



**BULGARIA AND THE ROMANIAN DANUBE DELTA -
COMPREHENSIVE BIRDING TOUR**

11 - 27 MAY 2017



Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker is one of the specials on the trip.

This tour encompasses the majority of species-rich Bulgaria, along with the mighty Danube Delta in neighboring Romania. It offers a good chance of finding a number of tough and localized European birds, along with providing some great scenery and culinary delights! Some of the target birds for this trip include **Dalmatian Pelican, Pygmy Cormorant, Ruddy Shelduck, Ferruginous Duck**, numerous shorebirds and terns (such as **Caspian, Black, and White-winged Terns**), and many raptors, including **Eastern Imperial, Lesser Spotted, Booted, and White-tailed Eagles, Egyptian and Cinereous Vultures, Long-legged Buzzard, and Levant Sparrowhawk**. Other localized and highly south-after species include the famous **Wallcreeper, Masked Shrike, Sombre Tit, Pied and Isabelline Wheatears, Spotted Nutcracker, Ring Ouzel, Olive-tree and Paddyfield Warblers, Semicollared Flycatcher** (tough), and all the European woodpeckers (**White-backed Woodpecker** being scarce).

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Itinerary (17 days/16 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Sofia, transfer to Bansko

Your international flights arrive at Sofia airport, where you will be met by your local guide and begin the transfer to Bansko, situated close to Pirin National Park. During the transfer we will visit the Rila monastery for **Pallid Swift**, if time permits.

Overnight: Bansko Банско

Day 2. Pirin National Park

Today we will visit Pirin National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, birding here all day. This area is located at high altitude, and hence we will be focusing on birding up in the high mountains. Target species for the day will include **Spotted Nutcracker, Ring Ouzel, Red Crossbill, Eurasian Bullfinch, Common Firecrest, Goldcrest, Grey Wagtail, Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, and Alpine Accentor** (for those willing to undertake a short hike). Numerous other species can be expected, including **Coal Tit, Black Redstart, European Serin, Eurasian Siskin, Dunnock, and Golden Eagle**. There will be a packed lunch for the day.

Overnight: Bansko Банско

Day 3. Birding Pirin National Park and the Trigrad Gorge

We will bird in the morning around Pirin National Park, before beginning the transfer to Trigrad. During the transfer numerous stops will be made along the route. Here we will target **White Stork**, several shrikes, and numerous raptors. The Trigrad Gorge is famous for the few pairs of **Wallcreeper** it houses. We will spend some time in the afternoon scanning the rocks for this bizarre species. Here we should also see **White-throated Dipper, Peregrine Falcon, Grey Wagtail, and Eurasian Crag Martin**. We will again have a packed lunch for the day.

Overnight: Trigrad Триград

Day 4. Birding Trigrad, transfer to Krumovgrad

We will again visit the gorge for **Wallcreeper**, should we have missed it the previous afternoon. Otherwise we will do some birding around the village, where various woodpeckers, tits, and seedeaters can be expected. We will have lunch in a local mountain hut. After lunch we will begin the transfer to Krumovgrad. Due to the nature of the roads this is normally a drive of a few hours, which we will intersperse with numerous birding stops. We slowly move out of the high mountains associated with the western Rhodope Mountains into the lower-lying reaches of the eastern Rhodope Mountains. Along these stops we can find species such as **Little Owl**, **Cirl** and **Black-headed Buntings**, **Woodlark**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, various woodpeckers, and the highly-prized **Sombre Tit**. Depending on our time of arrival into Krumovgrad, we will do some local birding in the afternoon. This will take us into prime rocky areas, holding specials such as **Western Rock Nuthatch**, **Blue** and **Common Rock-Thrushes**, **Black Stork**, **Ortolan Bunting**, raptors like **Egyptian Vulture**, and **Masked Shrike**. The thickets in these areas also play host to large numbers of warblers, and our targets will include **Sardinian**, **Subalpine**, **Eastern Olivaceous**, **Barred**, and **Eastern Orphean** (difficult) **Warblers**.

