

# Romania's Danube Delta & Carpathian Mountains

Naturetrek Tour Report

7 - 16 September 2019



Great White Pelicans by Tony Daniels



Spotted Crake by John Young



Danube viewpoint by Jason Mitchell



Wild Cat by Dave Rogers

Tour report by Jason Mitchell  
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Tour participants: Jason Mitchell (Leader), Florin Palade (Local Guide) with 13 Naturetrek clients

## Summary

The main focus of the tour was birds and it didn't disappoint, with a final count of 155 species; one of many star birds – the Great White Pelican – was migrating in good numbers over the Danube and the rare Dalmatian Pelican was more numerous than usual with sightings well into double figures. White-tailed Eagles were seen daily during our three days on the mighty Danube and other exciting raptors included Red-footed Falcon, Booted and Lesser Spotted Eagles. Seven different woodpeckers went down well, with Black, Syrian and Grey-headed the pick of the bunch. However, this tour was more than just birds and proved, at times, to be something of a mammal fest; on the first day alone, seven different species were recorded including a stunning Wild Cat and an amazing 15 Brown Bears from a feeding station in the Carpathian Mountains. Later in the week we added Chamois, Raccoon Dog and the ever-popular European Sousek – an endearing member of the ground squirrels. Butterflies were another well-represented group (23 species recorded) and it was unsurprising that the Painted Lady was seen in numbers following a bumper year across Europe, but less familiar species like the large and impressive Cardinal Fritillary, showy European Swallowtail and Common Glider were all showstoppers. Not to be left out, amphibians and reptiles got in on the act too, with the Macin Hills providing a smart Common Tree Frog and a surprise Spur-thighed Tortoise which had its five minutes of fame before retreating back into its shell! And finally, a splash of culture added yet another dimension to a hugely successful tour with visits to the Neo-Renaissance Peleş Castle in Prahova and the home of Bram Stoker's Dracula – the famous Transylvanian castle of Bran.

Typical of September, the weather was settled and pleasantly warm, with temperatures around the mid to high 20's with an occasional chilly start in the morning. Like much of Europe, it was a long dry summer resulting in water levels being generally lower than normal but local knowledge ensured we still found the birds!

## Day 1

**Saturday 7th September**

Florin and I met the group at Bucharest Airport, whose flight from Heathrow had arrived a little late. With luggage safely stowed, we headed to a restaurant on the edge of Bucharest. After an excellent dinner, finished off with a delicious desert, we drove north across the plains to Ploiesti and then north-west into the mountains. When we arrived at our comfortable guest house in the small Transylvanian town of Vulcan, near Brasov, it was already late so we settled into our rooms for a much-needed sleep ahead of our first full day in the Carpathians.

## Day 2

**Sunday 8th September**

Following breakfast, we left for the Piatra Craiului National Park but just minutes after leaving Vulcan, we came to a sudden stop as our first Lesser Spotted Eagle soared into view and promptly perched on a telegraph pole for all to admire. In the same area Common Buzzard, Kestrel and a fine Hobby all put in appearances – what a start! Arriving at the national park, we parked in view of the towering limestone ridge known as the King's Stone Mountains and on leaving the minibus, immediately spotted a Black Redstart, quickly followed by a juvenile Red-backed Shrike perched on its bush-top lookout; it was the first of many. Overhead the frequent flight calls of Tree Pipits and Yellow Wagtails was proof that migration was in full swing. Moving on, we walked towards the forest and it was not long before we heard the metallic, Jay-like call of a Nutcracker and, moments later, one

flapped into view showing off its characteristic white-tipped tail and vent. The species spends much of its time within the conifer forest but in the autumn it's often tempted from cover by a good hazelnut crop. In the same area, the distant cry of a Black Woodpecker rang through the trees where several Chiffchaffs were busy feeding in the company of Coal Tits, here, the smart slate-backed continental race. Returning to the bus, we spotted a high-flying harrier which was probably a migrating Montagu's but due to the far distant view Pallid Harrier could not be ruled out – the one that got away!

