

Bulgaria, species list and trip report, 8 to 15 September 2018

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



Bulgaria 2018

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#	DATE	LOCATIONS AND NOTES
1	8 September	Flew from the UK to Burgas and visit to Atanasovsko Lake.
2	9 September	Vaya Lake and Mandra Lake, Burgas.
3	10 September	Atanasovsko Lake, Dyulino Pass in the Balkan Mountains (Stara Planina), Panitsovo, Poroy.
4	11 September	Atanasovsko Lake, Pomorie Lake, Atanasovsko Lake.
5	12 September	Jurino Pass in the Balkan Mountains (Stara Planina), Kozichino, Kamchia riverine forest, Topola.
6	13 September	Krapets, Durankulak, Shabla Lake, Shabla Tuzla Lake.
7	14 September	Balgarevo, Bolata, Kaliakra, Shabla Tuzla Lake.
8	15 September	Back to Burgas with a stop at Atanasovsko Lake before our flights back home.



Above - Aranasovsko Lake. Front cover - Durankulak

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Day One: 8 September. Arrival in Burgas and visit to Atanasovsko Lake.

After an early arrival at, but slightly later departure than expected from Gatwick, we arrived in sunny Burgas, on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast in the mid afternoon.

Upon meeting Minko our guide for the week, a unanimous decision saw us heading straight to the nearby Atanasovsko Lake - a 5km long coastal saline lagoon, and an important location on the Via Pontica bird migration route. The Via Pontica is the second largest migration route used by birds that nest in north-east Europe to migrate to wintering grounds in Africa, and it is particularly important for White Storks and White Pelicans, as well as many species of raptors, songbirds and waterfowl.

Atanasovsko Lake is split in two by the main Burgas to Varna road, and our first stop was a short way from this road, to look over the northern section of the lake. Many gulls were bobbing on the water or sitting on posts, and amongst the Black-headed, Mediterranean and Little Gulls we spotted a Slender-billed Gull, calmly paddling through the water. Along the muddy edges we found Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Spotted Redshank and Wood Sandpiper, whilst flocks of both White and Dalmatian Pelicans were spotted commuting over; using their typical V-formation in flight. In the distance a Marsh Harrier could be seen flying low over the reeds.

From here we travelled south to a viewpoint over the southern section of Atanasovsko Lake. The sharp ticks of a Spotted Flycatcher alerted us to its presence in the trees surrounding the viewpoint, before it flitted away. The lake had a good range of waders and waterbirds, although many, including the pelicans and Spoonbills were fairly distant. Small groups of Shelducks came flying in periodically, and in the distance Curlew, Ruff and Redshank could be seen feeding enthusiastically. As we made our way back to the bus a noisy flock of Bee-eaters flew over; providing the soundtrack that would follow us every day.

After our first traditional Bulgarian meal it was time to retire ready for the first full day's exploring. By midnight our complement was complete as our travellers from northern England arrived in Bulgaria.

Day Two: 9 September. Visit to Vaya Lake and Mandra Lake.

Burgas is surrounded by a series of lakes and wetlands that have differing levels of salinity; providing a range of habitat conditions, which makes this area such an important resting area for birds migrating along the Black Sea coast. Today we were focused on exploration of Vaya Lake (Burgas Lake); a brackish water lake, and Bulgaria's largest natural lake, and Mandra Lake; a freshwater reservoir.

We headed first to Vaya Lake, west of the city of Burgas. Our first stop was close to an area of fringing reeds, and the air was thick with the whistles and clicks of Starlings. On the water there were Coots and Great Crested Grebes at close range; the latter still being harassed by demanding youngsters for food. We had good views of both White and Dalmatian Pelicans here at Vaya Lake. A pink flush was evident on many of the adult White Pelicans in the light, while the slightly dishevelled look of the Dalmatian Pelican was clear as two birds sailed by close to shore. Scanning in amongst the reeds we spotted a juvenile Night Heron along with several Squacco Herons, before the soft, slurry whistles of Penduline Tit drew our attention, but try as we might we couldn't spot it amongst the vegetation. As we enjoyed the bright flash of a Kingfisher passing by, a raptor was spotted in the distance flying low over a building. Minko's experienced eye quickly identified it as a Levant Sparrowhawk, and our luck was in as its flight line took it directly overhead; providing fantastic views of the coarse barring and black wing tips.

Attention was drawn back to the lake as a succession of Squacco Herons flew along the shore - 18 in total, followed shortly by a Marsh Harrier. We had a little time to appreciate the many Marsh Frogs that had been silently watching us from the water before we moved on to our next stop at Mandra Lake.

As we crossed the dam at Mandra Lake we spotted a pair of Caspian Terns flying strongly across the water. We stopped for a walk at what was also a popular fishing spot. A small party of White Pelicans was found here; one of which had a damaged wing, and was content to sit among the reeds. Purple Herons put in occasional appearances - lifting their slender striped necks to reveal their long dagger-like bills. In the warmth plenty of butterflies were flying and we saw a good range of species here including Mallow

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Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Eastern Bath White and Lang's Short-tailed Blue, along with two of the larger species on the wing at this time of year; Swallowtail and Great-banded Grayling. As we headed back many dragonflies flitted over the channels around us, including Black-tailed Skimmer and Ruddy Darter, along with the more slender Blue-tailed Damselfly.

