

Romania's Danube Delta & Carpathian Mountains

Naturetrek Tour Report

3rd – 12th September 2023



Middle Spotted Woodpecker by Julie Seakins



Juvenile Night Heron by Mike Cyprus



White-tailed Eagle by Mike Cyprus



Great White Pelicans in flight by Julie Seakins

Tour report by Jason Mitchell



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Summary

The main focus of the tour was birds, and it didn't disappoint with a total count of 156 species. One of many star birds – the Great White Pelican – was present in high numbers over the Danube and the much rarer Dalmatian Pelican was more numerous than usual with sightings well into double figures. White-tailed Eagles were seen daily during our time on the mighty Danube and other exciting raptors included dozens of Hobby, a migrating Honey Buzzard and a couple of high-flying Lesser Spotted Eagles. Seven different woodpeckers went down well, with Black, Syrian and Grey-headed the pick of the bunch. However, the tour was more than just birds and a good number of exciting mammals were recorded too. The highlight of the Carpathians for many, was a visit to a feeding station where an impressive eleven Brown Bears graced us with their presence! Later in the week we added Chamois, Red Deer and Golden Jackal to our list. Butterflies were also well-represented, with less familiar species like the large and impressive Cardinal Fritillary, showy Lesser Fiery Copper and stunning Freyer's Purple Emperor some of the stand-out species. Not to be left out, amphibians and reptiles got in on the act too, with the first days producing a 'muddy' Yellow-bellied Toad and the last a Spur-thighed Tortoise. And finally, a splash of culture added yet another dimension to a hugely successful tour, with visits to the Neo-Renaissance *Peles Castle* in Prahova and of course, the home of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* – the famous Transylvanian castle of Bran.

The weather was a little showery up in the Carpathians but thereafter, was settled and warmer than usual, with temperatures around the mid to high twenties. But typical of September, there were a couple of chilly starts. Like much of Europe, low rain fall had resulted in water levels being generally below the norm, however, local knowledge and expert boat handling saw us navigate the smaller Danube channels with ease.

Day 1

Sunday 3rd September

Alex and I met the group at Bucharest Airport, whose flight from Heathrow had unfortunately been delayed by two hours. With luggage safely stowed, we drove north across the plains to Ploiesti. Over the fields, we noted several Marsh Harriers and Common Buzzards, which were no doubt resting-up before continuing their migration south. After a welcome refreshment stop, we traversed the mountains and incredibly, some of the passengers spotted a Brown Bear at the forest's edge! We arrived in good time at our lovely guest house in the small Transylvanian town of Vulcan, near Brasov. After a glass of 'Dracula's tears', an aperitif kindly offered by our host, we settled into our rooms before reconvening for dinner. Following an excellent first meal, we parted for a much-needed sleep ahead of our first full day in the Carpathians.

Day 2

Monday 4th September

Leaving the hotel, a Lesser Spotted Eagle flapped powerfully across the road in front of the bus, but quickly disappeared from view. Our first morning 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 number of Grey Wagtails. On exiting the bus, a Peregrine 'complained' overhead, while Coal and Marsh Tits called from deep within the emerald green, and the distinctive penetrating cry of a Black Woodpecker rang through the woods. A target species here is the Willow Tit, and it wasn't long before we heard its distinctive nasal calls and this sometimes difficult to observe bird, was anything but! During the course of the morning, we

enjoyed unparalleled views of several birds and more than once, we watched on as its hard-to-separate cousin, the Marsh Tit, joined the party. Further on, a high-flying Alpine Swift had us peering skywards, an action 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 odd Common Buzzard and finally a Raven. Other high-fliers included masses of House Martins, which were joined by a single Common Swift. However, it was not only birds which had us looking up, with four smart Chamois spotted grazing on the vertiginous gorge sides. As the morning progressed, some milky sunshine eventually entered the gorge, making the return journey a slightly warmer affair. Back at the bus, we were soon on our way back towards Vulcan, except for a brief pause to view “Dipper Dave’s” bird – the black-bellied race of Dipper.

