

Romania

Danube Delta & Black Sea

Sat 7th – Sun 15th Sept 2013



*Photos (clockwise, from top left): A fine portrait of a young **Dalmatian Pelican** • An adult **Hobby** poses beautifully beside the ponton • A juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** – one of the sights of migration in eastern Europe • No less so is the **Spotted Flycatcher**, which we saw well • A real rarity in Romania, this **Terek Sandpiper** was seen on two days • **Bee-eaters** perched on a wire – a classic pose! © photos on left by tour participant Peter Farren; photos on right by tour leader Zoli Baczó*

**report compiled by tour leader:
Peter Kennerley**

Trip Diary

Tour Leaders: Peter Kennerley and Zoli Baczó

with Don Docherty & Ann Hide, Peter & Judy Farren, Peter & Dawn Gear, John Kenward & Helga Plate, Otto & Jean Meth-Cohn, Martin Wass, Chris & Jackie Wilkinson and Mary Yale

Danube Delta & Black Sea

Limosa's autumn tour to Romania focuses on the magic of migration, which this region of the Black Sea experiences, regardless of the prevailing weather. Here we combine a wonderful selection of eastern European birds with migrants from the north whilst enjoying a relaxing week-long break along the Black Sea coast and Danube Delta. It is possible to watch roadside birds included such delights as Roller and Bee-eater, together with common migrant species such as Red-backed Shrike and Red-breasted Flycatcher, which are so hard to see at home. Add to these some of the scarcer and highly sought after European breeders including Levant Sparrowhawk, Great Black-headed Gull and Lesser Spotted Eagle. By the coast, wetlands and shallow lagoons offer resting spots for many migrant shorebirds including Dunlin, Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints, while small groups of Broad-billed and Marsh Sandpipers, and flocks of migrating terns just add icing to the cake.

This exciting tour includes several nights on a floating ponton in the Danube Delta, which provides a sublime experience as we cruise slowly along the backwaters of this unique region. The ponton is actually a luxury floating barge which is slowly towed by a tug-boat. Birding is done from both the ponton and also from the smaller craft, which can get along the narrower waterways and into some remote corners of the delta. Here we visit lakes that we can only dream about in Britain, where Whiskered and Black Terns, Pygmy Cormorants, Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Great Egrets, Squacco, Purple and Night Herons dominate the scene. Woodlands of poplar and willow harbour Lesser Spotted, Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, while Ospreys and White-tailed Eagles float overhead, often joined by migrating Black Storks or Honey Buzzards.

This proved to be a most relaxing and bird-filled week and, with 170+ species recorded, the range and variety of birds is excellent. This tour is ideal for those who really do not like the idea of walking too far during their holiday, and who want good food and plenty of relaxation. Most excursions made during the stay on the Ponton are done by boat and require very little walking. Elsewhere, excursions made on foot are mostly on flat ground and taken at a leisurely pace. This really is birding as easy as it comes.

7th September

After meeting our guide, Zoltan (Zoli), and driver, Robi, at Bucharest airport we sped off on the newly extended highway all the way to the coastal town of Mamaia on the Black Sea coast. Along the way several Rollers and Bee-eaters were seen, as were the only Spoonbills of the tour, although we were unable to stop here to enjoy them. We reached Mamaia just after 8.30pm, to be greeted by a bus festooned with fairy lights and gyrating, semi-naked dancers; some of our group began to wonder just what they had let themselves in for. Thankfully our hotel was situated at the northern (quiet) end of the town and we managed to avoid any further repeats of this unseemly spectacle.

8th September

We began the day with a pre-breakfast amble by the lake, where several Little Gulls were dipping for insects and numerous Yellow-legged Gulls floated overhead. A Black-necked Grebe was found quite close inshore but more unexpected was a party of 26 rather distant divers (loons) which flew south. Black-throated is the most likely species to occur here, but in all honesty, they were just too distant to be certain which species they were. The adjacent bushes held a Red-backed Shrike and couple of Willow Warblers plus a rather bedraggled Tree Sparrow. Following breakfast we drove the short distance to the refinery pools at Navodari.

This year the water levels were quite high, but this didn't prevent us from finding a great range of birds. Terns topped the billing with great views of Sandwich, Common and Little perching on a floating boom, together with a Common Sandpiper and numerous Cormorants. Four Garganey and a couple of Pintail were found among the Mallard and Teal, and our first Pygmy Cormorants, a party of three birds flew past. Shorebird numbers were much reduced compared with previous years due to the high water levels, but in the end we found Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Ruff and Dunlin.

