest and near Greci.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Birds were occasionally heard singing at various grassland sites with a handful seen in Dobrogea.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia riparia*

A large colony was seen as we had a leg stretch west of the Danube crossing; several thousand fed at Istria.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

About eight were noted over Zarnesti Gorge.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica rustica*

Small numbers were seen daily.

House Martin *Delichon urbica urbica*

Several pairs bred in Zarnesti Village with several others seen in mainly urban contexts.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica daurica*

Two at Somova Forest appeared to be prospecting a nest site under a road bridge. Rather a rare bird in Romania, especially so far north.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris campestris*

Two singles were seen near the Black Sea coast at Vadu.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava feldegg & flava*, plus intergrades

Birds of the Black-headed race 'feldegg' were seen between Bucharest and the mountains and at Istria where several were singing; a few showed hints of intergradation with blue-headed flava but no obvious individuals of the latter race were seen.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea cinerea*

A handful was seen in the mountains and one at the Danube Delta.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

Up to 10 per day were seen throughout.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

One or two were glimpsed at Zarnesti Gorge where others were heard.

White-bellied Dipper *Cinclus cinclus aquaticus*

Half a dozen were in the Carpathians, mainly at Zarnesti Gorge.

(Dunnock *Prunella modularis*)

Heard but not seen in the mountains.)

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula rubecula*

A couple were seen at Zarnesti Gorge where others were heard.

(Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*)

Several were heard but not seen in the Danube Delta.)

(Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos megarhynchos*)

Heard but not seen at the Macin Mountains.)

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Singing birds were in Zarnesti Village with several more in the Danube Delta.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochrurus gibraltariensis*

Half a dozen were seen by early risers at Zarnesti Village; another was seen briefly at Zarnesti Gorge, also heard in Tulcea.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica*

About 10 were noted in the Macin Mountains.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

Open steppe country at the base of the Macin Mountains held at least 25 birds. This species was only recently discovered in Romania and is restricted to this remnant steppe habitat.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

A male was seen distantly a couple of times at the Macin Mountains.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

One was seen at Strimba Valley.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*

One or two males gave reasonable scope views at the Macin Mountains.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Small numbers were seen throughout, though mostly in the mountains.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

A handful seen in the mountains.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

A couple were seen in the mountains with another at Babadag.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

A couple were seen in the mountains with another at Babadag.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria nisoria*

Two gave several brief views near Somova.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Regularly heard throughout with a handful of migrants seen at Vadu on the Black Sea coast.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

A couple were seen and heard in the Danube Delta after an earlier bird was heard at Zarnesti.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis volgensis/boyeri*

A couple were at Strimba Valley with others, at our lunch stop en route to Tulcea and at Vadu.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin borin/woodwardi*

Quite regularly heard throughout but the only ones seen were at Strimba Valley.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

One was seen and a couple more heard in the Danube Delta.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides luscinioides*

One showed quite well in the scope opposite our second overnight location in the Danube Delta; about four more were heard elsewhere in the delta.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus scirpaceus*

Small numbers were heard and a couple briefly seen in the Danube Delta plus a couple more were at Istria and Vadu.

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*

One was photographed near Istria but rather breezy conditions hampered our attempts to find others there.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus arundinaceus* (or monotypic)

Common in the Danube Delta, though more often heard than seen, with others at Istria and Vadu.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

A few were heard in the Danube Delta and one was seen briefly at Somova.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

A singing bird gave a couple of brief views at Zarnesti Gorge.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus trochilus / acredula*

A couple were heard in the Danube Delta and two late migrants were at Vadu.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita collybita*

Very small numbers were heard in the Carpathians and Danube Delta.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus regulus*

Two were seen at Zarnesti Gorge with a couple more heard in the Carpathians.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus ignicapillus*

Heard but not seen at Zarnesti and in the Macin Mountains.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata striata*

A handful in the Carpathians and the Danube Delta were followed by a few migrants at Vadu.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

A singing male gave some excellent views at Zarnesti Gorge.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Small numbers were seen throughout.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes* (formerly *Parus*) *caeruleus caeruleus*

Small numbers were found in the Danube Delta.

Coal Tit *Pariparus* (formerly *Parus*) *ater ater*

Two or three were at Zarnesti Gorge.

Marsh Tit *Poecile* (formerly *Parus*) *palustris stagnatilis*

Two showed briefly at Strimba Valley.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus caudatus* and probably *caudatus* × *europaeus* intergrades

Half a dozen at Strimba Valley were followed by a couple of flocks of heard-only birds at the Danube Delta.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus ruscicus*

About a dozen were seen fleetingly in the Danube Delta but four showed well at Istria and Vadu.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus pendulinus*

Regularly heard in the Danube Delta but the only one seen well was a male building a nest near Letea Village.