We set off back to Burgas for lunch, with Dalmatian Pelicans soaring overhead as we entered the city, and before long were headed back to Mandra Lake. Crossing the dam again, with Wood and Green Sandpipers picking along its wall, we headed for the lake's southern section. As we drove a large, dark shape wheeled over the road; revealing itself to be a Lesser Spotted Eagle, pursued by a Marsh Harrier. A short aerial clash, between the two raptors ensued before the Marsh Harrier drifted away, and was replaced by a Common Buzzard. As if three raptor species wasn't enough; a juvenile Montagu's Harrier appeared over the field, before a flock of migrating Honey Buzzard was spotted soaring high above us - about 30 all together. Next, two Ospreys came into view as we walked up the road. We spotted the vibrant red of the somewhat flat-bodied Scarlet Darter sitting on vegetation, along with a motionless European Pond Terrapin while we were scanning the lake, before the first drops of rain started to fall from an ominously darkening sky.

A very wise decision was made to head back to the bus, which we reached just as the skies unleashed some heavy rain. We took this opportunity to have a coffee break in nearby Dimchevo, while the storm wore itself out, and were soon back on the road to another promontory over the lake. A short walk through farmland peppered with foraging Red-backed Shrikes, Yellow Wagtails and Chaffinches along with the briefest view of a kangaroo-hopping mouse - not a convincing enough look to make a full identification! From our vantage point we could see a good range of species with both Cormorant and Pygmy Cormorant together, and more Caspian Terns, standing alongside Black-headed Gulls; providing a useful size comparison. As we watched, groups of Garganey flew in along with a small party of six Glossy Ibis. On wires nearby a group of around 25 Turtle Doves could be seen and we briefly heard the 'quip' calls of a Quail.

As we headed back we spotted a Little Owl perching on a rooftop in one of the villages - its bright and expressive gaze fully in our direction. We stopped again for a short visit at Atanasovsko Lake. The species were much the same as seen the previous day; however Oystercatchers were an addition to the list, and the Spoonbills were clearly feeling more obliging - feeding much closer than they had been the day before.

Day Three: 10 September. Atanasovsko Lake, Dyulino Pass, Panitsovo, Poroy.

Our plans today included a visit to the ringing station at Atanasovsko Lake, and as we arrived for breakfast we received the news that the ringers had just caught a Bluethroat. All agreed that a swift breakfast seemed like a very fair exchange for the opportunity to see such a spectacular bird close up, and we were soon at the ringing site a short drive away.

We took some time here to find out more about bird ringing and the important role it plays in the study of birds; including their migration routes, survival rate of chicks and adults, and population change. At such a busy time of year for migration, the surrounding scrub and reedbeds were full of birds, and we were privileged to see a good selection of species 'in the hand'. The Bluethroat was of course hard to beat, but we also saw a Red-breasted Flycatcher, Red-backed Shrike, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Sand Martin, House Martin, Swallow and Spanish Sparrow. We were able to compare Reed and Marsh Warbler, and learn how ringers use definitive differences in the 'wing formula' of these species. A Sedge Warbler was also seen along with the chunky Great Reed Warbler; completing a quartet of *Acrocephalus* warblers. One special sighting was a leucistic Swallow; considered to be a very lucky sighting in Bulgaria... hopefully a good sign for things to come!

The ringing site is surrounded by some great wetland and scrub habitat, so we didn't neglect to explore this too. On one tree leaning out over the water we found Night Heron, Grey Heron and Kingfisher all perched; giving each other the requisite amount of space. Migrant Hawker and Emperor dragonflies were spotted, along with Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Small Copper and Small Heath. Crossing over a small dyke we looked out over an area where Spotted Redshank were feeding; characteristically up to their bellies in

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deeper water. More distantly was a party of around 40 Flamingos, and we had great views of a passing Short-toed Eagle - its pale underparts clearly visible.

From the ringing station we headed north past fields of sunflowers before striking up into the Balkan Mountains (Stara Planina), which run through the whole of central Bulgaria and reach their eastern extent at the Black Sea. As we drove along the tree-lined road, Great Banded Graylings and Cardinal Fritillaries could be seen around the verges, before we passed into a more open area with scrub and patches of plantation woodland.

We reached the open area of Dyulino Pass at around 440m, which provides a view north towards the end of the Balkan Mountains over which migrating birds must travel. We set out chairs and with telescopes trained north, we waited! A small group of White Storks passed over, along with Common Buzzard, Honey Buzzard, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk and 'Steppe Buzzard' but today did not seem to be a good migration day, so after a quick look at butterflies including Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper and Lesser Fiery Copper, we moved on.

Continuing north, we reached the small village of Panitsovo, taking a stop to check out the orchards. A Cirl Bunting was spotted briefly as we arrived, and a Middle Spotted Woodpecker called as it weaved with its bouncing flight between the trees. With a bit of persistence we tracked down a Sombre Tit amongst the Blue and Great Tits, but we weren't so lucky in our quest for a Caspian Whipsnake - maybe next time!