Moving on, we drove through vast fields that once held sunflowers and other crops but now seemed to be sprouting wind turbines. Crested Larks and Kestrels were quite numerous and just before we reached our next stop at the Sitorman Quarry, a couple of Hoopoes, the only ones we were to see on the tour, fed quietly beside the road giving nice views. Pied Wheatear is one of Romania's star breeding birds here at the western limit of its breeding range. The Sitorman Quarry is a reliable site, holding several breeding pairs, and by mid September this is usually the only place in Romania where they can still be found. Despite this, it took us quite some time to pin one down. Initially each wheatear we checked proved to be a Northern, then we found a couple of distant birds that were clearly Pied but the distance made the views less than satisfactory. As we approached the closer bird it was chased off by an Isabelline Wheatear that we hadn't been aware of. As we searched for another pair we watched a pair of Long-legged Buzzards hunting Souseliks over a hillside, a Lesser Spotted Eagle soared over a distant woodland and pale morph Booted Eagle passed overhead. Lunchtime beckoned and we still hadn't clinched the elusive wheatear, so we retired to a nearby eatery where a party of Spanish Sparrows were playing hide-and-seek with us in the crops. A quick return visit to the quarry almost immediately produced a Pied Wheatear close to the coach and everyone enjoyed prolonged 'scope views of this dapper little chat.

As most wetlands were brimming with water, or completely dry, Zoli recommended that we change our plans and spend time at nearby Nuntasi Lake where the water levels were ideal, and the previous week he had seen thousands of waterbirds there. This proved to be an astute move, and the spectacle that lay before us was one that will linger long in our memories. Avocets stretched in a white line from one end of the lake to the other, numbering over 4,000. Thousands of duck, mostly Mallard and Teal formed dense packs in the shallow water, obscuring anything smaller amongst them. The closer shoreline held hundreds of waders, with Ruffs, Curlew Sandpipers, Dunlins and Little Stints dominating. But carefully scanning through these birds revealed a treasure trove of goodies that included half a dozen Marsh and a couple of Broad-billed Sandpipers. The large packs of roosting gulls were mostly comprised of Caspian, Black-headed and Mediterranean. Out on the water a party of nine White Pelicans was eventually found – we had been so engrossed in the smaller birds on the close shore that we had completely overlooked these huge white birds! As we were leaving Zoli pointed out a Little Owl on the roof of a derelict house, an easy bird to see if you knew where to look – in the opposite direction to that which we'd all been gazing for the last 90 minutes. We had enjoyed a superb day of birding along the Black Sea coast and looked forward to tomorrow with great anticipation.

9th September

This morning our pre-breakfast stroll took in the Black Sea coast of Mamaia, just 200 metres in the opposite direction to the lake. Almost immediately we heard a Red-breasted Flycatcher calling and very quickly we were enjoying great looks at this delightful little chappie. Alongside it were a Spotted Flycatcher, two or three Willow Warblers and a male Redstart, which made a fleeting appearance. We spent the rest of the day birding to the north, mostly in the Vadu area. We began at a small wooded area quite close to the coast, one of Zoli's favourite sites and a migrant hot spot.

As soon as we got off the coach we were surrounded by Red-backed Shrikes, they were everywhere, at least a dozen in the first 100 metres, including one of the few adult males we saw on the tour. This small woodland was packed with birds, particularly Red-breasted and Spotted Flycatchers, which were conspicuous but by carefully working the edge we found Icterine and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Redstart, plus many Willow Warblers. Overhead small parties of flava

wagtails drifted south, along with the occasional Tree Pipit. A small reed-fringed fish pond produced several Purple Herons, a couple of Gadwall, our best views so far of Whiskered Terns and a couple of Caspian Terns.