Back at the guesthouse, we were treated to a delicious three-course lunch before heading out once more, this time to the Stramba Valley. Arriving at the base of the valley, we quickly parked the minibus as a Lesser Spotted Eagle flapped powerfully overhead – not one but three! As we looked on they displayed in a manner suggesting one or more were juvenile birds, with playful swoops and chases. In warm and sunny conditions, there were dozens of butterflies on the wing. A probable Berger's Clouded Yellow sped past, but a stunningly fresh Swallowtail was a real crowd-pleaser, settling on an *umbellifer* for a 'memory card-filling' five minutes! A little further on, a Middle Spotted Woodpecker flitted between bushes before finally settling on a dead tree affording excellent views of this smart bird.

Leaving the lower slopes, we headed further up the valley towards our evening destination: a hide where we hoped to observe wild Brown Bears. But there was more to come, first a Red Fox stealing across a field, then moments later we came to an abrupt halt as a stunning Wildcat was spotted on the other side of a hedge. We all looked on in awe, as it lazily got to its feet and walked away revealing its characteristic striped, bushy tail to the sound of gasps. Reaching the far side of the field it stopped to hunt, allowing time to scope it before finally slipping silently into the undergrowth – wow!

On meeting the warden, we spent 10 minutes stretching our legs and enjoyed a huge flock of House Martins wheeling high over his house while a surprise Common Glider butterfly was sunning itself closer to earth. Back on the minibus, it was not far to the parking area where we quietly made our way to the hide which overlooks a woodland clearing. Incredibly, there were already a number of bears there; a young female with her two small cubs were soon joined by other mums and their offspring – a second set of twins and a singleton, plus several other lone individuals. As we looked on in silence, they searched for food hidden in various logs and trunks and during the next hour and a half, we experienced privileged views of an amazing (almost record number) 15 individuals.

Leaving the hide, we returned back down the valley spying a Roe Deer at the edge of the forest, but the real excitement came when an animated voice alerted the driver to an owl perched on a pole alongside the road. It was quickly identified as the impressive and rarely seen Ural Owl and although the initial view was frustratingly brief, Florin walked quietly into the field where it had flown off and, to our amazement, the owl returned to a fence post close to the bus. Then followed 10 intense minutes of viewing – a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience – before it swooped silently back into the darkness. Leaving the valley, we headed home feeling most satisfied.

## Day 3

## Monday 9th September

A quick look around the guesthouse grounds at breakfast turned up a nice little flock of Tree Sparrows, Blackcap and a 'pied' woodpecker, probably a Great Spotted but equally the Syrian Woodpecker (known in Romania as the Orchard Woodpecker) is a frequent visitor to gardens!

The first session of the day was spent enjoying the splendour of the Zarnesti Gorge, a breath-taking location used in several Hollywood feature films including 'Cold Mountain'. Driving into the gorge, a small stream was graced by a Grey Wagtail but the local Dippers were playing hard-to-get. As we exited the bus, a confiding Song Thrush scoured the leaf-litter for morsels, while Coal and Marsh Tits called from deep within the emerald green, and the distinctive call of a White-backed Woodpecker rang through the woods. A target species here is the Willow Tit and it was not long before we heard its buzzing nasal call; then followed an exercise in separating this from the extremely similar Marsh Tit which is common here. Further on, a high-flying Common Buzzard had us peering to the sky, something we would repeat many times with dozens of birds catching our eye as they flew across the narrow gorge: Jay was common, along with the occasional albeit distant Nutcracker, a couple of Sparrowhawks and finally a Peregrine. However, it was not only birds which has us looking skywards, with a number of Chamois spotted grazing on the vertiginous gorge sides. As the morning progressed, sun eventually began to flood into the gorge bringing dozens of butterflies and dragonflies to life; firstly a Small White, which was soon followed by Wall, Comma, Red Admiral, several Scotch Argus, and for the second time, a late Common Glider graced the air space. Our picnic was enlivened by a fly-over Black Stork and a foraging Willow Tit allowed close views of this handsome, if tricky, species. The return to the bus was a speedier affair but for a stop to study a Lesser Stag Beetle, after which we were soon on our way towards Bran.