After a sumptuous lunch back at the hotel, we headed out once more, this time to the Stramba Valley. Arriving at the start of the valley, we quickly disembarked to watch some Bee-eaters gliding and swooping overhead – not one, but forty or more of these rainbow-coloured beauties! In warming conditions, a few butterflies were on the wing with a Clouded Yellow and some Common Blues seen drifting between late blooms. A little further on, a migrant Spotted Flycatcher flitted in bushes before finally settling in the open, affording excellent views of this dandy specialist insect-eater. The first of many Red-backed Shrikes perched high on a bush, with more seen as the afternoon progressed. But the avian highlight for many, was the presence of masses of House Martins streaming south overhead – estimates varied between a few hundred and a thousand birds!

Leaving the lower slopes, we headed further up the valley towards our evening destination; a hide where we hoped to observe wild Brown Bears. On meeting the warden, we drove the rutted forest track to the parking area, from where we quietly made our way to the hide which overlooks a woodland clearing. Incredibly, there were already some bears feeding. Over the next twenty minutes, more individuals arrived, with several females joined by their cubs from previous years. We also enjoyed the company of a nervous family group of Red Foxes, which darted between the bears in search of scraps, but always maintained a respectful distance. The plentiful apples and other hidden foodstuffs poked in holes and under logs, was just too tasty to pass up and during the next hour and a half, we experienced privileged views of a staggering eleven Brown Bears.

Day 3

Tuesday 5th September

Following breakfast, we left for the Piatra Craiului National Park and just minutes after leaving Vulcan, we spotted a Marsh Harrier, shortly followed by some Common Buzzards and several large groups of Jackdaws.

Arriving at the national park, we immediately found a juvenile Red-backed Shrike perched on its’ bush-top lookout. Overhead a Meadow Pipit gave its fine call, while a Black Redstart flickered its fiery tail on a rooftop and a Yellowhammer flushed from the track side. Moving on, we walked towards the forest and it was not long before we heard the metallic, Jay-like calls of a Nutcracker and seconds later one flapped lazily into view, showing off its characteristic white-tipped tail and vent before perching obligingly at the top of a spruce. This handsome species spends much of its time deep within the forest, but in the autumn it is sometimes tempted from cover by the hazelnut crop and that’s exactly what happened, as another fearless individual hopped around in a large hazel bush just metres from an admiring public. 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 continental race with slate-coloured mantles. In an adjacent water-filled wheel rut, a Yellow-bellied Toad poked its eyes from the muddy water, obliging the photographers during its five minutes of fame.

From here we continued onto the attractive monastery of Coltul Chiliilor, nestled deep within the forest and we even had time to explore a cave decked in gilt-coloured offerings. The surrounding woodland held a couple of Crested Tits and Goldcrests, both of which stubbornly refused to show. During our picnic lunch at the monastery, we were patiently 'waited on' by some handsome monastery dogs, after which we returned to the bus, where a busy flock of Linnets flitted over a meadow and were joined by a Clouded Yellow butterfly.

Taking one of Alex's short cuts, we climbed a gullied track and enjoyed magnificent views back across the valley and also the Zarnesti Gorge from the previous day. At a lofty viewpoint, a flock of Chaffinches 'pinked' from a hedgerow and a Green Woodpecker flashed across the stunning backdrop. Arriving at Castle Bran, the reputed former abode of Vlad the Impaler, the group spent a pleasant hour or so visiting the castle and its attractive grounds, where a chattering flock of 'white-headed' Long-tailed Tits made it onto our growing bird list.

Day 4

Wednesday 6th September

Gathering our cases at the bus, we took a moment to admire a dozing Little Owl which was sunning itself on a nearby chimney pot. After bidding farewell to our hosts, we left the Carpathians 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. But the show was well and truly stolen by a Fox, which tormented a large vole just metres from a growing crowd of astonished on-lookers.

Next our route took us across the open plains close to Bucharest. Lunch was taken in a well-placed service station, before heading east towards Tulcea. Onwards we travelled, picking out Bee-eaters and numerous raptors along the way. Shortly before the bridge crossing over the middle reaches of the Danube, we spotted a group of seven White Storks hunting frogs along a marshy strip.