Heading back south towards Burgas, we made a final stop near the village of Poroy to explore its forest steppe habitat, as we took a walk towards the nearby reservoir. As we arrived a very vocal group of five Ravens flew over - their 'cronking' calls carrying widely. Our walk took us through an open area of woodland with Tree Pipits spotted on prominent perches and Spotted Flycatchers hawking for flies. The silvery flash of a Purple Hairstreak was spotted around the crown of one oak tree, and the last of the flowers were proving particularly popular with Cardinal Fritillaries.

The trees gave way to scattered scrub, with the Jerusalem Thorn *Paliurus spina-christi* with its papery seeds providing particular interest. Looking over the grassland a group of Yellow Wagtails could be seen foraging on the ground, while a Northern Wheatear kept watch from a fencepost. The gentle sloping banks here provide perfect opportunities for Sousliks (European Ground Squirrels) to excavate their tunnel systems, and we were lucky enough to spot one of these charismatic mammals amongst the short turf.

Pete spotted a bird disappearing into the scrub, which eventually reappeared; revealing itself as a Corn Bunting. It turned out to be the advance guard to wave after wave of Corn Buntings, with twittering flocks appearing from every direction, some even issuing their characteristic 'jangling keys' song.

Making our way back we encountered a local goat herder with his flock, making a musical procession through the trees. A small black and cream striped moth spotted in the grass was identified as the Spotted Sulphur; now considered extinct in the UK, so nice to see it here in Bulgaria. We spent some time watching both Spotted and Red-breasted Flycatchers feeding amongst the trees, and had a great view of a juvenile Hawfinch sat stock-still on a branch, and a Middle Spotted Woodpecker suspended under a tree limb using its strong claws.

Day Four: 11 September. Atanasovsko Lake, Pomorie Lake, Atanasovsko Lake.

Following a wonderful morning at the ringing station yesterday, the group were keen to visit the site again, so after breakfast we took the short drive to Atanasovsko Lake. Walking down to the reedbeds, we stopped to watch Turtle Doves sitting in a tree at just the right time; as a male Golden Oriole flew in to join them - spending long enough to allow us all to enjoy his vibrant plumage.

The reedbeds again were alive with the sound and movement from thousands of Spanish Sparrows and Starlings, and the skies full of hirundines. The hirundine roost at this time of year numbers many thousands of birds, and as we waited the ringers showed us four species together - Sand Martin, House

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Martin, Swallow and Red-rumped Swallow. We also saw a couple of new species 'in the hand' from yesterday - Savi's Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat.

Looking out over the open water we took some time to enjoy close views of Red-rumped Swallows perched amongst the reeds, while neither the Night Heron nor the Grey Heron appeared to have moved from the previous day. A flock of around 15 Honey Buzzards soared over, but attention was soon drawn to two ducks flying alongside vegetation at the far end of the lake. An initial speculative identification of scoter was reassessed as the pair came in closer to land... Wood Ducks! This is an American species, so the two males will undoubtedly have escaped from a collection; however they are fine looking birds, so we did still give them some attention - especially as this appears to be the first record of this species for Bulgaria!

Another warm and sunny day brought out Knapweed Fritillary, Eastern Bath White and Clouded Yellow, while the raptor passage included Short-toed Eagle, Montagu's Harrier and our first Booted Eagle of the trip, as we were leaving the ringing site.

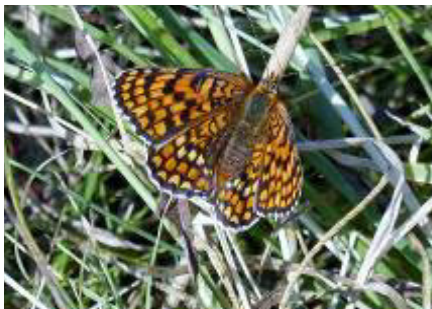
Our next stop was further east with a visit to Pomorie Lake; a saline lagoon, famous not just for its birdlife, but also its curative mud! We first visited an area on the lake's southern shore close to the town's Salt Museum. The rich black mud from the lake's bottom had drawn crowds; both tourists and birds. The advantage of the slowly-baking mud-caked tourists found here, is that birds roosting and feeding here are habituated to people, and as such we had close views of many species including Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit and Wood Sandpiper. Mediterranean Gulls revealed their completely pale underwings as they flew, and both Sandwich Terns and Common Terns were spotted on posts and a small island; with some Common Tern fledglings still being fed by their parents.

Following lunch overlooking the water we took a trip further round to the west bank of Pomorie Lake, following a bumpy track through the reeds to a viewpoint overlooking water on both sides. We found a fantastic selection of waders here, which gave us a real opportunity to refine our identification skills! Marsh Sandpiper and Greenshank probed the mud side by side, joined by Black-tailed Godwit, Grey Plover, Lapwing and many Snipe. Searching along the shores we spotted the diminutive Little Stint, and searching a little further one Temminck's Stint was spotted; eventually moving to feed close to a Little Stint, allowing a comparison of their plumage and profile. Both Broad-billed Sandpiper with its striped crown and Kentish Plover were also spotted here, along with a small group of Collared Pratincoles, which breed here in the summer months. As we waited a Little Tern flitted over the water, before several of the Collared Pratincoles took to the air, chasing airborne insects on long and agile wings.