Initially passing through Bran, we drove to a local beauty spot with spectacular views of the surrounding Carpathian landscape but which also serves as a lookout for birds of prey. On this occasion the sky was empty of raptors but a Nutcracker made a brief fly-by and an impressive Wasp Spider put in an appearance. Florin also took time to share his knowledge of the fascinating geology all around, which was duly absorbed by an interested audience.

Our next destination was Castle Bran, the reputed former abode of Vlad the Impaler where some of the group spent an hour or so visiting the wonderful castle and its attractive grounds. Others explored a public garden from where we spotted some Hobbies hawking in woodland nestled on a crag high above the castle and a couple of Willow Warblers were seen gleaning insects. Following a spot of afternoon tea, and retail therapy for a few, we left Bran in search of more wildlife. Just outside the village of Zarnesti, we stopped at a haunt favoured by Great Grey Shrikes and true to form a lone bird was seen sat motionless on top of a bush while several Common Buzzards soared the skies. More than satisfied with the day's events, we returned to Vulcan for another fine dinner.

## Day 4

Tuesday 10th September

Bidding farewell to our hosts in the Carpathians, we left the mountains for the Danube Delta via Sinaia where we made a visit to one of Romania's most famous buildings – the fairy tale-like *Peleş* Castle. Built between 1873 and 1914 with visible elements of the German Renaissance style, [it](#) was used as the summer residence of King Carol. *Peleş* was constructed following plans of several celebrated architects of the time, including Karel Liman and Johannes Schultz. After a coffee and a delicious pastry, we returned to the bus spotting Wood Warbler, Common Treecreeper, Goldcrest and a Red Squirrel along the way.

Next our route took us across the open plains close to Bucharest then east towards Tulcea. Lunch was taken on the shore of a lake which was dotted with wildfowl; both Mallard and Shoveler were common along with Teal and our first Ferruginous Duck of the tour. The resident pair of Marsh Harriers quartered the reedbed and

several Black-necked Grebes bobbed amongst the ducks. Several butterflies were noted flying over the swathes of poisonous Thorn Apple and less showy Dodder and these were joined by reddish Southern Darter dragonflies.

Soon we crossed a bridge over the middle reaches of the Danube, after which we began to spot some quality birds resting on wires alongside the road; Roller, Red-footed Falcon and European Bee-eater were the pick of the bunch.

The last stop of the day was at an almost dried-up lake but this only served to concentrate the birds making for easy viewing. Ruff were joined by a number of Little Ringed Plover and singletons of Curlew and Wood Sandpiper were nice finds. However, it was a group of six Black Storks that grabbed our attention as they swooped in for a rest bite from their travels. Wildfowl were also noted, with several fine Ruddy Shelduck the most popular and these were joined by Shoveler and Teal. A noisy flock of 20 or so Yellow Wagtails set to roost in a small patch of reeds included some sulphur yellow adults but they soon fell silent on the arrival of a female Red-footed Falcon which briefly hawked for insects above our heads.

The final leg saw us arrive in Tulcea in time to enjoy an aperitif ahead of a sumptuous dinner aboard the floating hotel, which would be our home for the next few days.

## Day 5

## Wednesday 11th September

After breakfast we boarded a smaller boat which would allow us to explore some of the Delta's narrow waterways and as we left the 'floatel', we spied a juvenile Little Gull, probably the same bird seen in fading light the evening before. And not long after, three Honey Buzzards were a welcome sight as they glided over the main channel. Almost as soon as we turned off, a Kingfisher zig-zagged ahead of us, and we enjoyed close views of Little and Great Egrets and our first Squacco Heron of the trip: a popular species that featured daily during our time on the Delta. A late migrant White Stork was surprising to see as it sat on the riverbank, unfortunately probably a sick bird, maybe a victim of a gruelling migration. Raptors were in evidence too, with a female Marsh Harrier cruising 'Sparrowhawk-fashion' low over the water as if leading the boat deeper into the Delta and it was not long before we notched up our first White-tailed Eagle, a first-winter bird. The latter species was seen dozens of times during the morning and on two occasions, perched birds sat in channel-side trees completely unperturbed by our presence. A Wren-like ticking call alerted us to the presence of a Red-breasted Flycatcher and a brief search turned up a single bird feeding frantically amongst willows. Few of this species retain their red breast late in the season and typically this bird was rather plain but for its distinctive tail pattern which is an attractive feature.