Unfortunately, our planned stop on the shores of a lake which is usually dotted with waders and wildfowl had to be abandoned, following an ominous warning light illuminating on the bus's dashboard. And not ten kilometres later, we rolled to an unplanned stop! And preceeded, not thirty seconds before, by the announcement that we were just an hour from the floating hotel – Jason never lived that one down! It was immediately clear that we needed a replacement bus and one was soon dispatched, arriving a little over an hour later. We did however put our time to good use, totting up several additions to the day, including a Common Redstart, Red-backed Shrike and a migrating Short-toed Eagle. However, the most curious sighting, was twenty or so Roman snails on the wall of a village building.

With the replacement bus in place, we were soon loaded and back on the road. During the next hour, we picked out some quality birds resting on wires along the road, with Roller, Bee-eater and a Hobby the pick of the bunch. 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

Thursday 7th September

After breakfast we boarded a smaller boat, which allowed us to explore some of the Delta's narrow waterways. Almost as soon as we turned off the main Sulina Channel, a Kingfisher zig-zagged ahead of us and we enjoyed close views of our first Night Heron of the trip; a boldly spotted juvenile. Soon, a wren-like ticking call alerted us to the presence of a Red-breasted Flycatcher and a brief search turned up a single bird complete with red breast, feeding at the water's edge. Few individuals of this species retain their red breast in the autumn, so it was a real treat to see a colourful individual which also sported the wheatear-like tail pattern. Raptors were in evidence too, with several Marsh Harriers quartering adjacent reed beds, a migrating group of six Sparrowhawks and it was not long before we notched up our first White-tailed Eagle. 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. Approaching the entrance to Lake Fortuna, our first Grey-headed Woodpecker bounded across the bow of the boat and at the same time a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker 'squeaked' from the dense canopy; woodpeckers are something of an unexpected avian feature of the Delta and before the morning was over, we added both Green and Great 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 Whiskered, Common and Caspian Terns along with a pair of Black-necked Grebes. A flock of twenty Common Redshank was a welcome sight but these were soon dismissed, when three huge Dalmatian Pelicans drifted into view. After a welcome coffee, we continued on our way spotting dozens of Bee-eaters before a group of several Great White Pelicans cruised into view, followed moments later by a much larger flock containing close to a hundred of these iconic Delta birds.

Continuing along the backwaters, we met with a Squacco Heron feasting on a frog, while in a nearby dead tree both Great and Pygmy Cormorants looked on. Overhead a juvenile Honey Buzzard made for a challenging identification; the youngsters looking quite different to their parents. However, one of the greatest surprises were the large flocks of Tree Sparrows dotted along our route, some numbering in their hundreds!

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 Hobbies. After lunch we headed back out in the smaller vessel, this time on to the Caraorman Channel where we were delighted to find several species of wader, including both Wood and Green Sandpipers, Snipe and Lapwing. Along the same channel, a Roller perched briefly before flying swiftly off along the sandy shore, showing off its gorgeous turquoise plumes. As we approached Swan Lake, we were alerted to a flock of Long-tailed Tits; with the engine cut, we drifted serenely as a dozen 'northern' birds, with gleaming white heads, fed busily metres from an adoring public. Arriving at the lake, some off-white juvenile Mute Swans lingered at their nest and a Great Reed Warbler chattered from deep in the reed bed. Leaving the lake and as we re-joined the channel, a Freyer's Purple Emperor caught our eye. Then followed a ten-minute photo shoot, as Dan skilfully manoeuvred the boat within inches of our obliging subject – and what a beauty it was!

Returning to base, a group of Yellow Wagtails flew along the shoreline and a Golden Oriole briefly broke cover. As we neared the floatel, at the junction between the Sulina Branch and the Old Danube Channel, the mixing waters bring nutrients to the surface, making the spot a magnet for terns. Sure enough, there were hundreds of Whiskered Terns as far as the eye could see and within the melee, a single, immaculate summer-plumaged White-winged Tern skimmed the turbid surface for its tea. Back on deck, we soon reconvened for another excellent dinner.