Turning our attentions to the more open area of the lake as Garganey flew in, we spotted perhaps the first Pintail of the winter amongst the many Teal, Mallards and Coots. Stalking among the vegetation were Little Egret and its much larger cousin; Great Egret. At this point the gathering clouds overhead chose their moment to open, causing us to beat a hasty retreat to the bus. As we drove away, Pete lamenting the fact that we hadn't managed to spot a Black-necked Grebe out on the lake, our attention was drawn to a small shape bobbing on the water next to the track. Nothing less than a Black-necked Grebe!

We had a short stop at Atanasovsko Lake on the way back to the hotel, catching up again with the Slender-billed Gulls, which were much closer than the first day; their dark red bills looking fantastic in the late afternoon light.

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Top - Black-tailed Godwit; Knapweed Fritillary; Bluethroat. Middle - Poroy; Middle Spotted Woodpecker; Dalmatian Pelican; Scarlet Darter; Marsh Frog. Bottom - Jurino Pass.

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Day Five: 12 September. Jurino Pass, Kozichino, Kamchia - riverine forest, Topola.

We set off today under sunny skies on our journey north up the Black Sea coast, with plenty of stops planned along the way. As we drove through farmland being scrutinised by hovering Kestrels, we spotted a Black Stork; enjoying fantastic views as it flew alongside us. Travelling back up into the Balkan Mountains we passed huge swirling flocks of Swallows and House Sparrows.

Our first stop was at a dry river bed surrounded by the wooded mountains. The wind was steadily picking up, so despite some searching we had only one (unconvincing view) of a bright blue butterfly that could have been Blue Argus; known to occur here, with better sightings of Painted Lady and Wall. As we walked we disturbed several Balkan Wall Lizards; one resting for long enough for us to inspect its patterned body. The wind was also keeping the birds in cover, but we did spot Marsh Tit and Cirl Bunting amongst the scrub, with an Osprey wheeling high overhead, and a Sparrowhawk shooting across the sky.

We travelled higher into the mountains, making a short stop in some cattle-grazed pasture, which we quickly decided to bypass as it was attracting the full force of the wind. Heading through more open areas as we climbed, we saw flocks of sheep accompanied by traditional Karakachan mountain dogs.

Shortly before reaching the village of Kozichino at around 500m; the target of a number of tourist 'jeep safari' groups, we turned off on to a dirt track and set off through the grassland. We quickly spotted the white rump of a bird flying low to the ground, and as it stopped and perched upon a rock, quickly confirmed it as an Isabelline Wheatear; one of the birds we were hoping to spot in this area. Amongst the rocks and bushes several Whinchats and Northern Wheatears perched, flicking their tails and occasionally dropping down in pursuit of a meal. A pair of Short-toed Larks crossed the track ahead of us, and we watched a Sparrowhawk in (unsuccessful) pursuit of a smaller bird. Down in the valley a party of 30 Ravens flew through, and we enjoyed a great show from a pale morph Booted Eagle, which showed its contrasting markings well as it soared overhead.

We continued on our way back through the Dyulino Pass, spotting Mistle Thrush, Nuthatch and Jay as we drove, joining the main road to Varna shortly before Rudnik, where we stopped for an enjoyable lunch at a local restaurant.

Our next visit was to the Kamchia Biosphere Reserve, formed of ancient riverine forest around the floodplain of the Kamchia River, marshes and sand dunes along the Black Sea coast. We took a walk along the edge of the forest, hearing the rapid-fire calls of Red-breasted Flycatchers, and Middle-spotted Woodpeckers calling deep within the trees. Tree Frogs were croaking enthusiastically from the trees, but alas couldn't be spotted amongst the leaves. Although many of the sand dune plants were past their best we found several species still in flower, including the Balkan specialities *Silene thymifolia* and *Alyssum borzaenum*, alongside more familiar species such as Sea Holly *Eryngium maritimum* and Sea Kale *Crambe maritima*. Among the flowers we spotted Lang's Short-tailed Blue, along with the moths Scarce-bordered Straw and Spotted Clover, both of which are found as occasional immigrants in the UK. The boldly marked Black-and-red Bug also caused some interest as it scuttled along the sand, as did a European Hornet meticulously dismembering a Honeybee.

Retracing our steps back towards the main road we spotted a large raptor in the sky. Following our established routine we pulled into the road verge to get a better look, and Minko soon became very animated; quickly producing his telescope. As it soared closer the dark plumage and broad wing shape revealed it as a Greater Spotted Eagle; a great find! Once the eagle was out of sight we continued on our journey to Topola, where we were in search of another heavyweight...

Parked in a layby, telescopes out, and the scanning began. The cliffs at Topola are a known breeding area for the Eagle Owl; the largest owl species in the world, coming in at a respectable 0.5 - 0.75m tall, with the largest individuals having a wingspan approaching 2m! Our first stop drew a blank as we carefully scanned the cliff front, but we did have a flock of around 30 Turtle Doves passing overhead. Moving a little further along the road, we tried again, and there it was - an Eagle Owl reclining under an overhang, high

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up on the cliff. We spent some time enjoying the owl, as it surveyed the landscape around it with its piercing orange eyes; occasionally yawning, waiting for night to fall, when it could re-employ its not insignificant talons! As Kate said it was well-worth travelling 100 miles for! Just as we were leaving a flock of Hawfinch flew over calling, with their distinctive large beaks and white wing bars. The last part of the journey took us on to Krapets, our home for the rest of the trip, with our first Red-footed Falcons of the week spotted along the way.