Approaching the entrance to a protected lake, a smart Grey-headed Woodpecker posed in the top of a dead tree, but was swiftly out-ranked by a massive Black Woodpecker which made several passes over the boat; woodpeckers are something of an unexpected avian feature of the Delta and before the morning was over we added both Lesser and Middle Spotted to the list. At the mouth of the lake we scanned through the masses of waterbirds in search of scarcer species and were happy to find our first Greenshank and Black-tailed Godwit of the tour. After a welcome coffee, we continued on our way spotting a Muskrat just before a group of seven Great White Pelicans cruised into view, followed moments later by a much larger flock containing close to a hundred of these iconic Delta birds.

Arriving back at the floating hotel, we continued birdwatching whilst having lunch which was both novel and productive, spotting yet more White-tailed Eagles and several Hobbys. After lunch we headed back out on to the Crisan Channel in the smaller vessel, where a jaw-dropping number of 'marsh terns' swirled around us like a snow storm. Whiskered Terns made up the greater number and were joined by the odd moulted Black Tern but it was a handful of stunning White-winged Terns in full-summer dress that gained most attention. Back on a smaller channel, things quietened down except for some Spotted Flycatchers feeding in riverside willows. Later as the channel widened out and trees gave way to more open habitat, a gaudy Roller was spotted sitting upright on wires, and a Hoopoe flashed its crest as it fed discretely on a sandy stretch of riverbank. Arriving at Lake Jacob, our presence seemed to spook a huge flock of Greylag Geese which took to the air in a clatter of wings and honking, luckily a group of 30 Great White Pelicans sat tight. Half a dozen near-Herring-Gull-sized Caspian Terns cruised the lake dwarfing the smaller Common Terns. The reeds held a number of passerines, with a calling Penduline Tit breaking cover only briefly. As we prepared to leave the lake another generally hard-to-see and sought-after species, the Little Crake, was spotted as a juvenile fed in the open delaying our departure by a good 10 minutes.

Returning to base, several Night Herons flushed from thickets lining the channel and on the river banks both Green and Common Sandpipers probed the margins. A Purple Heron flew over followed by a few Black Storks and the bushes held several Red-backed Shrikes and a roosting flock of Yellow Wagtails. Back on the floatel we settled in for another excellent dinner.

## Day 6

## Thursday 12th September

After breakfast, we transferred to the smaller vessel. Moments after leaving the floating hotel, a Spotted Flycatcher lived up to its name, making a sortie in front of the boat to catch breakfast and a Purple Heron flew overhead. In the same area a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker gave its squeaky call but remained hidden. A party of calling Long-tailed Tits were typically active and eventually broke cover flying across the channel close to the boat; in the Delta they sport entirely white heads, making them even more attractive than usual. A lone male Red-footed Falcon drifted over the boat showing off its smart 'red trousers' and a distant Common Buzzard showed features alluding to the steppe race *vulpinus*. A little later at a point where the channel narrowed, movement on the bank attracted our gaze to where a Raccoon Dog was foraging for its lunch. We spent an exciting and privileged 10 minutes observing this rarely seen relative of the Fox, as it went about its business seemingly unperturbed by our presence.

Then on entering a large lake we shut-off the motor and in blissful silence watched as hundreds of Ferruginous Duck and even greater numbers of Greylag Geese scattered across the water's surface. In a small bay a young Marsh Harrier was spotted afloat on a mat of reeds and, as we slowly approached, it attempted to take off but was hindered by the Coot held firmly in its talons! With the boat in reverse, it tried twice more then abandoned its kill, hopefully returning to it later. As we continued across the lake, two distant 'white blobs' proved to be our first Dalmatian Pelicans and with stealth, we approached to within a few hundred metres of this massive species; a bird boasting a greater wingspan than any other in Europe, measuring up to nine feet! However, our attention was in time drawn to a Great Black-backed Gull that had excited Florin, our local guide, who quickly explained that this familiar UK species was in fact a great rarity on the Delta. In the same spot a brilliant-red Broad Scarlet dragonfly attracted some attention from the photographers. With rumbling tums, Danny engaged full speed and with the 'mother ship' almost in view, a diminutive juvenile Little Bittern stepped out of the reeds. Then

followed a masterclass in boat handling as our skipper approached to within metres of this diminutive heron, which stood firm, until hunger eventually drew us back to the floating hotel.

