Romania's Danube Delta & Carpathian Mountains

Naturetrek Tour Report

1 - 10 August 2009



Raccoon Dog

Report compiled by John Carruthers

Image courtesy of Rosemary Egan



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Day 1

Saturday 1st August

Weather - hot & sunny with thunderstorm

We were met at Otopeni Airport, Bucharest, by Florin and got away by 5.30pm. We had a cafe stop in a thunderstorm on the way to Zarnesti, arriving at our guesthouse in the dry for a late meal.

Day 2

Sunday 2nd August

Weather - hot & sunny, 29C

We spent the day exploring the higher slopes of the Strimba Valley which was only a few minutes drive from the guesthouse. Families of Red-backed Shrikes were everywhere as we took a walk through hillside meadows with fine Alpine views, many flowers and butterflies including Swallowtail, Hungarian Glider, Small Pearl-bordered, Queen of Spain, Niobe and Silver-washed Fritillaries. During our picnic lunch break a Black Stork flew over and later on 3 Honey Buzzard, 3 Ravens and glimpses of 3 Nutcrackers were enjoyed by most of the group. After an early dinner, half the group went to a bear hide deep in the forest and returned after dark having had good views of 7 European Brown Bears.

Day 3

Monday 3rd August

Weather - hot & sunny all day

The group left quite early to visit the beautiful Zarnesti Gorge which had many flowers, butterflies and birds, notably, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Goshawk, Crag Martin and a great many Alpine Swifts zooming about overhead with their distinctive calls.

Interestingly, high up on the slopes above the gorge walls, we spotted several Chamois running across the grassy patches and rocky areas. After lunch we visited the Dambovicira Gorge where a pair of Wallcreepers had bred this year, but unfortunately we didn't see any.

In the late afternoon the remainder of the group were taken to the bear hide and saw possibly the same seven Bears feeding on titbits put out for them in a forest clearing. These included a mother and 3 cubs, one of whom tried to climb the steps to the back of the hide, but was deterred as the hide was full!

Day 4

Tuesday 4th August

Weather - hot & sunny all day

After breakfast we left Zanesti and, joining the Prahova River Valley, we headed south and then forked left to travel eastwards. We had an early picnic stop in the shade of some poplar trees near a small river in the company of Bee-eaters, a young Cuckoo, a Golden Oriole, 2 Red-footed Falcons and a Hobby. As we watched Kestrels in old rooks' nests across the river, two groups of White Pelicans flew low overhead, about 150 in total. At a nearby lakeside we watched several waders, including Ruff, Wood and Green Sandpipers and Black-winged Stilts together with Common and Whiskered Terns and a Great Reed Warbler in the reeds. From here we moved onto the plains and started to see our first Rollers on the roadside wires (about 15 altogether).

We then crossed the River Danube in the late afternoon and before arriving in Tulcea we had time for one last lakeside stop where the highlight was seeing a pair of White-tailed Eagles and a Dalmatian Pelican. As we arrived at our boat moored in Tulcea, a Hobby dashed past chasing some Sparrows and then a Syrian Woodpecker was spotted perched in a large dead tree. It was then time for a pre-dinner drink.

Day 5

Wednesday 5th August

Weather - sunny and warm all day

After an early breakfast we left our floating hotel and set off downstream in the launch. Half an hour later we turned off the main channel and made our way along a much narrower arm of the old Danube, and were soon seeing our first Delta birds...there were plenty of Little Egrets on the shore with Squacco and Night Herons, Glossy Ibis and Green Sandpipers. In the waterside willows 2 Grey-headed Woodpeckers were spotted, and several Kingfishers were perched on overhanging twigs (36 Kingfishers were counted that morning). As we drifted along with the engine off, Pygmy Cormorants, Purple Herons and 2 Hobbys were seen flying low overhead, and a Black Woodpecker was sitting in a dead tree.

We travelled past the entrances to several lakes and on Lake Furtuna we watched Black and White-winged Terns hawking for insects with many Whiskered Terns sitting on the floating leaves of Yellow Waterlily. Here also there were many wildfowl, mainly Gadwall and Garganey, and waders, mainly Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Wood Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwits and Black-winged Stilts. White-tailed Eagles soared above us and Marsh Harriers quartered the reed bed as a Grass Snake swam across in front of us.