Overnight: Krumovgrad Крумовград

Day 5. Birding Stouden Kladenets

Today we will visit the Stouden Kladenets volcanic region. This is similar in habitat to the area visited the previous afternoon, but houses larger numbers of raptors with more regular sightings. Raptors to be seen include **Griffon**, **Egyptian**, and the prized **Cinereous Vultures**, **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Black Kite**, and **Eurasian Honey Buzzard**. Most likely we will also encounter **Northern Raven**. We will also target various **Wheatears** like **Black-eared** and **Northern**, **Shrikes** including **Woodchat** and **Masked**, and various **Warblers**, the same as mentioned for the previous day – **Sardinian**, **Subalpine**, **Eastern Olivaceous**, **Barred**, and **Eastern Orphean**. **Alpine Swifts** grace the sky, and the ubiquitous **Crested Lark** struts around on open patches of ground. We will have a packed lunch for the day.

Overnight: Krumovgrad Крумовград

Day 6. Birding the Dolna Kula rocky valley

Today we will visit the Dolna Kula rocky valley. The entire Krumovgrad region is absolutely spectacular for birding and also plays host to some incredibly scenic routes. This valley has more woodland and bush than other parts of the region and hosts virtually all of the warblers occurring in Eastern Europe. Following up on the mixed and jumbled calls is the best way to find them. **Hawfinch** also inhabits the seeding trees. Great emphasis will be placed on **Blue** and **Common Rock-Thrushes** and **Western Rock Nuthatch** (a tricky species), as this must surely rank as one of the best sites in Europe for them. **Black Stork** breeds on inaccessible ledges in this area, and various species of **Buntings** – **Cirl**, **Black-headed**, **Ortolan**, **Corn**, etc. – occupy the prominent perches. **Common Cuckoo**, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, **European Roller**, **Eurasian Wryneck**, and **Common Nightingale** litter the trees along the river, while in addition to the warblers occurring within thickets and bushes **Sombre Tit** is another inhabitant. This is also a good area to get to grips with **Eurasian Turtle Dove**, which is becoming less common around Europe. Various hirundines can also be expected (**Barn** and **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Common House Martin**). We again will have a packed lunch for the day.

Overnight: Krumovgrad Крумовград

Day 7. Transfer to Pomorie, birding on the way

We will have an early morning start for another transfer filled with a few birding stops. We will be leaving the region, heading north-east to reach the southern Black Sea coast. In the

late afternoon we expect to arrive at the seaside resort of Pomorie, where we will be staying at a local hotel for two nights. During the transfer the birding stops will hopefully be filled with sightings of **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Lesser Kestrel**, **Olive-tree Warbler**, and **Masked Shrike**. Numerous other species can also be sought, including **Spanish Sparrow**, **Booted Eagle**, **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, **Black-headed** and **Corn Buntings**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Common Quail**, and various woodpeckers. We will have a packed lunch for the day. In the afternoon we will visit some wetlands around the town of Burgas (just before Pomorie), where a large number of waterbirds can be expected. Specials here include **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Little Bittern**, **Great Crested Grebe**, **Purple** and **Squacco Herons**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Eurasian Penduline Tit**, **Common Kingfisher**, and various **Warblers**, including **Sedge**, **Cetti's**, and **Great Reed**.

Overnight: Pomorie Поморие

Day 8. Birding the wetlands around Pomorie and Burgas

Today we will spend the day focusing on the waterbirds in the immediate Pomorie/Burgas area. The main habitats include salt pans, freshwater lakes, and woodland fringing the lakes. We expect to see many shorebird species today, together with woodpeckers, raptors, herons, and warblers. Some of the exciting shorebird species we expect to find include **Common** and **Spotted Redshanks**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Ruff**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Little Ringed** and **Kentish Plovers**, **Temminck's Stint**, **Dunlin**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Wood** and **Broad-billed Sandpipers**, **Common Greenshank**, and **Collared Pratincole**. **Temminck's Stint** and **Broad-billed Sandpiper** are rare visitors. Various gulls and terns can also be expected, including **Little**, **Mediterranean**, **Slender-billed**, **Yellow-legged**, and **Black-headed Gulls**, while the tern front holds **Common**, **Sandwich**, **Black**, **Little**, and **White-winged Terns**. We will also search for waterbirds like **Pygmy Cormorant**, various herons, **Little** and **Spotted Crakes** (both uncommon and highly skulking), **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Western Yellow Wagtail**, **Great White Pelican**, **Mute Swan**, **Eurasian Teal**, etc. The reed beds will be scoured for **Eurasian Penduline Tit**, **Bearded Reedling**, and various warblers. The woodlands surrounding some of the wetlands are host to specials like **Lesser Spotted** and **Middle Spotted Woodpeckers** (both sought-after European birds) along with the likes of **Collared**, **European Pied** (both uncommon), and **Red-breasted Flycatchers**. Once again, we will have a packed lunch for the day.