Returning to the coach, three adult male Red-footed Falcons put on a nice show as they hawked for insects above the woodland, while a couple of Turtle Doves added to the variety. During lunch in Vadu, Peter F and Chris watched a couple of pelicans fly low over the restaurant – Peter's photos proving them to be Dalmatian's, thankfully we would see several more during the tour. The afternoon was spent exploring some old settling lagoons near Vadu, always an exciting place to bird. The Common Tern colony was a hive of activity with adults coming and going to feed their hungry youngsters. The lagoons held Black-winged Stilt, three Temminck's Stints plus a scattering of Green and Wood Sandpipers. Over the fields at least three Gull-billed Terns and some distant Collared Pratincoles were hawking for insects, plus a soaring adult White-tailed Eagle. Passerine migrants were few and far between though, the best being eight or more Northern Wheatears. We finished the day back at Nuntasi Lake where the shoreline and birds were much farther out than yesterday – when the wind had pushed the water to our side of the lake. Thankfully we found a small pool that held a nice selection of birds including nice comparative views of Little and Temminck's Stints, Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers, plus Wood, Green and Curlew Sandpipers. All in all, a great day packed full with exciting migrants.

10th September

We skipped the pre-breakfast walk this morning, instead opting for an early breakfast to maximize our time at Histria. After departing from the hotel we went directly to the reedbeds near Histria, which are one of the best sites in Romania for Paddyfield Warbler, yet another species whose European range reaches its western limit on the Black Sea coast. The warblers are usually straightforward in the spring when they are singing, but in autumn they can be a bit more tricky. Most adults will have already left and the youngsters will have dispersed, although hopefully not too far. This year they were easy to find.

After explaining what we were about to do, Zoli played a recording of the song and almost immediately there was a movement in the reeds. Another short snippet of song and a bright young Paddyfield Warbler popped briefly into view. We moved in closer, tried again and this time it stayed in view. Result. As we watched, a Reed Warbler appeared alongside it, ideal for comparing the field characters of these tricky Acros. Next came a Great Reed Warbler, then a couple of Whinchats and a Reed Bunting, while the adjacent grassland produced a couple of Sky Larks and Eurasian Curlews.

Moving onto the archaeological museum at Histria, a drab building but one surrounded by trees and bushes that act like a magnet for migrant birds. We quickly found a scattering of the expected Red-breasted and Spotted Flycatchers, numerous Willow Warblers, Garden Warbler, Blackcap and several Lesser Whitethroats. We thought that was it until Peter F. showed me an image on his camera – Icterine Warbler, taken 20 seconds earlier. Now it was nowhere to be seen – in fact it took us almost 15 minutes to relocate it, but when we finally did, it put on a fine show.

All too soon we had to say farewell to these migrants and press on to Murigihol where our ponton was awaiting our arrival, and lunch was getting cold. We drove pretty much non-stop, a drive of about two hours, although we did grind to a halt when Zoli spotted an eagle on a roadside post. We piled out and were faced with a large immature *Aquila*. With nothing to compare it against, size was immaterial. The large white tips to the wing coverts, and overall dark brown plumage immediately ruled Lesser Spotted and Imperial. Discussion centred on Steppe and Greater Spotted. It was clearly too dark to be juvenile Steppe, but what about an older bird? But the extensive spotting on the wing coverts ruled out an older bird, or a Steppe Eagle of any age, so by default we concluded it must be a Greater Spotted. But in flight it seemed too long tailed and narrow winged, fitting Steppe better. Clearly it was Greater Spotted but I wonder what we would have made of it if we had only seen it in flight from below? As it gained height, it was joined by a Eurasian Sparrowhawk, although this didn't help to judge its size.

Once on the ponton, we were greeted by our crew and the fair Mikaella, who spoke excellent English and was here to earn enough to pay her college fees. We immediately set off downstream along the Stantu Gheorghe or St George's Channel towards our destination for the night, the hamlet of Stantu Gheorghe. Along the way we passed through vast flocks of Whiskered Terns feeding over the channel, watched dozens of Hobbies hunting dragonflies and just having fun, and saw a tree festooned with Pygmy Cormorants. Add to this the occasional Osprey, Honey Buzzard and Grey-headed Woodpecker, and you begin to appreciate the richness of this magical wetland. We reached our mooring as the light was beginning to fade, and looked forward to tomorrow and our visit to the fabled Sacalin Island.

11th September

Those who rose early were treated to a magnificent sunrise as the mist rose off the river. We had moored on the opposite bank to the village, and were able to watch a flypast of small numbers of various herons, Cormorants, cavorting Hobbies, Caspian Gulls and Whiskered Terns. Somewhere below us a Savi's Warbler quietly lurked and in the distance a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker called, which had Zoli reaching for his speaker. A quick blast and a female flew across the clearing and landed in a bush in front of where we were standing. Scopes were quickly positioned and everyone soaked up this endearing little bird.