Day Six: 13 September. Krapets, Durankulak, Shabla Lake, Shabla Tuzla Lake.

Our first morning in Krapets started with a pre-breakfast walk to explore the scrubby habitat close to the hotel. As we made our way to a viewpoint over the shoreline we spotted a Whimbrel picking along the shore, before Trevor spotted a small grebe out at sea, which turned out to be Red-necked Grebe; two good finds!

Following breakfast we set off north to nearby Durankulak Lake to walk along a stretch of sand dunes between the lake and the sea. As we walked along the shoreline, squadrons of Teal, Pintail, Shoveler and Pochard came flying in to the lake. Another good Osprey sighting, along with Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, and the ever present Marsh Harrier, but all were surpassed by a flyby of a magnificent adult White-tailed Eagle. At the end of the dunes was a small open channel and we peered in hopefully; looking for crakes. No luck on that front but we did have a nice selection of waders at close range - Wood Sandpiper, Ruff, Little Ringed Plover and Ringed Plover. As we made our way back down the beach we spotted a Lesser Black-backed Gull with its rich slatey colouration, and much to our surprise, a bat; possibly an inbound migrant such as Nathusius's Pipistrelle.

Moving further north we checked out the top section of the lake and beach; a flock of ten Spoonbill flying in as we arrived. Along the shoreline we saw a small group of Sanderling playing a game of dodge with both the waves and a couple of tourists walking along the shore. Short-toed Eagle and another Osprey were spotted here, as well as a good view of a Hobby with its long pointed wings and streaked underparts. A large party of herons flew overhead; predominantly Grey Herons, but three Purple Herons travelling with them showed clearly their darker colours and smaller size.

Following lunch back at our hotel we headed south this time to Shabla Lake. Driving along the track towards the lake we spotted a 'Steppe Buzzard' sitting in a freshly ploughed field, along with a group of three Marsh Harriers. Further ahead a pair of Purple Herons was taking advantage of a large puddle at the field's edge, and as we drew alongside we spotted a Snipe, motionless and gambling on its superb camouflage.

We enjoyed a walk through grass and scrub habitat that had recolonised a former farmstead, towards the lake. The lake itself was heavily fringed with reeds, which heaved and hummed with the chatter of untold thousands of Starlings, and as we arrived two Great Egrets lifted into the air. Several small channels and streams threaded through the area and we enjoyed some time sat here absorbing the environment around us. We had particularly good sightings of Red-breasted Flycatchers that were flitting around in the scrub and trees, along with Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Redstart and Whitethroat. A steady stream of Starlings poured out of the reeds as we watched, but didn't seem to lessen the chatter from within.

Periodically the Kingfisher's piping calls announced its arrival before this little flash of blue darted past; pausing on a couple of occasions to perch on branches over the water, for all to see. Among patches of flowering mint *Mentha* sp. we found Mallow Skipper and the vivid orange of Lesser Fiery Copper, with some of the group catching a fleeting glimpse of a snake disappearing into cover - most likely a Grass Snake or a Dice Snake, but we couldn't say for sure! More fantastic views of both Osprey and Levant Sparrowhawk as we were leaving, with the chorus provided by Marsh Frogs occasionally peaking as they wound each other up around the water's edge.

Our final stop of the day was at nearby Shabla Tuzla, a saline lagoon, which together with Shabla Lake and the surrounding wetlands and beaches form part of a habitat complex recognised for its importance to breeding, migratory and wintering birds. Shabla Tuzla was particularly good in the evening light and we

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found many waders at close range, including another Broad-billed Sandpiper and Kentish Plover, and as something of a relief, a group of three Avocets; a species that had proved somewhat elusive up until now! A Red-necked Phalarope was carrying out its frenetic feeding behaviour, circling out on the water. While a Spotted Crake was seen on a far bank, quietly picking its way along the edge of the reeds.

With another good day's birding under our belts, it was time to head back to the hotel, where the White Wagtails were making good use of the pool! After a break for dinner, we prepared for our next adventure, as Minko had offered to take us out on a night drive in the local area looking for ever-elusive mammals. We were soon on our way with torches, and a sense of anticipation; headed along some of the dirt tracks we had travelled earlier in the day. Scanning over the fields with torches, all was quiet, with just a small mouse spotted scurrying across the track. Things quickly picked up however! We spotted a Nightjar, along with several larks, before ahead of us, we spotted a pair of eyes shining green in the light. Slowing down to watch, we had a good view of a Golden Jackal running ahead, and shortly after spotted three more, which stopped to watch us for a while too - six points of green shining in the dark. As we made our way back through the fields, we also saw a Badger and two Brown Hares, along with a couple of other small mice and voles. A very exciting end to the day!