In the afternoon, back on the floating hotel (pontoon) we were towed along by our own tugboat in the company of Rollers, Bee-eaters and Terns.

We then enjoyed another trip in the launch exploring some very quiet beautiful backwaters watching Hobbys, White Pelicans, Rollers and Penduline Tits. On the bank, in a gap between the reeds, we spotted a resting Racoon Dog which was slow to move off and allowed plenty of time for photographs; most of us had a good view of this rarely seen animal. We now rejoined the pontoon which had tied up to a large willow in a peaceful spot for the night.

Day 6

Thursday 6th August

Weather - hot & sunny

We awoke to a lovely sunny morning at our beautiful quiet mooring with Hobby, Grey-headed Woodpecker and Reed Warbler for company. After breakfast we left in the launch down a small channel to visit the village of Letea. This waterway was very quiet and undisturbed with many birds to see including Kingfishers, Ferruginous Ducks, Night Herons, Hobbys, Garganey, Golden Oriole, Bearded and Penduline Tits, the latter with a nest. We took a walk around the village, one of the most remote in the Delta and only accessible by boat. It is most attractive, with sandy streets, single storey wooden houses and a peaceful, almost medieval atmosphere. During our walk we found Spotted Flycatchers, a Lesser Whitethroat, Redstart, Northern Wheatear, Hobby and some Bee-eaters in the fields and gardens. There was also a pond where some Wood Sandpipers and Green Sandpipers were feeding.

After lunch we were back on the launch off to a new area of channels and lakes where the bird highlights were several Dalmatian Pelicans and a White-tailed Eagle being mobbed by a Hobby. The mammal highlights were spotting a Musk Rat swimming and 4 Wild Boar amongst the trees on the bank. We had tied up for the night in another picturesque spot where five of us had a quick swim in the clean waters of the Danube and then ate dinner as the sun went down.

Day 7

Friday 7th August

Weather - hot & sunny with a breeze

This morning a Paddyfield Warbler was seen in the reeds before breakfast. We then headed north to explore the Lake Babina area where the outstanding birds were 2 young Red-necked Grebes, 2 White-tailed Eagles, 8 Dalmatian Pelicans, 2 Bearded Tits, 2 Penduline Tits and dozens of Whiskered Terns hawking for insects.

In the afternoon we spent some time on the vast Lake Furtuna where water levels were dropping and on the exposed sandbars there were many birds, notably Spotted Redshank, dozens of egrets and Whiskered Terns plus 6 Black Terns and 8 White-winged Terns. An adult Red-necked Grebe with 4 young and a family of Black-necked Grebes were all busy diving for tiny fish. There was an exciting moment when a Hobby was seen persistently chasing, but not quite catching a Wood Sandpiper.

We could see masses of ducks near the reeds away to our right, but it was only when 2 White-tailed Eagles flew along low over the reeds that we saw over 1,000 Ferruginous Ducks take to the air. As we sailed along back on the pontoon, 2 White-tailed Eagles were seen in a dead tree with a Black Woodpecker on a lower branch.

We had our last short trip in the launch to nearby Lake Purcela which was full of lily pads and on these were several hundred Squacco Herons looking for frogs. This species had been counted during the day and we reached the impressive total of 528. A swimming Musk Rat was the last recorded mammal for the day. Amazingly, we had seen 8 White-tailed Eagles during the day and the trip total was 18; it is thought that there are 12 breeding pairs plus non-breeders in the Delta. We spent our last night tied up to a large willow tree.

Day 8

Saturday 8th August

Weather - hot & sunny

We arrived in Tulcea at breakfast time, left our comfortable floating hotel at 8.30am and headed west in the minibus. Our first stop was at Somovar overlooking the Danube flood plain where we found some amusing little Susliks (a type of ground squirrel), plus lots of Bee-eaters and Rollers and a pair of Long-legged Buzzards overhead. We then took a walk on an open hillside in a forest of oak, maple and native pear, searching for the special birds of the area, and we were lucky to find Levant Sparrowhawks, Long-legged Buzzard, Honey Buzzard, Steppe Buzzard and Short-toed Eagle. Also in the forest we found 2 Greco Tortoises and a White-tailed Eagle being mobbed by a Kestrel.