Day 6

Friday 8th September

After breakfast, we boarded the smaller vessel once more, allowing us to navigate the small side channels with the aim of reaching some protected lakes to the north. Moments after leaving the floating hotel, Alex spotted a Black Woodpecker but by the time the boat had turned, it had moved on. However, we were thrilled to see a large flock of Swallows, accompanied by a few Sand Martins, leaving their roost. Just before entering a large lake, some 'pinging' alerted us to a flock of Bearded Tits. Then followed five wonderful minutes watching these exquisite little birds feed in reeds just metres from the boat, skilfully teasing tiny grains from the seed heads. On the lake, we shut the motor and in blissful silence watched on as a single Black, dozens of both Whiskered and Common and a few Caspian Terns glided gracefully over the water's surface. The latter were still feeding youngsters, noting with some surprise the incongruous high-pitched, whining calls of the juvenile Caspian Terns. As we continued across the lake, a mass of white transformed into the spectacle of several hundred Great White Pelicans fishing the shallows, while gulls and cormorant vied for any scraps at the margin of the huge raft. Such impressive post-breeding gatherings are typical before birds head south for the winter. But with rumbling tums, Dan engaged full speed ahead, but our progress was soon halted by the amazing sight of a superb adult White-tailed Eagle attempting to snatch a fish from the water. Unsuccessful, it then perched in a tree alongside the boat! We looked on in awe, until hunger eventually drew us back towards the floating hotel. Back at base, while disembarking we disturbed a Red Underwing moth and as we struggled to re-find this master of camouflage against a tree trunk, a Penduline Tit gave its mournful call from adjacent reeds.

After lunch, Dave, David, Kev and Jason braved the cool waters for a quick dip, while others took a short siesta. We then headed out once more, cruising the smaller waterways leading back to the same large lake visited in the morning. The first ten minutes were a little quiet but in idyllic, calm and sunny conditions we relaxed after what had been an action-packed morning, but some angry Bee-eaters soon broke our slumber, alerting us to a Hobby perched in a tree just in front of us. Reaching the lake, we were delighted to spot not one, but two Red-necked Grebes mixed in with the ever-present Great Crested Grebes. And while checking out a skulking warbler at the reedy margins, a Cuckoo shot out over our heads. Back on a smaller channel, we stopped to admire a posing Grey-headed Woodpecker and a lucky few also gained views of a diminutive Lesser Spotted Woodpecker bounding overhead. Arriving at a second smaller lake, two Glossy Ibis danced over the lily pads as a Wood Sandpiper picked around their feet. Time was also spent observing a fine group of iron-coloured Ferruginous Ducks and several distant white blobs proved to be Dalmatian Pelicans returning to their favourite roost for the night; a bird boasting a wingspan greater than any other in Europe and measuring up to nine feet! Turning back, the boat was briefly moored alongside a section of floating reed bed, where Alex 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 'pinging' calls of Bearded Tits. Nearing the floating hotel and in fading light, we were crossed by two large flocks of migrating Purple Herons both of which numbered in their twenties. Ahead of dinner, several of the group enjoyed the last of the daylight relaxing with a drink on the top deck, bathed in the soft red glow of a spectacular sunset.

Day 7

Saturday 9th September

Shortly after dawn, an impromptu birding session produced a fine White-tailed Eagle, a diminutive Red-breasted Flycatcher and a fly-over Yellow Wagtail. Following breakfast, in what had now become a familiar routine, we headed out from the floating hotel to explore the Danube's maze of smaller channels once more. In beautifully

calm conditions, we looked on as a pair of Black-necked Grebes gave us a master class in fishing. At the same spot, a 'reed-type' warbler had us discussing the finer points of this tricky-to-identify family, before agreeing the bird was a rather small Great Reed Warbler. Entering a well-vegetated lake, six Spotted Redshank called noisily and other waders included Common Redshank and Wood Sandpiper. A clattering of wings betrayed a small group of Garganey, as they took to the wing. In a channel leading to a second larger lake, we were thrilled to observe a mixed-race flock of 'regular' and 'white-headed' Long-tailed Tits, while a Water Rail squealed from cover and a probable Little Bittern gave the most fleeting of views – there's always one that gets away! As the channel gave way to a broad lake, we revelled in our first decent numbers of duck. A mixed flock contained hundreds of birds and included Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, Shoveler and Common Pochard. Overhead some good raptor action was playing out, with Kestrel, Hobby and Marsh Harrier along with both White-tailed and Lesser Spotted Eagles making the cut. Leaving the lake behind, we turned a corner to find the floating hotel coming our way and after a smooth docking 'on the go', we were soon back at the dining table, which marked the start of the final leg back to Tulcea.