Overnight: Pomorie Поморие

Day 9. Transfer to Vetren, birding on the way, birding Srebarna Nature Reserve

This morning we will do some birding around the nearby salt pans, should we have missed any species the previous day, before transferring to Pelican Birding Lodge, located on the Danube River in the small town of Vetren. During the transfer we'll visit a highly productive portion of the woods located in the Balkan range. Here targets will include **Semicollared Flycatcher**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, and **Wood Warbler**, along with various tits and **Woodpeckers** (including **Black** and the scarce **White-backed**). Lunch will be had in a local village restaurant, offering national cuisine. We will be arriving at Pelican Birding Lodge in the afternoon, where a visit to Srebarna Nature Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is in order. Birding around this lake is brilliant, with sublime waterbirds and a good compliment of woodland birds. **Dalmatian Pelican** is the stalwart species here, where we should see them on their breeding platform. Various other waterfowl occur, such as **Ferruginous Duck**, **Ruddy Shelduck**, and all the heron, bittern, and egret species occurring in Europe. A few scarce **White-tailed Eagles** also breed on the reserve. **Eurasian Scops Owl** occurs in the grounds of Pelican Birding Lodge and usually serenades guests after darkness has fallen.

Overnight: Pelican Birding Lodge, Vetren Berpen

Day 10. Birding local wetlands

Today we will concentrate on wetland birding with visits to some of the local marshes and pans, including Srebarna Nature Reserve, Malak Preslavets Marsh (a Bulgarian IBA), Garvan Marsh, and Nova Cherna, along with the mighty Danube River. Along the Danube River vast tracts of pristine woodland still exist and add to the birding complement here. Species targeted for the day are **Dalmatian Pelican, Pygmy and Great Cormorants, Red-necked, Black-necked, Little, and Great Crested Grebes, Ferruginous Duck, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Caspian Gull, Gull-billed, Black, Whiskered, and White-winged Terns, Northern Lapwing, Spotted and Little Crakes** (difficult), **Water Rail, Little Bittern**, numerous herons and egrets, and **White-tailed Eagle**. The woodland plays host to some fantastic species, including the likes of **Grey-headed, Syrian, and Black Woodpeckers, Eurasian Nuthatch, Long-tailed, Marsh, and Willow Tits, Eurasian Treecreeper, Song Thrush, Lesser and Common Whitethroats, Eurasian Blackcap, Common and Thrush Nightingales** (difficult), **River Warbler** (difficult), **Eurasian Golden Oriole**, and **Northern Goshawk**. An eye should be kept skyward for various raptors along with hirundines (**Sand Martin**) and swifts. There will be a packed lunch for the day.

Overnight: Pelican Birding Lodge, Vetren Berpen

Day 11. Birding along the Danube, transfer to Kavarna, birding Kaliakra and Bolata

We will visit the Danube River in the morning, where various waterbirds can be expected, along with a sizeable number of woodland species. We will transfer to Kavarna on the northern Black Sea coast. During the transfer numerous observations along the road will be made. This is a good area for raptors, with specials such as **Lesser Spotted and Eastern Imperial Eagles, Long-legged, Eurasian Honey, and Common Buzzards, Eurasian Hobby, and Red-footed Falcon**. We will visit a **European Bee-eater** colony, and we will also try for species such as **Sombre Tit, Woodlark, Woodchat Shrike**, and various **Woodpeckers**, including the scarce **White-backed**. We will have lunch in the restaurant of our hotel. After lunch we will visit the Kaliakra Nature Reserve and Bolata for a completely different suite of birds. Here we can expect to see **Calandra and Greater Short-toed Larks, Eurasian Skylark, Tawny Pipit, Pied Wheatear**, and the local subspecies of **European Shag**. We will also search for **Eurasian Eagle-Owl**.