After lunch and a short siesta, we headed out once more, cruising the smaller waterways leading to Lake Matita. The first hour was a little quiet but in idyllic, calm and sunny conditions we relaxed after what had been an action-packed morning, until a fine Osprey soon broke our slumber as it zig-zagged up the channel in front of us. Reaching the lake, we were delighted to spend time observing the terns, with Caspian, Whiskered and Common all actively feeding youngsters, noting with some surprise the incongruous high-pitched, whining calls of the juvenile Caspian Tern. Turning back, the boat was briefly moored alongside a section of floating reedbed, where Florin eloquently explained the uniqueness of this rare habitat and its vital role in the ecology of the 10,000 Great White Pelicans that use it for nesting. Moving off again, we made gentle progress back towards base noting numerous Squacco Herons along our route and the frequent 'dreamy' calls of the Penduline Tit alerted us to birds feeding in the reeds. Further along, a White-tailed Eagle perched in a willow and two Dalmatian Pelicans inspected fishing nets in the hope of a free meal. As we returned to base, an Osprey, possibly the same bird as earlier, posed briefly in a dead tree close to where the floating hotel was moored for the night. Ahead of dinner, several of the group enjoyed the last hour of daylight relaxing with a drink on the top deck, bathed in the soft glow of a spectacular red sunset.

## Day 7

## Friday 13th September

Even before breakfast, an impromptu birding session provided an eclipse drake Garganey, good views of both Bearded and Penduline Tits and several fishing Caspian Terns. However, the talking point was a Little Bittern which had taken up residence on the bank just outside Laura and Tony's cabin window! Following breakfast, in what had now become a familiar routine, we disembarked the floating hotel to explore the Danube's maze of smaller channels. In beautifully calm conditions, Bearded Tits were 'pinging' from almost any suitable habitat, so we stopped and spent some time watching a small flock as they skilfully teased seeds from the heads of Common Reed. Penduline Tits were active too, with both species seemingly much easier to find in the still morning air.

Where the channel gave way to a broad lake, we scanned through the masses of 'wild' Greylag Geese for something different. And after some minutes, a Red-necked Grebe surfaced close to the boat and was quickly identified as a first-winter bird sporting the first signs of the rusty-red neck more familiar in breeding adults. Subsequent scanning turned up a distant group of fishing Black-necked Grebes, which were readily identified by their distinctive steep foreheads and monochrome plumage. Pelicans were also present albeit further from the boat than on previous outings, however, it was pleasing to see both species together, with the Great White Pelican typically outnumbering its rare Dalmatian cousin. Moving on, we soon arrived for our lunchtime rendezvous with the floatel at Lake Baclanesti where news quickly spread of a yet another Little Bittern seen from Laura and Tony's cabin – conspiracy theories were rife!

After lunch, the afternoon was spent birdwatching from the main boat as we made gentle progress back towards the pontoon in Tulcea. From our elevated vantage point we saw a number of Caspian Terns, four Red-footed Falcons, Grey-headed and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers and a few White-tailed Eagles including a very close adult which was snapped by a lucky few. Passing one of many small lakes, a flurry of activity helped add some waders to the day list: Lapwing, Snipe and a Wood Sandpiper. Fittingly, one of the last notable bird sighting of our time on the Danube was a squadron of Great White Pelicans which made a pass over the boat – we stood to

salute. Insects were notable too, with dozens of Willow Emerald Spreadwings and Southern Darters hitching a ride on the top deck and new butterflies included several Freyer's Purple Emperors and a Large Cooper. Once in Tulcea, we soon settled down for a last delicious dinner served on the floating hotel.