After lunch the afternoon was spent birdwatching from the top deck, as we made gentle progress back towards the pontoon in Tulcea. From our elevated vantage point, we saw a number of Caspian Terns and several White-tailed Eagles, while woodpeckers featured highly, with Black, Grey-headed and Lesser Spotted all noted. Closing in on our destination, a young Hobby made repeated passes over the boat, complete with an entourage of angry hirundines. Shortly afterwards, several elegant Black Storks drifted serenely west. However, the moments just before docking in Tulcea, produced the most unexpected sighting during our three days on the Danube. And it came in the unlikely form of a brick-red, male Crossbill flying low overhead and landing in a small tree at the side of the docks! Once in Tulcea, we soon settled down for a last delicious dinner, after which many of the group headed into town to benefit from a lively rowing festival!

Day 8

Sunday 10th September

Having thanked the river staff for their excellent service during our wonderful time on the floating hotel, we drove into the Machin Hills National Park, noting a dark-phase Booted Eagle en-route before arriving at our planned walk along the base of a hillside. The area can be particularly good for migrants and even before reaching our parking spot, a sandy-coloured Isabelline Wheatear sat confidently on a rock and even posed for some photographs. Joining the rough track on foot, the ground was alive with 'hoppers', the most impressive being the sizeable and curious-looking Predatory Bush-cricket – *Sago Pedro*. Lepidoptera were noticeable too, with some colourful moths on offer including a species of *Lythria* decked in yellow and purple stripes and a delicate Pale Shoulder, however, both were upstaged by a dazzling male Adonis Blue butterfly. We now aimed our sights on the Marry Stones, a modest rocky outcrop rising from the flat steppe a short kilometre away. As we made our approach a second Booted Eagle, this time a pale-phase bird, soared into view passing low overhead. Climbing the outcrop, we were surprised to find some flowering plants still in bloom, including two rather attractive endemics, a pretty bellflower and a bright pink *dianthus*. Scanning the high ridge beyond the forest, yet another Booted Eagle mingled with some Common Buzzards and a group of six Black Storks traversed the hillside.

In increasingly hot conditions, we took lunch under the canopy of the Oriental Hornbeam forest, where dozens of Spotted Flycatchers and a Common Redstart were joined by a small flock of Woodlark. But the star bird was the much hoped-for Sombre Tit; this delightful bird gave extended views as it fed on thistle heads, but hunger pains eventually took us back to our buffet-style picnic in the shade.

Replete, we moved on to a monastery known as Cilic Dere, but not before a stop for some well-earned ice-creams. The site is well known for its diverse woodpecker fauna and we weren't disappointed. However, our first sightings were two large and impressive insect species, notably the fearsome-looking, yet harmless Violet Carpenter Bee and the magnificent Cardinal, a large species of fritillary butterfly. Soon after, we connected with our best views of the cracking little Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, and what was a typically scruffy, if cute individual. At the edge of the woodland a Red-backed Shrike posed nicely, as did a Spotted Flycatcher and a Common Treecreeper. Back in the woods, a Middle Spotted Woodpecker called and after a brief wait, a handsome male appeared and gave us excellent views during an exciting ten minute spell; amazingly three other woodpeckers - Green, Great Spotted and Syrian - were also heard or seen during our brief stay. Hawfinches were active too, with numerous birds calling and three flying overhead along the woodland edge.

With a longish drive ahead of us, we reluctantly loaded back onto the bus and headed east to the third and final guesthouse of the tour.

Day 9

Monday 11th September

The day started with a two hour drive to Vadu, situated on the Black Sea coast at the southernmost point of the Delta. A comfort stop en-route proved most productive, with the first Long-legged Buzzard of the tour spotted sitting on the ground in the distance – later in the day, closer birds were seen, albeit from the moving bus.