Following breakfast we boarded the three smaller boats and slowly made our way along the Turceasca channel to the lagoon behind Sacalin Island. We soon stopped to watch a juvenile Levant Sparrowhawk sitting just above eye level and giving superb views, we were so close that the diagnostic dark eye was clearly visible. Along the way Squacco Herons showed in abundance and a Little Bittern made a brief appearance as it flew over our heads. A couple of Honey Buzzards accompanied the numerous Marsh Harriers and abundant Hobbies. We will all forever remember the moment when we emerged from the channel into the lagoon, and entered a paradise for birds. Squacco Herons and Whiskered Terns sat on the floating pads of water chestnuts, while overhead there were Purple Herons and Cormorants. Distant shimmering lines of White Pelicans urged us in that direction, but closer Dalmatians distracted us. Usually you would dismiss the gulls, but here there are likely to be Great Black-headed Gulls, which have nested in the delta since 2009. So we were torn, where to go, what to look at. As we drifted towards the closest Dalmatian Pelican, Zoli found a Great Black-headed Gull so we changed tack and moved in that direction, then two more were found. Once everyone had soaked up this wonderful spectacle we moved closer to the island and the White Pelican flock. We had to wade ashore for the final 30 metres – not as far as in previous years due to higher water levels.

There are just too many highlights to mention them all. The shoreline was a mass of waders, gulls and terns and we soon set about searching through them. Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers again dominated the small shorebirds but here there were many more Broad-billed Sandpipers than we'd previously seen, at least 35 in total. Groups of Ruff and Wood Sandpipers were feeding in the damp grasslands, while Grey Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Dunlin and Redshank were all familiar birds from an English winter estuary scene, but it was more than likely these birds would be spending the winter months in Africa. Amongst the Caspian Gull flock we found another adult and a first-winter Great Black-headed Gull and a solitary Black Tern within the roosting Caspian, Sandwich and Common Terns. Offshore at least three Arctic Skuas harassed the passing terns.

All too soon it was well past lunchtime and time to leave. The afternoon was spent near the village and on an adjacent canal. As we reached the cover of the trees and bushes migrant Red-breasted and Spotted Flycatchers, Willow Warblers and Red-backed Shrikes appeared, and a single Golden Oriole was seen by some. But the undoubted highlight of the day was an obliging Grey-headed Woodpecker that must have come out, unseen, to Zoli's recording, and sat atop a concrete power pole. After this we returned to the ponton and immediately began our journey upstream, birding from the upper deck was a great way to finish a great day.

12th September

We awoke to find we had anchored in a secluded waterway in the S. Gheorghe Channel. Birding from the top deck, invigorated by freshly ground coffee got the day off to a fine start, as did superb views of a Grey-headed Woodpecker, especially appreciated by those who missed yesterday's bird. The reeds beside the river held Great Reed, Reed and Sedge Warblers, and parties of Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits called from the woodland. Our target for this morning was Erenciuc Lake, a secluded backwater accessed by a narrow channel through flooded forest. Using our three small boats we slowly made our way towards the lake, which opened up before us as we cleared the trees.

The mats of floating water chestnuts supported numerous Moorhens, Coots and Squacco Herons, a solitary Ferruginous Duck and best of all, three young Dalmatian Pelicans that gave us our best views so far of this endangered species. A young Penduline Tit was a nice bonus and which showed well for everyone, and we all heard the characteristic pinging call of Bearded Tit (or was that Zoli?), but this was one bird that stubbornly refused to materialise. Back on the ponton, the more foolhardy decided to explore the wooded island opposite where we had moored. Dire warnings on man-eating mosquitoes went ignored and pretty soon the male contingent were having their blood drained, and for just a Treecreeper – although it was a very nice Treecreeper with particularly white underparts, and a bunch of frogs!

Soon we were all back on the ponton and steaming upriver, leaving Mosquito Island far behind and enjoying a hearty lunch served by the now smouldering Mikaela. Again we passed through hundreds of feeding Whiskered Terns, and mixed with them were just one or two Blacks and White-winged Blacks, always nice to compare these side by side to appreciate the subtle differences. After failing to negotiate a rather difficult berthing, the Captain opted to moor the ponton in the middle of a bush, which he did with great acumen – sideways, with much cracking of branches, to the amazement of the gathering crowd who had to rescue their fishing tackle. Yes, well... enough said. We didn't move again until the morning. But we did go out in the small boats to investigate the sand banks on a quiet ox-bow. This was a really peaceful and pleasant way to round off the day, with waders like Green and Common Sandpipers, Spotted and Common Redshank, Kentish Plovers and best of all a Terek Sandpiper – quite a rare bird in Romania and most unexpected here – they are usually found at the coastal shorebird honeypots. Overhead Bee-eaters formed a large pre-roost gathering, Hobbies continued to entertain us with their antics, and one boat glimpsed a Black Stork as it came into roost.