Day Seven: 14 September. Balgarevo, Bolata, Kaliakra, Shabla Tuzla Lake.

Our last full day in Bulgaria took us further south along the coast, driving past Cape Shabla; Bulgaria's easternmost point, complete with Bulgaria's oldest lighthouse, and an Osprey travelling along the shore. Much of the land here near Balgarevo was arable, and we stopped alongside some freshly ploughed fields to scan for birds - finding both Skylarks and Crested Larks, along with large flocks of House Sparrows and Corn Buntings. Following a tip-off, we moved on to an area of steppe alongside a small strip of woodland, and before long had located a group of nine Stone Curlews. Unfortunately they flew off soon after we found them, but we did spot both Syrian and Great Spotted Woodpecker, side by side on a telegraph pole; allowing us to compare the differences in the plumage of these two similar birds.

The wind was ever increasing, so we took a slow drive through the steppe, with good views of Northern Wheatear and a Hoopoe with its distinctive crest and long beak in side profile, before it departed on its bouncing flight; black and white barred wings receding. Flying low over a tree line in the distance we picked out a buzzard, the long wings, rufous colour and markings identifying it as our only Long-legged Buzzard of the trip. As it disappeared out of sight we spotted (yet another!) shrike, but a quick check revealed this to be a juvenile Woodchat Shrike, rather than the omnipresent Red-backed Shrikes we had become accustomed to seeing on every other bush.

We headed to the small bay at Bolata, spotting a small group of Shags perched on the cliff side and a Booted Eagle soaring above us before we set off for a walk down through the gorge. Stopping at a vantage point to scan the rock faces we found a juvenile Hobby surveying the scene below it, along with a juvenile Cuckoo tucked in a crevice. The walk through the gorge opened out into an area with old holiday chalets, and as we were stood here two swirling clouds of Levant Sparrowhawks worked their way across the sky; around 50 in each flock.

We headed for our final stop of the day at Kaliakra under rapidly darkening skies. Our arrival at the car park overlooking the impressively tall cliffs coincided with the start of the rain lashing down. We took the decision to wait it out; looking out below at the Sandwich Terns, Black-headed Gulls and Cormorants looking decidedly unimpressed perched out on posts in the sea. The increasing wind and rain dropped a flock of some 20 White Wagtails, accompanied by a Yellow Wagtail; that searched for some shelter from the elements. Minko explained to us the significance of the geography of this headland to migrating birds, which are suddenly confronted by the open expanse of the Black Sea as Bulgaria's coastline makes a dramatic westward turn at this point. This often causes birds to rest in this area, or to turn and head briefly northwards in order to gain more height before striking out over the water. As if to illustrate his point the calls of Bee-eaters above us intensified and as we looked there were hundreds gathering overhead, circling and swirling in brightly-coloured mini-murmurations; seemingly trying to decide 'what next'. As Pat put it - there were Bee-eaters everywhere you listened!

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Amazingly, after the intense downpour, the sky very rapidly brightened. We took our opportunity to walk out along the headland, which has important ruins including fortified walls and Roman baths. Hopping along the walls were many wagtails and Northern Wheatear, and among them we found a splendid Pied Wheatear; well-known breeders in this area and at the western extent of their range here. High trilling calls drew our attention to an incoming wave of Alpine Swifts, and we were accompanied by these aeronautical professionals on much of our walk, often with them whizzing past us at eye-level. Passing a small house owned by the military, its garden teeming with birds, we once again heard the tell-tale calls of Red-breasted Flycatcher and enjoyed more good views of these delightful little birds. Looking down onto rocks below, we found a mixed group of Cormorants and Shags. One of the Cormorants had a green darvic colour ring, and with a little help from our ringer friend from earlier in the week, we were able to find out that the bird had originally been ringed in Greece.

Reaching the end of the headland we enjoyed the views out to sea, in what was now rather fine weather, as a mixed group of Common Dolphins and Harbour Porpoises foraged in the waters below us. While various gulls and cormorants flew by, we also found both Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes foraging close in to shore; the latter still looking resplendent in almost full breeding plumage. After some time here to soak up the environment, with the birds and the ruins, it was time to stroll back to the bus towards our final meal in the hotel.

Day Eight: 15 September. Visit to Atanasovsko Lake and departure from Burgas.

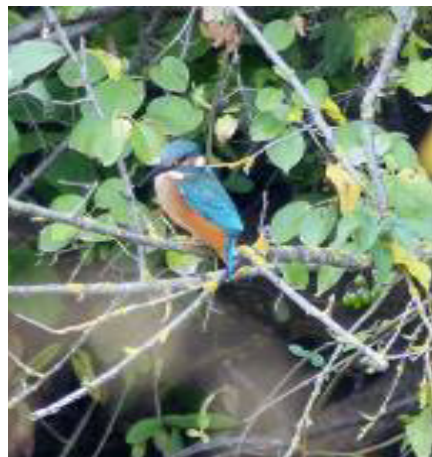
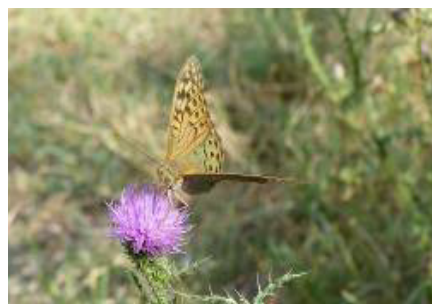
It was an early start this morning to get on the road back to Burgas. We had a stop en-route for a coffee and breakfast in Varna, before reaching the outskirts of Burgas in plenty of time to enjoy an impulsive pit stop at Pomorie Lake. Nothing new here, but a good selection of waders and water birds, and seemingly a big day in the Ruddy Darter calendar as the sky was filled with couples flying in tandem as they prepared for their complicated mating process.