Arriving into Vadu, we parked near a huge derelict concrete factory, which provided excellent habitat for a resident Little Owl. The adjacent marshy area was a hive of activity, with a Cuckoo sat in full view on the factory fencing, Bee-eaters streaming overhead, and Marsh Harriers were quartering in all directions. However, it was the appearance of a full adult male Red-footed Falcon that really grabbed our attention, as it hawked for insects 'Hobby-style' over the vast building. In an adjacent reed bed, a howling dog drew us along a concrete road to discover the reason for its consternation. It was a Golden Jackal; a species fast expanding its range westwards. Reaching a point where we could clearly see some pools, it was evident that there was a healthy 'crop' of waders present. We began slowly scanning the shoreline, calling out such exciting names as, Collared Pratincole, Little Stint and Little Ringed Plover. Other noteworthy species present included a Gull-billed Tern, several Little Gulls and 150 Teal. A short distance further on, a near empty reservoir held more species and on our approach, a thirty-strong flock of Glossy Ibis flew over the road on an arrow-straight course south. From the raised reservoir walls we noted: Avocet, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Greenshank, Dunlin, Snipe and best of all, four Curlew Sandpipers in summer plumage!

Finally arriving on the shore of the Black Sea, a number of the group took a cooling dip while others scanned the coast for wildlife, finding both Great-crested and Black-necked Grebes on the sea in the process. While further out, several noisy Common Terns attracted our attention with their harsh calls, but these were easily outnumbered ten to one by a huge raft of Mediterranean Gulls. Along the shore a decent flock of Sanderling were busy keeping their toes dry! Behind the dunes, a Spur-thighed Tortoise was another excellent find.

Following another super picnic, we headed a little inland to Lake Sinoe. A short walk led to the drying shoreline, where a reddish haze was in fact a massive group of around 500 Ruddy Shelduck. Suddenly they took to the air, almost certainly spooked by the White-tailed Eagle soaring overhead. Closer in, a couple of gloriously gaudy Rollers perched on a concrete bunker, before taking flight as well.

Returning back through Vadu, we headed for Lake Nuntashi with a quick stop to view a distant Lesser Spotted Eagle but actually enjoyed far better views of a Yellow Wagtail flock feeding in the adjacent field. Just before arriving at the lake, four Turtle Doves took to the wing, flushed by our passing bus. From the shoreline, Shoveler, along with both Red-crested and Common Pochard were present in large numbers. In the reeds, warblers shuffle between the stems and included Reed and Sedge Warblers. However, the best sighting was of an unexpected mini Starling murmuration! Reluctantly we headed north back towards Tulcea, clocking up another fine Long-legged Buzzard along the way. Back at the guesthouse, we spent a very pleasant final evening reflecting on what had been an amazing holiday, experiencing some of Romania's best wildlife and landscapes.

Day 10

Tuesday 12th September

Leaving the guesthouse in Tulcea, we headed toward Bucharest but not before a stop at Lake Hasar, the site we were forced to bypass on the transfer day. After an hour on the road, we arrived at the lakeside which was alive with a wide variety of water birds. Ducks were dominated by Teal but a healthy flock of Ruddy Shelduck added a splash of colour. Waders were numerous as well, with a couple of Spotted Redshank, several Little Ringed Plover and a few Dunlin which were joined by a handful of Snipe, the latter showing off their handsome gold-spangled plumage. Two Common Sandpipers were the last wader to join the list, a species previously noticeable by its absence.

With time ticking by we returned to the bus and set off towards Bucharest, spotting more birds along the way; a few Long-legged Buzzards and a several flocks of the seemingly ever-present Bee-eater. 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 (H = Heard only)

		September 2023									
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>									1	
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>				c20					c50 0	c40
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>						1	✓			
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>							✓		✓	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>						✓			✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>						✓	✓		c15 0	✓
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>									4	
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>						6	✓		✓	✓
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>						c20	100 s			
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymartus melba</i>		1								
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		2								
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>						1			1	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>								1	4	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>					H	H	H			
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					✓	✓	✓			✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>						2				
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>					✓	✓	✓			✓
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>					2		1		2	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>									1	
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>									c50	
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>									3	6
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>									c10	
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>									4	
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>									c20	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>									c10	3
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>									8	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					✓				3	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>										2
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>					✓				1	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>					25		1			
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>					10	1	✓		2	