Next we travelled on to the Macin Mountains, a line of low, rocky hills which had recently become a National Park. Here we had good views of several Isabelline Wheatears, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Stone Curlew, Sombre Tit and a Lesser-spotted Eagle. Also glimpsed were Pied Wheatear, Woodchat Shrike and Turtle Dove. Two important flowers of the area were found, namely Dianthus nardiformis and Campanula romanica. It was then time to head back to Tulcea and check into the new Ibis Tours Hotel for our last two nights.

Day 9

Sunday 9th August

Weather - hot & sunny

First we went south to a local Steppe area where we found Crested Larks, Hoopoes, Lesser Grey Shrikes, a Stone Curlew, Isabelline Wheatears, a Lesser-spotted Eagle and had a glimpse of Short-toed Larks. Our next stop was Lake Sinoie where we watched Collared Pratincoles feeding, one catching a Grasshopper, together with many Gull-billed Terns, a Dalmatian Pelican, 5 Spoonbills and a soaring White-tailed Eagle being chased by a Marsh Harrier.

We then moved on to Vadu in the south of the Danube Delta Reserve for our picnic overlooking pools and lagoons where we hoped to find some waders. On one pool there were many different species, the highlights being Marsh Sandpiper, Kentish Plover, Red-necked Phalarope, Avocet and Little Stint. We did in fact see 22 different waders in this area. Also here were Spoonbills, Ruddy Shelducks, many Little Gulls, 2 Caspian Terns and 6 more Dalmatian Pelicans. While looking across one lagoon, a Golden Jackal was spotted walking around the base of the reeds.

After travelling through the dunes to the nearby Black Sea coast, some of the group had a swim, while others watched the Sandwich Terns fishing. With a thunderstorm threatening it was time to head back and we arrived at the hotel at 7 o'clock, and after dinner we were entertained by two local musicians.

Day 10

Monday 10th August

Weather - hot & sunny

We left Tulcea at 9.30am for the long drive to Bucharest and our flight back to London. All went well and we landed just a few minutes late.

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Species Lists

Birds (H = heard only)

			August									
	Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Black-necked Grebe	Podiceps nigricollis							8			
2	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis					4	4	2			
3	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus				✓	✓	✓	✓			
4	Red-necked Grebe	Podiceps grisegena							7			
5	White Pelican	Pelecanus onocrotalus				150	17	150	100	34	50	
6	Dalmatian Pelican	Pelecanus philippensis				1	1	12	8		6	
7	Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo				R	R	R	R	R	R	
8	Pygmy Cormorant	Phalacrocorax pygmeus					100	50	50	10	30	
9	Little Bittern	Ixobrychus minutus					2	2	2			
10	Squacco Heron	Ardeola ralloides					100	36	528	1		
11	Night Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax					100	18	40	65	1	
12	Great White Egret	Egretta alba				10	20	13	17	1	1	
13	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea			✓	√	√	✓	√	✓	✓	
15	Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea					20	40	20	1	2	
16	White Stork	Ciconia ciconia		50	100	40	12	1	2	2	8	
17	Black Stork	Ciconia nigra		1		4	1					
18	Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus				50	54	10	81	6		
19	Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia									36	
20	Mute Swan	Cygnus olor				2	✓	√	370	✓	500	
21	Greylag Goose	Anser anser					10	60	130	✓	0	
22	Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna									10	
23	Ruddy Shelduck	Tadorna ferruginea									57	
24	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
25	Gadwall	Anas strepera					2	1				
26	Shoveler	Anas clypeata									3	
27	Teal	Anas crecca							3		3	
28	Garganey	Anas querquedula						3	12		2	
29	Pochard	Aythya ferina					1		2			
30	Ferruginous Duck	Aythya nyroca					6	30	990			
31	White-tailed Eagle	Haliaeetus albicilla				2	1	2	8	2	3	
32	Lesser Spotted Eagle	Aquila pomarina			1	1				2	1	
33	Short-toed Eagle	Circaetus gallicus								1		
34	Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus					3	8	4	1	6	
35	Long-legged Buzzard	Buteo rufinus								3	1	
36	Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo		3	1	2						
37	Steppe Buzzard	Buteo buteo vulpinus								3	1	
38	Honey Buzzard	Pernis apivorus		3	2					4		
39	Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus		1	1							
40	Levant Sparrowhawk	Accipiter brevipes								10		
41	Goshawk	Accipiter gentillis			1							
42	Hobby	Falco subbuteo				2	4	10	10	1	1	
43	Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus		4	6	12			1	2	2	
44	Red-footed Falcon	Falco verspertinus				2	1				2	
45	Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus					2		1			
46	Water Rail	Rallus aquaticus						Н	Н			
47	Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus					✓	✓	✓			