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria muraria*

Two males were watched foraging on a high cliff at Zarnesti Gorge, although rather distant views were not too bad in the scope.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea europaea* or *europaea* × *caesia*

A family group were seen at Strimba Valley.

Common Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris familiaris*

One was seen in the Danube Delta.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio collurio*

After the first half a dozen at Strimba Valley this attractive species proved pleasantly common throughout with over 100 noted in total.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Three were seen at Strimba Valley.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

After the first at Strimba Valley this species became reasonably common in the lowlands where about a dozen were seen each day.

Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica pica* & *pica x bactriana*

Common and widespread, seen daily.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius glandarius*

A couple were seen briefly at Strimba Valley and Zarnesti Gorge.

Eurasian Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

One flew over at Zarnesti Gorge.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus frugilegus*

Common in open country in the lowlands with large rookeries noted at a couple of places.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix sharpii*

Common and widespread.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula monedula* & *soemerringii* (and intergrades)

Fairly common and very widespread.

Common Raven *Corvus corax corax*

Three or four were seen at Strimba Valley and Zarnesti Gorge.

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris* & *vulgaris x tauricus* ('*balkanicus*')

Small numbers were seen throughout.

Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*

Up to 300 per day were seen in flight at the Danube Delta before we eventually came across a couple of large flocks of feeding birds that gave good views; another 25 were seen in flight at Vadu.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus oriolus*

After three at Strimba Valley this species was seen daily in the lowlands where up to 10 per day were noted.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

A male showed well near the Danube crossing and a few more were heard there; another male was near Greci.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus domesticus* & *balearoibericus*

Fairly common in urban contexts; seen daily.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus montanus*

Small numbers were seen most days in the Danube Delta.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs coelebs*

Small numbers were heard or seen most days.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Four or five were seen in the mountains.

European Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

One was noted at Sinaia.

European Linnet *Acanthis cannabina cannabina*

A couple at Strimba Valley were followed by a handful in Dobrogea.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

A couple at Strimba Valley were the only ones recorded.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis carduelis*

A small handful were recorded most days.

European Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula pyrrhula*

One was seen at Strimba Valley.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Two were seen briefly at Strimba Valley.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

A handful were seen and others heard in the Carpathians.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

Three or four were near Somova with a couple more at Babadag.

European Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus tchusii*

Small numbers were regularly seen in the Danube Delta with a couple more at Istria and Vadu.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra calandra*

After the first near the Danube Crossing, a further three or four were found in Dobrogea.

Mammals

(European) Brown Bear *Ursus arctos arctos*

A male visited the baited viewing area during the second of two evening visits there .

European Squirrel *Spermophilus citellus* (aka European Ground Squirrel)

Several were seen in steppe contexts in Dobrogea.

Muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus*

A couple were seen in the Danube Delta.

Northern Chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra carpatica*

One posed for the scope at Zarnesti Gorge.

Common Otter *Lutra lutra*

One was seen briefly in the Danube Delta.

SELECTED OTHER FAUNA

Reptiles

European Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* (aka Water Snake and Ringed Snake)

One at Strimba Valley was followed by four more in the Danube Delta.

Dice Snake *Natrix tessellata*

Three were recorded in the Danube Delta.

European Pond Terrapin *Emys orbicularis*

About 10 were seen during our final day in the Danube Delta.

Amphibians

Small pools and streams at Strimba Valley held Alpine Newts *Triturus alpestris* and Yellow-bellied Toads *Bombina variegata*. A Fire Salamander *Salamandra salamandra* was noted near the bear hide. In the Danube Delta frogs were abundant, the dominant species being Marsh Frog *Rana ridibunda* and Edible Frog *Rana kl. Esculenta*.

Selected flora

The following lists were provided by Mihai who noted the most interesting or characteristic species at more botanically rich areas visited during the final two days

Somova Forest

Quercus pubescens
Quercus pedunculiflora
Carpinus orientalis
Loranthus europaeus
Pyrus pyraster
Pyrus elengrifolia
Veronica austriaca

Macin mountains

Salvia nemorosa
Dianthus nardiformis
Campanula romanica
Potentilla argentea
Achillea leptophylla
Tilia tometosa
Fraxinus ornus
Carpinus orientalis
Artemesia australiala

Babadag Forest

Limodorum abortivum
Orchis purpurea
Orchis militaria
Orchis simia
Iris suaveolens
Iris variegata
Iris sintenisii
Adonis vernalis
Scutellaria orientalis
Cephalanthera damasonium
Stipa pulcherrima
Stipa lessingiana

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