13th September

Our final morning on the ponton turned out to be quite memorable one. We began on the upper deck and were soon treated to eight Black Storks, which must have spent the night in the nearby woodlands. They flew low over our heads, in groups of three, three and two, and we enjoyed wondering views as they continued their migration to Africa. Parties of Whiskered Terns flew low over the river in purposeful manner, quite different to the feeding birds we had been seeing earlier, again they were going somewhere. Grey-headed Woodpecker and Song Thrush called in the nearby woodland but neither revealed themselves.

Following an egg-less breakfast (it seems we had emptied the larder) we clambered the small boats to make a return visit into the ox-bow we explored the previous day. Almost immediately a male Black Woodpecker flew over the river and landed in full view. Thankfully he stayed and everyone enjoyed superb views of this magnificent woodpecker as he bashed away at a dead tree – with bits of bark flying off in all directions. The ox-bow had a similar spread of birds to the previous day, including the Terek Sandpiper, which allowed us to get much closer. The Caspian Terns were just as wary, however, and we again failed to make out any details on the leg rings.

On our return to the ponton, while watching Green Sandpipers, our boat began to take on water, initially not too much but it quickly became apparent that we had a Titanic situation on our hands. Thankfully we beached the boat on a sandbank before we went under, and our crew began bailing out the water. We

were rescued when Zoli returned with an empty boat, having returned his group to the ponton, and the stricken boat made it back as well, without its passengers and minus many gallons of water the increasingly large hole was safely above the water line. Needless to say, this is why we all carry our life jackets with us!

Once safely on board we continued our journey to Murighiol but were soon engulfed in a torrential downpour that reduced visibility to a matter of yards, and which was accompanied by spectacular lightning and cracks of thunder. It must have put down about 75mm of water in less than 30 minutes- that's how deep it was in the small boats – lucky we hadn't got caught in this when we were on the sandbank. At Murighiol we said farewell to our crew and boarded the bus. After ordering lunch we called in at Murighiol Lake, a salt lake on the outskirts of the town, and spent an enjoyable hour searching through the many ducks where five Black-necked Grebes lurked. Water levels were on the high side to hold large numbers of waders but the longer legged species including Avocets, Black-winged Stilts and Black-tailed Godwits were all present. Overhead a couple of Long-legged Buzzards toyed with a Common, and a juvenile Red-footed Falcon quickly passed through. But the highlight came as a group of 250 or more migrating White Pelicans slowly made their way towards us, rising in a thermal then gliding until they reached the next one, and all the time rarely flapping their wings.

During lunch we realised how serious the flooding was, the lower lying parts of Tulcea, where we were staying for the next two nights were under a metre or more of water. But this was something that we'd deal with later, and we decided to press on to the Babadag Forest as planned. Along the way we stopped at Sarinasuf Lake where the highlight was an adult Great Black-headed Gull in the gull flock by the roadside, while waders included Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stint and our first Sanderling, a rather smart juvenile.

Babadag Forest was extremely pleasant in the evening light, and the open character of the woodland made viewing particularly easy. Zoli soon brought in a male Middle Spotted Woodpecker, which sat in the open for several minutes, followed by a pair of Sombre Tits which wouldn't stay put for more than a few seconds in the open before flying onto the next tree. The woodland here was full of Jays, collecting acorns, and overhead the skies were filled with Bee-eaters, Swallows and Sand Martins. On our return to Tulcea we passed by numerous flooded fields, and at one place the road itself was flooded and only just passable. But we eventually reached our hotel without incident and settled into our rooms for the next two nights, everyone appreciating the rather more spacious bathrooms than those on the ponton.