From here it was a very short trip back to the airport, looking out for those last pelicans and raptors on the way, before our flights home with some fond memories of a very special country, at a very exciting time of year.

Thank you to all the travellers for joining us in Bulgaria, and to our great guide Minko - I hope you all enjoyed it as much as I did!

**Laurie Jackson, Wildlife Travel.
September 2018.**

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Top - Red-breasted Flycatcher; Balkan Wall Lizard; Cardinal Fritillary. Middle - Lesser Fiery Copper; Kingfisher; Spurge Hawk-moth; Kaliakra. Bottom - Krapets.

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BULGARIA 2018: some highlights

ENGLISH NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th
BIRDS (* - 'in the hand'; H - heard only)									
Family Anatidae (Ducks, geese, swans)									
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		◆		◆		◆	◆	◆
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	◆	◆		◆		◆	◆	◆
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	◆	◆		◆		◆	◆	◆
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		◆					◆	◆
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>								
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		◆		◆		◆	◆	◆
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				◆		◆	◆	◆
Garganey	<i>Anas wuerquedula</i>		◆		◆				
Pochard	<i>Aythya farina</i>		◆		◆		◆		
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>		◆						
Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>				◆				
Family Phasianidae (Pheasants, partridges)									
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>		H						
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>						◆	◆	
Family Podicipedidae (Grebes)									
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>				◆			◆	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		◆		◆		◆		
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		◆		◆		◆		
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>						◆	◆	◆
Family Pelecanidae (Pelicans)									
White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	◆	◆	◆	◆				◆
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	◆	◆		◆				
Family Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants)									
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i>	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	◆	◆
(Mediterranean) Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii</i>						◆	◆	
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	◆	
Family Ardeidae (Hérons)									
Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		◆	◆	◆				
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola rolloides</i>		◆	◆	◆				
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	◆	◆		◆		◆	◆	◆
Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>				◆		◆		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	◆	◆
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		◆				◆		
Family Ciconiidae (Storks)									
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>			◆					
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			◆		◆			
Family Threskiornithidae (Ibises, spoonbills)									
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		◆						
Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	◆	◆		◆		◆		
Family Phoenicopteridae (Flamingoes)									
Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			◆	◆				
Family Accipitridae (Hawks, eagles, vultures)									
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>						◆		
Osprey	<i>Pandion halietus</i>		◆			◆	◆	◆	
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>		◆	◆	◆				
(Greater) Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>					◆			
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		◆	◆	◆		◆		
Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>				◆	◆		◆	
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		◆	◆	◆		◆	◆	

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	ENGLISH NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th
*	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>			◆		H	◆	◆	
Family Turdidae (Thrushes)										
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>					◆			
	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>					◆			
	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		◆	◆		◆		◆	◆
Family Sylviidae (Sylviid warblers)										
*	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			◆					
*	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			◆	◆	◆	◆		
	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			◆	◆		◆		
*	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>				◆	◆	◆	◆	
Family Acrocephalidae (Reed warblers)										
*	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			◆					
*	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			◆	◆				
*	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>			◆	◆				
*	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>			◆	◆				
Family Locustellidae (Grasshopper warblers)										
*	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>				◆				
Family Phylloscopidae (Leaf warblers)										
	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		◆	◆	◆	H	◆	◆	
	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			◆	◆	◆	◆		
Family Paridae (Tits)										
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>					◆		◆	
	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		◆	◆		◆		◆	
	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>					◆			
	Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>			◆		H			
Family Aegithalidae (Long-tailed tits)										
	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			◆					
Family Remizidae (Penduline tits)										
	Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>		H						
Family Sittidae (Nuthatches)										
	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			◆		◆			
Family Laniidae (Shrikes)										
*	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	
Family Corvidae (Crows)										
	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		◆	◆		◆	◆	◆	◆
	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆
	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>					◆	◆		
	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>		◆		◆	◆	◆		
	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			◆		◆			
Family Sturnidae (Starlings)										
	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Family Oriolidae (Orioles)										
	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>				◆				
Family Passeridae (Sparrows)										
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
*	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			◆	◆				
Family Fringillidae (Finches)										
	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		◆	◆		◆			
	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>						◆		
	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>			◆					
	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			◆		◆			
Family Emberizidae (Buntings)										
	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>			◆		◆			

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					◆				◆	◆
	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>			◆				◆	◆

MAMMALS										
Carnivores										
	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>						◆		
	Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>						◆		
Cetaceans (Whales, dolphins and porpoises)										
	Black Sea Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphinus ponticus</i>							◆	
	Black Sea Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena relicta</i>							◆	
Rodents, insectivores and lagomorphs										
	Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europeus</i>							◆	
	Souslik	<i>Spermophilus citellus</i>			◆					