Overnight: Kavarna Каварна

Day 12. Birding Durankulak Lake, Shabla Tuzla Lake, and Kamen Bryag

Today a day trip will lead us to the productive Durankulak Lake, along with visits to Shabla Tuzla Lake and Kamen Bryag rocky steppes. We will have a scan for various seabirds, including **Black-throated Loon, Yelkouan Shearwater, and Parasitic Jaeger**. Target species for the day include **Montagu's, Pallid, and Western Marsh Harriers, Eurasian Bittern, Caspian and Gull-billed Terns, Great White Pelican, Paddyfield Warbler, Bearded Reedling, and Spotted Crake**. We will also make another attempt at the larks, should we have missed any of them yesterday, and will have another opportunity for pipits including **Red-throated Pipit** (uncommon). We should also be able to find **European Stonechat, Eurasian Stone-curlew, European Pied Flycatcher, Rosy Starling, Levant Sparrowhawk, Common Reed Bunting, and Isabelline Wheatear** to the list. Again we will have a packed lunch for the day.

Overnight: Kavarna Каварна

Day 13. Transfer to the Danube Delta in Romania, birding on the way

Today we will transfer to the Danube Delta in neighboring Romania. During the transfer we will have observations at Babadag Lake, along with some woodlands en route. Here we will target difficult species that may have been missed on the tour up until now, such as **Hawfinch**, **Eurasian Treecreeper**, flycatchers, and various **Woodpeckers** (including **Black**), along with a large compliment of waterfowl, shorebirds, and general waterbirds. Lunch will be had at a local road restaurant. We will likely arrive in the late afternoon at our accommodation, situated on an island in the Delta. We will stay here for three nights.
Overnight: Hotel Complex Cormoran, Uzlina

Day 14. Birding the Danube Delta

Fishponds, associated flooded meadows, woodlands, and small pans, situated on a neighboring island, will be the areas we will be birding today. We will have a packed lunch for the day. Specials here include **White-tailed Eagle**, **Eurasian Hobby**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Greylag Goose**, **Common Shelduck**, **Mute Swan**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Eurasian Teal**, **Gadwall**, **Black Stork**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Dalmatian** and **Great White Pelicans**, **Great Crested Grebe**, all the European species of egrets and herons, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Pied Avocet**, **Common Snipe**, **Glossy Ibis**, various shorebirds (including **Green Sandpiper**), **Terns** including **Caspian**, **Black**, **Whiskered** and **White-winged**, **Common Kingfisher**, **Woodpeckers** including **Syrian**, along with a new compliment of warblers, including **Savi's**, **River** (uncommon), **Common Grasshopper**, **Moustached**, and **Aquatic Warblers**. We will mainly be on foot for the day, as we slowly bird the area.

Overnight: Hotel Complex Cormoran, Uzlina

Day 15. Birding the Danube Delta

Today we will visit the numerous lakes and channels situated in the delta by boat. We will, again, take a packed lunch for the day, and we will again be focusing on the huge array of waterbirds occurring within the Delta. If anything will stand out as a fabulous experience, it will surely be this – visiting the Danube Delta (which is basically the European equivalent of Africa's Okavango Delta) and experiencing the absolutely huge volumes of birds present. Seeing a feeding party of a few hundred pelicans swarm around certain corners of pans, along with feeding rafts of thousands of terns, is a sight hard to beat! We will concentrate on the same bird species as on the previous day.

Overnight: Hotel Complex Cormoran, Uzlina

Day 16. Transfer to Bucharest

Today we will transfer to Bucharest, the capital of Romania, for your final night at a local hotel of your choosing. We suggest Hotel Charter, Otopeni. This night will be for your own expense (see details below of what is excluded from the trip price). Observations will be had en route, where we will target any species (whether they be wetland or woodland species) still missing from our list, before arriving in Bucharest.

Overnight: Hotel Charter, Otopeni (or similar hotel of your choosing).

Day 17. Departure

Today our international flights will leave for home.

Duration: 17 days
Limit: 4 – 8
Date: 11 – 27 May 2017

Start: Sofia, Bulgaria
End: Bucharest, Romania

Price: €3113 per person sharing for 6 – 8 participants
€3575 per person sharing for 4 – 5 participants

Single supplement: € 258

Price includes:

Ground transport
Boat transport in the Delta
Accommodation
Full-board – packed lunch where indicated
English-speaking guide
Entrance fees

Price excludes:

Personal insurance
Alcoholic beverages
Gratuities
Laundry
Items of a personal nature
Hotel and dinner for the last night in Bucharest