14th September

Rain, much of it heavy, had been predicted for the morning, and for once the forecasters got it right. It was raining when we left the hotel, and still raining when we reached Babadag Forest 90 minutes later. It was also really cold as well, 11C. So whoever recommended that we should bring a woolly hat and gloves to go birding at sea level in southern Europe was spot on. The problem was that it seemed such daft advice that nobody bothered to bring them. So after a half-hearted attempt to bird in the forest, in the pouring rain, with less than half the group, we retired to a nearby restaurant for a warming cup of coffee or two. Babadag wasn't exactly birdless, in fact, given the conditions we did remarkably well there with Hawfinch topping the bill, and Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, and bags of Chaffinches showing nicely, so we vowed to return later in the day if the weather improved. Coffee dragged into lunch and it was 1pm before we eventually emerged to brightening skies. Martin quickly found a Spotted Flycatcher, followed by a Tree Pipit, clearly birds were starting to reappear, desperate to start feeding again. From the restaurant it was only a short drive to the Macin Mountains National Park so we headed there, stopping to watch three Wood Larks on the overhead wires.

The Macin Mountains are a delightful location and in the breeding season would doubtless resound with bird song. In mid-September however, we were primarily searching for migrants and soon found a party of Black Redstarts, followed by an extremely confiding Red-backed Shrike, and several Blackcaps,

Willow Warblers and a male Redstart. A couple of Booted Eagles passed overhead, as did at least four Long-legged Buzzards, a similar number of Common Buzzards and a pair of Ravens. This was clearly a place to spend more time, but the heavy rain and plummeting temperatures had thwarted our plans. We left earlier than we had intended to as we really wanted to spend some time back at Babadag Forest in brighter, sunny conditions – unfortunately when we got there the sun was already low and the valleys were in shadow. The birds were still here but not in the numbers from earlier that day. We did enjoy nice views of Nuthatch, and both Green Woodpecker and Sombre Tit put in fleeting appearances. With this being our final afternoon we returned to Tulcea with ample time for final preparations for our homeward journey the following day.

15th September

We awoke to a much-improved day, the skies were brighter and the temperature had gone up by a notch or two. Despite this, we still had to return to Bucharest and catch our flights home. Initially we visited the waterfront in Tulcea where a large Russian river cruiser was moored, we all considered ourselves privileged to have travelled on our cosy ponton rather than this monstrosity. After leaving Tulcea shortly after 08.30, we headed west until we reached some roadside fishponds close to the Danube bridge near Braila, where we spent 45 minutes scanning through the vast flocks of birds out on the water. The majority were Coots, but amongst them we found several Great Crested Grebes, Garganey, Gadwall and our only Red-crested Pochard of the tour, a rather drab immature or female. Several Pygmy Cormorants perched in the reeds and gave nice 'scope views, while much closer, along the water's edge we watched Black-tailed Godwits, a flock of swimming Spotted Redshanks masquerade as phalaropes, our second juvenile Sanderling, and Zoli flushed a couple of snipes. Raptors here remained frustratingly distant but did include a Long-legged Buzzard together with four Common Buzzards, and a Red-footed Falcon.

Moving on, we soon encountered a flock of Black Storks, numbering about 50 birds that had just taken off in the warming conditions, presumably having been grounded by the atrocious weather of the previous two days. Soon after setting off another flock of about 30 birds was seen, and some were still on the ground – all very frustrating as we couldn't stop here, but we estimated that there were at least 85 birds here, and quite possibly many more. After reaching the expressway we pulled over into a rest area for our picnic lunch stop just beyond Slobozia, a location that has been very good for watching migrating birds in the past. Today lacked the mass raptor or stork movements, but we were treated to superb views of a male Montagu's Harrier that flew south right over us, a Long-legged Buzzard which did the same but a bit further away, and two Alpine Swifts that moved through with the continuous procession of Barn Swallows. After this, we drove non-stop to the airport, which we reached at 14.30, with more than ample time to spare. After saying our goodbyes to Zoli and Robi we sailed through the formalities without incident or delay. Here we also bid farewell to John and Helga who were flying to Germany.

We all enjoyed a fantastic tour and between us we had seen or heard 172 bird species, some of which are extremely rare in Europe including Paddyfield Warbler, Pied Wheatear and Great Black-headed Gull. We also encountered a wealth of migrating birds that featured high on everyone's most-wanted, including masses of shorebirds and terns, which added variety, quality and quantity to our experience. No two years are ever the same, and the birds and our experiences with them change from year to year. We stayed at some great hotels, with welcoming and friendly people, and enjoy superb food. I look forward to returning again.