## Day 8

## Saturday 14th September

Having thanked the river staff for their excellent service during our wonderful time on the floating hotel, we drove the short distance to an impressive viewpoint overlooking the Danube as it flowed towards Tulcea. The hillside was dotted with Suslik burrows but sadly none were active, having seemingly entered in to hibernation a little earlier than normal due to a lack of food following a long, hot summer. However, the river below produced some good birds with yet more Greylag Geese, Great White Pelicans along with two Dalmatians Pelicans; the latter is quite unusual upstream of Tulcea. As we walked back to the bus, the hillside was enlivened by several raptors with two Booted Eagles and three Steppe (Common) Buzzards flying over a woodland across the valley and, just as we were getting into the bus, a Crested Lark burst into song.

Moving on, we arrived at a monastery known as Cilic Dere; a site well known for its diverse woodpecker fauna and we weren't to be disappointed with four species noted during our brief stay. Initially, a Syrian Woodpecker gave us the run-about but eventually flew across a glade and landed in a dead tree giving excellent, if brief views. Three other woodpeckers – Lesser, Great and Middle Spotted – were also heard or seen. Hawfinches were active too, with numerous birds flying overhead calling and occasionally landing along the woodland edge. In surrounding scrub two flycatchers, Spotted and Red-breasted, were joined by a Common Redstart. Meanwhile, overhead, up to four Booted Eagles were more or less visible throughout our stay with both pale- and dark-phase birds in the same binocular view more than once! Other interest came in the form of insects, with the large and impressive Cardinal and Silver-washed Fritillary butterflies present in good numbers, but an equally imposing Violet Carpenter Bee was the clear favourite.

After an hour's drive, lunch was taken in the Macin Mountains National Park under the shade of some trees. Replete, we started out on a short walk up a gully where two experts of camouflage, a Praying Mantis and a Great Banded Grayling, did their best to blend in with the surroundings. The area can be good for raptor passage but the afternoon was hot and the sky clear; a few Kestrels and a Hobby put in an appearance but a low-flying female Sparrowhawk was the best bird. A cool, damp patch next to an area of luxuriant vegetation hosted a few butterflies but these were outshone by a fine Common Tree Frog which gave its presence away by calling and was then picked out by sharp-eyed John. In increasingly hot conditions, we retraced our steps, enjoying views of the rugged hills and the plains below.

With ice creams calling, we made a refreshment stop in a service station where to our amazement we gained our best views of not one, but two Syrian Woodpeckers and this time, everyone managed excellent views of this tricky species. Our last visit of the day took us to an Oriental Hornbeam forest near Greci. Blue and Great Tits were active but sadly the same was not true of their sombre cousin; however, we did manage decent views of a couple of Whinchats which caused some confusion by perching in the top of a tree. Another short walk allowed wonderful views over the plain below, not to mention a fine rufous-coloured Booted Eagle which made a low pass. But sadly, the Long-legged Buzzard nest was long since abandoned.

With a longish drive ahead of us, we reluctantly loaded on to the bus and headed east to our third and final guest house where we were greeted with a 'warming' aperitif.

## Day 9

## Sunday 15th September

The day started with a visit to Denize Tepe (Hill of the Sea), an impressive steppe-land hill which towers over the surrounding plains which were once covered by water. On our arrival we scanned for a local speciality, the handsome Long-legged Buzzard; however, all was quiet on this occasion, except for a small group of Northern Wheatears flitting over bare ground. It was decided to cut our losses and we moved on to a nearby lake, noting a very large, 80+ flock of Yellow Wagtails scattered over a newly ploughed field along the way. At the lake we were met by good numbers of waders and a careful search turned up a diminutive Little Stint amongst its larger cousins which included both Green and Wood Sandpipers, Avocet, Greenshank and several elegant Spotted Redshanks.

Stopping for a welcome comfort break, we watched a Little Owl glaring at us from its concrete perch, while a stunning Short-toed Eagle glided overhead. Another short drive took us to a large lake south of Istria where four Little Ringed Plovers stood out from a dozen or so Ruff, and a huge flock of Mediterranean Gulls numbered several hundred.

Next we arrived at our picnic location, a fine viewpoint overlooking Lake Tuzla where we decided to walk out to the drying shoreline before eating our picnic. Across the lake, a reddish haze was in fact a massive group of around a 150 Ruddy Shelduck accompanied by a handful of 'regular' Shelduck. And as we looked on, a hunting Red-footed Falcon flushed a group of three small waders whose flight calls betrayed them as Temminck's Stints – unfortunately they continued across the lake disappearing from view, never to be seen again. On the water dozens of Shoveler were joined by 50 or so Mediterranean Gulls and a dry spit was home to a mixed flock of feeding Dunlin and Little Stint. Returning to the minibus, we settled down on the grass for lunch and were joined by a good selection of butterflies, including an Adonis Blue, a few Eastern Bath Whites and a lovely fresh Brown Argus.