			August									
	Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
48	Coot	Fulica atra				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
49	Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus				2	4		1		2	
50	Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus				2	10	6	3	✓	✓	
51	Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta									50	
52	Stone Curlew	Burhinus oedicnemus								2	1	
53	Collared Pratincole	Glareola pratincola									20	
54	Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula									2	
55	Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius									1	
56	Kentish Plover	Charadrius alexandrinus									3	
57	Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus				4	7	3	5		20	
58	Dunlin	Calidris alpina									6	
59	Little Stint	Calidris minuta									4	
60	Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola				2	2	13	4		6	
61	Green Sandpiper	Tringa ochropus				2	16	7	4	1	2	
62	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos					8	2	5			
63	Redshank	Tringa totanus				1					Н	
64	Spotted Redshank	Tringa erythropus					1		10		4	
65	Greenshank	Tringa nebularia				1	15	1	1		2	
66	Marsh Sandpiper	Tringa stagnatilis				1	1	-			12	
67	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa				2	12	6	10		1	
68	Curlew	Numenius arquata				 -	·-				1	
69	Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago					2				5	
70	Ruff	Philomachus pugnax				4	2				4	
71	Red-necked Phalarope	Phalaropus lobatus				T					6	
72	Black-headed Gull	Larus ridibundus					✓	✓	✓	✓	√	
73	Common Gull	Larus canus				✓	✓	✓	✓	<u> </u>	√	
74	Caspian Gull	Larus cachinnans				/	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	Little Gull	Larus minutus								ļ ·	200	
76	Sandwich Tern	Thalasseus sandvicensis									4	
77	Gull-billed Tern	Gelochelidon nilotica									10	
78	Common Tern	Sterna hirundo				-	/	✓	✓	✓	√ -	
						'	1	· ·	· ·	<u> </u>	2	
79	Caspian Tern	Sterna caspia					1	4	_		2	
80	Black Tern	Chlidonias niger					5	2	6		2	
81	White-winged Black Tern	Chlidonias leucopterus					6		8	✓	3	
82	Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias hybridus				6	100	100	100	, ·	•	
83	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Columba livia					2	4	4			
84	Stock Dove	Columba oenas		✓	✓	✓	2	1	1	✓	✓	
85	Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus		∨	▼	▼	▼	▼	∀	V ✓	V ✓	
86	Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto		\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \	+	\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \	\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \	•	•		V	
87	Turtle Dove	Streptopelia turtur					_			1		
88	Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus				1	2	3	1	1	2	
89	Little Owl	Athene noctua		Н						2		
90	Alpine Swift	Apus melba			50	-						
91	Swift	Apus apus			20					2		
92	Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis		-		-	36	44	40	6	1	
93	Hoopoe	Upupa epops				5		1	1	4	6	
94	Bee-eater	Merops apiaster		2		2	1	4	Н	20	50	
95	Roller	Coracias garrulus				15	30	3	4	20	6	
96	Black Woodpecker	Dryocopus martius					1		2			
97	Grey-headed Woodpecker	Picus canus					4	2	2			
98	Green Woodpecker	Picus viridis		Н				1				