AMPHIBIANS										
	European Tree Frog	<i>Hyla arborea</i>		H	H		H			
	Agile Frog	<i>Rana dalmatina</i>						◆		
	Marsh Frog	<i>Pelophylax ridibundus</i>		◆			◆			

REPTILES										
	European Pond Terrapin	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>		◆						
	Balkan Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis tauricus</i>					◆			

	ENGLISH NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th
LEPIDOPTERA - Butterflies										
Family HesperIIDae (Skippers)										
	Mallow Skipper	<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>		◆				◆		
	Obethür's Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus armoricanus</i>			◆					
Family Papilionidae (Swallowtails, festoons, apollos)										
	Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		◆	◆	◆	◆			
Family Pieridae (Whites)										
	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	
	Eastern Bath White	<i>Pontia edusa</i>		◆	◆	◆				
	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
	Berger's/Pale Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfajariensis/hyale</i>						◆		
Family Lycaenidae (Blues, coppers, hairstreaks)										
	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>		◆	◆		◆	◆		
	Lesser Fiery Copper	<i>Lycaena thersamon</i>			◆			◆		
	Purple Hairstreak	<i>Favonius quercus</i>			◆					
	Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>		◆			◆			
	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>		◆	◆			◆		
	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus Icarus</i>		◆	◆	◆	◆	◆		
Family Nymphalidae (Nymphs, fritillaries and browns)										
	Cardinal Fritillary	<i>Argynnis pandora</i>			◆		◆	◆		
	Knapweed Fritillary	<i>Melitaea phoebe</i>				◆				
	Lesser Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea trivia</i>			◆		◆			
	Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea athalia</i>		◆						
	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>					◆	◆		
	Wall	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>					◆			

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ENGLISH NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>		◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Great Banded Grayling	<i>Brintesia circe</i>		◆	◆		◆			
LEPIDOPTERA - Moths									
Family Geometridae (Thorns, beauties, umbers and allies)									
Purple-barred Yellow	<i>Lythria purpuraria</i>		◆	◆		◆			
Family Crambidae (Grass moths)									
Mint Moth	<i>Pyrausta aurata</i>			◆					
Family Sphingidae (Hawkmoths)									
Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>		◆	◆		◆		◆	
Spurge Hawk-moth	<i>Hyles euphorbiae</i>						◆		
Family Erebidae (Underwings and tussocks)									
The Amah	<i>Dysauxes famula</i>							◆	
Family Noctuidae (Noctuids)									
Spotted Clover	<i>Protoschinia scutosa</i>					◆			
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>			◆	◆				
Spotted Sulphur	<i>Acontia trabealis</i>			◆					
Scarce Bordered Straw	<i>Helicoverpa armigera</i>					◆	◆		

ODONATA - Dragonflies and Damselflies									
Family Lestidae (Spreadwings)									
Southern Emerald Damselfly	<i>Lestes barbarus</i>		◆						
Family Coenagrionidae (Pond damselflies)									
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>		◆						
Family Aeshnidae (Hawkers)									
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>			◆	◆		◆		
Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>		◆				◆		
Family Libellulidae (Chasers)									
Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>		◆						
Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>		◆	◆	◆		◆		◆
Scarlet Darter	<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>		◆	◆					

OTHER INVERTEBRATES									
HEMIPTERA (True bugs)									
Black-and-red Bug	<i>Lygaeus equestris/simulans</i>					◆	◆		
HYMENOPTERA (Grasshoppers and allies)									
European Hornet	<i>Vespa crabro</i>				◆	◆	◆		
Violet Carpenter Bee	<i>Xylocopa violacea</i>		◆	◆					
GASTROPODA (Snails and slugs)									
Roman Snail	<i>Helix pomatia</i>					◆			
MANTODEA (Mantids)									
a praying mantis	<i>Mantis cf religiosa</i>						◆		

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Plants seen at Kamchia Riverine Forest and Durankulak

	SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH NAME
ANGIOSPERMS: DICOTYLEDONS		
Apiaceae (Carrot Family)		
	<i>Eryngium maritimum</i>	Sea Holly
Asteraceae (Daisy Family)		
	<i>Centaurea arenaria</i>	a knapweed
Brassicaceae (Cabbage Family)		
	<i>Alyssum borzaeanum</i>	an alyssum
	<i>Crambe maritima</i>	Sea Kale
Campanulaceae (Bellflower Family)		
	<i>Jasione heldreichii</i>	a sheep's bit scabious
Caryophyllaceae (Pink Family)		
	<i>Saponaria officinalis</i>	Soapwort
	<i>Silene euxina</i>	Elegant Catchfly
	<i>Silene thymifolia</i>	a catchfly
Euphorbiaceae (Spurge Family)		
	<i>Euphorbia seguieriana</i>	Siberian Spurge
Plantaginaceae (Plantain Family)		
	<i>Linaria genistifolia</i>	Broom-leaved Toadflax
ANGIOSPERMS: MONOCOTYLEDONS		
Poaceae (Grass Family)		
	<i>Ammophila arenaria</i>	Marram Grass