Our final destination of the day was the Black Sea coast, but first we stopped just outside Vadu where we were delighted to find a number of Susliks, also known as the European Ground Squirrels, grazing on some wayside meadows, and moments later, a huge Dalmatian Pelican flapped overhead. On a nearby lagoon we found several Gull-billed Terns, then followed a real 'tern fest' as we spotted they were roosting with three other species – Caspian, Black and Whiskered! A nice supporting cast of Curlew, Ruff, and Greenshank along with a smart Black-winged Stilt provided the cherry on the cake!

Finally arriving on the shore of the Black Sea, a number of the group took the opportunity for a cooling dip while others scanned the beach and sea for wildlife, finding both Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes on the sea in the process. Meanwhile, further out, several noisy Sandwich Terns attracted our attention with their rasping calls, and we spotted they were being chased by an Arctic Skua. This pirate of the sea chases other birds which eventually give up their food in an effort to flee the skua; in all two adults and two juvenile were watched as they harassed the terns and gulls, often with great effect! With time racing on, we headed north back to Tulcea where we spent a pleasant final evening reflecting on what had been an amazing holiday, experiencing some of Romania's best wildlife and landscapes.

## Day 10

Monday 16th September

Leaving the guesthouse in Tulcea, we set off towards Bucharest, producing an impressive list of birds along the way: 40 or more Black Storks, more Dalmatian Pelicans and a probable Long-legged Buzzard were some of the highlights.

The last stop of the tour was at Lake Hasar, which was alive with a wide variety of water birds. Here several Pygmy Cormorants clung to an island of reed, while Common Pochard and Great Crested Grebe floated on the water nearby. Along the shoreline a few Snipe were beautifully illuminated, showing off their gold-spangled plumage. However the best was yet to come; as we slowly advanced along the shoreline, at an opening in the reeds, a Spotted Crake was seen creeping stealthily along the shore. Frozen to the spot, we stood in hushed silence as this rarely observed relative of the Moorhen was briefly joined by another of its cousins – a Water Rail! Returning to the minibus and reeling at our good fortune, we were gob-smacked when yet another Spotted Crake was seen standing out in the open – all agreed we had peaked and should head straight for the airport!

The last leg to the journey was enlivened by a few 'Steppe' Common Buzzards and a nice flock of Bee-eaters. Arriving at the airport in good time, we said our farewells ahead of a smooth flight back to the UK.

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## Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	September									
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
1	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>				✓			✓		✓	
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	✓	200	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓						✓	
5	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>			✓						150	
6	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>				1	2	1				
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			✓	✓	✓				✓	
8	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓				
10	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>									✓	
11	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			✓		✓	✓			✓	
12	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			✓		✓	✓				✓
13	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>			✓	✓	1000	✓			✓	
14	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓									
15	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				✓		✓				
16	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			
17	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>								1		
18	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>						h	h			1
20	Little Crane	<i>Porzana parva</i>				1						
21	Spotted Crane	<i>Porzana porzana</i>										2
22	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				✓	✓	✓				
23	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
25	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>							1			
26	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
27	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			4				7		6	
28	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>									1	
29	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>									400	
30	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
31	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			2						✓	
32	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>									✓	
33	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				6		✓			✓	
34	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>			6	6					✓	
35	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			1						2	
36	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>									3	
37	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>									✓	
38	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>									20+	
39	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
40	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				1						
41	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>				2						
42	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>			3	6						
43	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>									6	
44	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>				3					✓	
45	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>			1	1						
47	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>									200	