		September 2023									
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>							7			2
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>					2				10	
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>									2	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>					2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>									4	
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>									c20 0	
Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>									1	
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>									4	
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>					6	c10	c10			
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>				1	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>					c10 0	✓	✓			✓
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>					1					
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>						1				
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>					1		6	6		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		2	1	7						
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>					c20 0	✓	✓			
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>						2			c30	
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>					✓	✓	✓			
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>					✓	✓	✓			
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>					1	c50	✓		2	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>					c70 0	c1k	✓	80	✓	
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>					4	c30	✓			
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>					2					
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>				1						
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>		1					1		1	
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>								3		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1		6			✓	✓	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>					c20	✓	c10		1	
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>									3	2
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				1				H	H	
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>			1	1	1			1	2	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		c40	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>		1	1					3		

		September 2023									
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Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>					H	3	H	1		
Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>				1				1		1
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			H		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>		H	H			1	1			
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H	1					H		
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>					✓	2				
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>									2	
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>				1	5	5	2	✓		
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		H								
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>					1					
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓		✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>			c25							
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		c30	✓	✓	1					
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓	✓						
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			H							
Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>								1		
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓	✓	✓						
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		✓	✓							
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>						H				
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>						7	H			
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>								4		
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>								2	✓	✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>					✓	✓			c500	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		c200		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		H	✓		✓	H	✓			
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	✓	H	✓		
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>					H		1			
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>									1	
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>				✓						
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓	H						
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓		H						

		September 2023									
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓		
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓		
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓							
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>				✓						
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>		c20	✓	✓						
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		2			✓		✓	✓	✓	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓						
Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>					1	1	H			
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓					✓	
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		H		1				1		
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>								1	1	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>									1	
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>								2		
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		1								
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓		
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓								
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>					6		1		✓	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓						
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			H							
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			H							
Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>										H
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>								3		
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓							
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>							1			
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓							
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			H							
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		H	H	✓						
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓							
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>					2		H		H	

Others

Common name	Scientific name
Mammals	
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
Red Fox	
Northern White-breasted Hedgehog (dead)	<i>Erinaceus roumanicus</i>
Roe Deer	
Red Deer (dead)	
European Brown Bear (11)	
Chamois (4)	

Common name	Scientific name
Golden Jackal (1)	
Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>
Stone Marten (dead)	<i>Martes foina</i>
Reptiles & Amphibians	
Yellow-bellied Toad	<i>Bombina variegata</i>
Eastern Tree Frog (heard)	<i>Hyla orientalis</i>
Edible Frog	<i>Pelophylax esculentus</i>
Spur-thighed Tortoise	<i>Testudo graeca</i>
Common Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis muralis</i>
Grass Snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>
Dice Snake	<i>Natrix tessellata</i>
Butterflies	
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Eastern Bath White	<i>Pontia edusa</i>
Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>
Lesser Fiery Copper	<i>Lycaena thersamon</i>
Brown Argus	<i>Arícia agestis</i>
Adonis Blue	<i>Polyommatus bellargus</i>
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Freyer's Purple Emperor	<i>Apatura metis</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>
Cardinal Fritillary	<i>Argynnis pandora</i>
Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria tircis</i>
Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus armoricanus</i>
MOTHS	
Humming-bird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>
Pale Shoulder	<i>Acontia lucida</i>
Spotted Sulphur	<i>Emmelia trabealis</i>
a Red Underwing	<i>Catocala sp.</i>
a purple-barred yellow moth	<i>Lythria sp.</i>
Other invertebrates	
Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>
Common Bluetail	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>
Western Willow Spreadwing	<i>Chalcolestes viridis</i>
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>
Southern Darter	<i>Sympetrum meridionale</i>
Red-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda germanica</i>
Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulea</i>
Carpenter Bee sp.	<i>Xylocopa sp.</i>
MOLLUSCS	
Roman Snail	<i>Helix pomatia</i>