							Αι	ıgust				
	Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
99	Syrian Woodpecker	Dendrocopos syriacus				1				1		
100	Great-spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major		1	Н	1		1	Н	1	2	
101	Middle-spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos medius								2		
102	Lesser-spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos minor							1			
103	Skylark	Alauda arvensis									2	
104	Crested Lark	Galerida cristata				1				2	2	
105	Woodlark	Lullula arborea								1		
106	Short-toed Lark	Calandrella brachydactyla									2	
107	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia								✓	✓	
108	Crag Martin	Ptyonoprogne rupestris			2							
109	House Martin	Delichon urbica		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
110	Swallow	Hirundo rustica	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
111	Red-rumped Swallow	Hirundo daurica								1		
112	Tawny Pipit	Anthus campestris								1	1	
113	Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis		2								
114	White Wagtail	Motacilla alba		✓	✓		✓	√	✓	√		
115	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea		3	10		4					
116	Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava				6		2		4	50	
117	Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes			1			+		+ -	00	
118	Dipper	Cinclus cinclus		1	2							
119	Robin	Erithacus rubecula		1	1							
120	Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus		<u>'</u>	<u>'</u>			1				
121	Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros		3	1			·				+
122	Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe			<u>'</u>			1		2	5	_
123	Isabelline Wheatear	Oenanthe isabellina						+ '		5	7	_
124	Pied Wheatear	Oenanthe pleschanka								1	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	_
125	Blackbird	Turdus merula		2					1	1		+
126	Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris			1				<u> </u>	+ '		_
127	Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus			1							+
128	Fan-tailed Warbler	Cisticola juncidis			'	1						-
129	Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla		1		'						-
130	Lesser Whitethroat	Sylvia curruca		'		1		1				-
131	Sedge Warbler	Acrocephalus schoenobaenus				<u>'</u>		'		+	1	-
132	Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus					6	4	2	+	1	-
133	Paddyfield Warbler	Acrocephalus agricola					-	4	1			-
134	Great Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus arundinaceus				1	1	1	2	+	1	-
135	Olivaceous Warbler	Hippolais pallida				'	<u>'</u> Н	1			1	-
				2		1	_	1		10	1	-
136	Spotted Flycatcher Great Tit	Muscicapa striata		2		I ✓	4	1		10	1	-
137	Blue Tit	Parus major		· ✓		+	/	\ \ \ \	/	\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \		-
138		Cyanistes caeruleus			11		ļ ·	'	,	ļ ·		-
139	Coal Tit	Periparus ater			H							-
140	Marsh Tit	Poecile palustris			1							-
141	Willow Tit	Poecile montana			Н					1		-
142	Sombre Tit	Poecile lugubris					1		1	2		-
143	Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus			2		4		2			-
144	Bearded Tit	Panurus biarmicus					H	1	2		2	-
145	Penduline Tit	Remiz pendulinus					4	2	3	1	2	-
146	Nuthatch	Sitta europaea		H		<u> </u>			-	1	✓	-
147	Red-backed Shrike	Lanius collurio		15	8	4	4	1	2			-
148	Lesser Grey Shrike	Lanius minor				1				10	1	
149	Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator								2		

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				August									
	Common name	Scientific name	1 2 3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
150	Magpie	Pica pica		✓	√	✓	✓	√	✓	√	✓		
151	Jay	Garrulus glandarius			1								
152	Nutcracker	Nucifraga caryocatactes		3									
153	Rook	Corvus frugilegus		✓	√	✓							
154	Hooded Crow	Corvus corone cornix		✓	✓	√	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
155	Jackdaw	Corvus monedula	✓	✓	✓	√	✓		✓	✓			
156	Raven	Corvus corax		4	3					1			
157	Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	✓			√	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
158	Golden Oriole	Oriolus oriolus				4	3	7	2	1	1		
159	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	✓	✓	√	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
160	Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
161	Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs		✓	✓	√	✓	✓		✓			
162	Linnet	Acanthis cannabina			2	2							
163	Greenfinch	Carduelis chloris		2	✓			✓			✓		
164	Siskin	Carduelis spinus		1	1								
165	Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis		✓	✓	√		✓			✓		
166	Yellowhammer	Emberiza citrinella		Н		1							
167	Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus						1			1		

Butterflies

Butterflies	Swallowtail	Scarce Swallowtail	Small White
Eastern Bath White	Clouded Yellow	Brimstone	Wood White
Hungarian Glider	Red Admiral	Silver-washed Fritillary	High Brown Fritillary
Queen of Spain Fritillary	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Weavers Fritillary	Glanville Fritillary
Lesser Spotted Fritillary	Niobe Fritillary	Common Grayling	Painted Lady
Mountain Ringlet	Arran Brown	Ringlet	Meadow Brown
Brown Argus	Speckled Wood	Small Copper	Large Copper
Scarce Copper	Sooty Copper	Small Blue	Holly Blue
Common Blue	Dingy Skipper	Mallow Skipper	Small Skipper
Silver Spotted Skipper	Pale Clouded Yellow	Small Heath	

Mammals

Mammals	Hare	Roe Deer	Suslik
Musk Rat	Wild Boar	Golden Jackal	Racoon Dog
Brown Bear	Chamois	Polecat	