	Common name	Scientific name	September											
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16			
48	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>					1							
49	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>											4	
51	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>				6	20+	✓					✓	
52	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>											✓	
53	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>				✓	✓	✓						
54	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>			3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
55	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>				6								
56	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>				4							3	
57	Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger)	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>											4	
58	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>		1	7	5			6					40+
59	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>				1								
60	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>				✓	1000+	✓	✓	✓				10+
61	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
62	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>						1	2					
63	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>				✓	✓	✓					✓	
64	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓					
65	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
66	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>				4	6	1						
67	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
68	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓						
69	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>				100+	✓	✓	✓					
70	Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>					10+			2	1		5	
71	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>					1							
72	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>			1	3			3					
73	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>											1	
74	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>	4	1		1			2					
75	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>									7			
76	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1	1			3	2	1		2	
77	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1	1	10+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	1?											
79	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>												1?
80	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
81	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>	1											
82	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		h									1	
83	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>				1								
84	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>			2	1								
85	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				1
86	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	3+		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>				✓								
88	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>	1			3			h	3				
89	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>				3	h	4	3					
90	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>			1					3				
91	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					
92	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>		h										
93	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	h			1								
94	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>				3	✓	✓	1					
95	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>			4	1	20+	6				6	2	
97	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1		1	✓	15+	✓	✓	✓				
98	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1											

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			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
99	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	✓	✓	2	3		✓	✓	✓	
100	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		1							
101	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>						1			
102	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓		
103	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
104	Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	10+	2							
105	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓	
106	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
107	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
108	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	40+	✓	✓				1		
109	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓	✓						
110	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		3							
111	Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>							3		
112	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓					1		
113	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		✓							
114	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
115	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
116	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>				3	7	2		h	h
117	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>					✓	✓		h	
118	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>							1	1	
119	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
120	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
121	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				h					
122	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓		
123	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>			2						
124	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		1	1	✓		✓			
125	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			
126	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>			1						
127	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓		✓			
128	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		h							
129	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓						
130	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓							
131	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓		
132	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			1						
133	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
134	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓					✓		
135	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	1								
136	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		1					✓	✓	
137	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓		
138	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓					
139	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>				6			1		
140	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓						
141	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>				1			1		
142	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	4						2		
143	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>								4	
144	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
145	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓			
146	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	✓		20+	✓		✓		80+	
147	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓							
148	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
149	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>							h		

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			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16		
150	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓	✓									✓
151	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
152	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>									10+		
153	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>									2		
154	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	1										
155	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		h	✓								
156	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>						1	2			✓	

## Mammals

Roe Deer, *Capreolus capreolus*

Red Squirrel, *Sciurus vulgaris*

Chamois, *Rupicapra rupicapra*

Souslik, *Spermophilus citellus*

Wild Cat, *Felis silvestris*

Mole, *Talpa caucasica*

European Brown Bear, *Ursus arctos*

Red Fox, *Vulpes vulpes*

Musk Rat, *Ondatra zibethicus*

Wild Boar, *Sus scrofa*

Raccoon Dog, *Nyctereutes procyonoides*

bat sp.,

## Amphibians & reptiles,

Marsh/Pond/Edible Frog, *Pelophylax* sp

Spur-thighed Tortoise, *Testudo graeca*

Wall Lizard sp, *Podarcis* sp

European Tree Frog, *Hyla arborea*

Eastern Green Lizard, *Lacerta viridis*

## Butterflies

Small White, *Pieris rapae*

Clouded Yellow, *Colias crocea*

Small Heath, *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Freyer's Purple Emperor, *Apatura metis*

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*

Comma, *Polygonum c-album*

Silver-washed Fritillary, *Argynnis paphia*

Common Blue, *Polyommatus icarus*

Brown Argus, *Aricia agestis*

Wall Brown, *Lasiommata megera*

Water Ringlet, *Erebia pronoe*

Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria tircis*

Eastern Bath White, *Pontia edusa*

Berger's Clouded Yellow, *Colias alfacariensis*

European Swallowtail, *Papilio machaon*

Common Glider, *Neptis sappho*

Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*

Cardinal, *Argynnis pandora*

Adonis Blue, *Polyommatus bellargus*

Holly Blue, *Celastrina argiolus*

Large Copper, *Lycaena dispar*

Great Banded Grayling, *Brintesia (Kanetisa) circe*

Meadow Brown, *Maniola jurtina*



Little Bittern by Tony Daniels



Swallowtail by Tony Daniels