My thanks go to Saker Tours for making such smooth arrangements, to Zoltan (Zoli) our leader for finding so many birds, without his expertise our bird list and experiences would be only a fraction of what they were. Our driver, Robi, looked after us extremely well and drove us with care and consideration throughout. And a big thank you to everyone who made it such a pleasure and privilege to lead this tour.

Peter Kennerley

Daily itinerary

- 7/9. Arrived Bucharest and drove directly to the Black Sea coast, arriving after dark. Overnight Mamaia.
- 8/9. Pre-breakfast walk in parkland near the hotel in Mamaia, followed by visits to the refinery pools at Navodari, Sitorman Quarry and Nuntasi Lake near Vadu. Overnight Mamaia.
- 9/9. Pre-breakfast walk by hotel at Mamaia, followed by search for migrants in woodland near Vadu, then Vadu settling lagoons and return visit to Nuntasi Lake. Overnight Mamaia.
- 10/9. Morning exploring Histria region, searching for Paddyfield Warblers in reedbeds and migrants at the archaeological centre. Joined the ponton in Murighiol at midday and spent the afternoon travelling on the S. Gheorghe Channel. Night on the ponton near village of Stantu Gheorghe.
- 11/9. Morning to Sacalin Island. PM exploring Tataru channel and adjacent bushes until late PM, then return along S. Gheorghe Channel, mooring up near Erenciuc Lake just after dusk.
- 12/9. Morning exploring channel to Erenciuc lake. Afternoon exploring river at Dunavatu de Sus, overnight on ponton at Dunavatu de Sus.
- 13/9. Morning exploring the river at Dunavatu de Sus, then continue to Murighiol. Depart ponton and explore Murighiol and Sarinasuf Lakes, and Babadag Forest. Overnight in Tulcea.
- 14/9. Morning to Babadag Forest, PM to Macin Mountains National Park and return to Tulcea via Babadag Forest. Overnight Tulcea.
- 15/9. Drive to Bucharest with occasional roadside stops.

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(A total of 172 species was recorded by the group)

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted on five dates, although two in shrubland by the Tataru channel on 11/9 were the only birds seen well by most. As elsewhere in Europe, this species is introduced here.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Several groups totalling approximately 40 individuals in the lagoon at Sacalin Island on 11/9 were the only sighting. Birds in this region show a pink bill characteristic of the eastern race *A. a. rubrirostris*.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Noted on five dates, including four dates in the delta. Highs included 20+ on 8/9 (mostly at Nuntasi Lake), and 30+ in the lagoon at Sacalin Island on 11/9.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

At least 30 at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and Histria on 10/9, with smaller numbers at Vadu on 9/9 and Murighiol Lake on 13/9.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Just two sightings, two on 9/9, and at least 20 on roadside fish pools close to the Danube bridge near Braila on 15/9.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common throughout the week and recorded daily.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Recorded on five days, with 60+ at Nuntasi Lake near Vadu on 8/9 and 9/9 being the highest counts. Others seen along the Danube and on roadside fish pools close to the Danube bridge near Braila on 15/9.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

Two at Navadori refinery pools on 8/9 and two at Murighiol Lake on 13/9.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Four at Navadori refinery pools on 8/9, at least ten at Sacalin Island on 11/9 and one on fishponds en route to Bucharest on 15/9.

Teal *Anas crecca*

Common throughout the week and recorded daily except for 10/9 and 14/9. At least 3,000 present at Nuntasi Lake near Vadu on 8/9 and 9/9. Otherwise, 400+ Sacalin Island on 11/9 was the next highest.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A female/immature on fish pools close to the Danube bridge near Braila on 15/9 was the only sighting.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

At least ten in flight over S. Gheorghe Channel near Erenciuc Lake on 12/9 and at least one on roadside fish pools en route to Bucharest on 15/9.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

A female at Erenciuc Lake on 12/9 was the only sighting.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Widespread and seen on many lakes. Most numerous on the refinery pools at Navodari with 30+ there on 8/9, but not recorded from the delta region.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Ones and twos noted at several locations on five dates throughout the week but nowhere numerous.

The highest numbers were on the fishponds near the Danube on 15/9 where six were noted.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

One on the lake near the hotel on the pre-breakfast walk on 8/9 and five on Murighiol Lake on 13/9.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Noted on three days. The first was low over the forest at Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9, followed by eight birds there early the following morning, flying low to the east, presumably having roosted nearby.

Finally after a day of heavy rain, several groups were watched en route to Bucharest on 15/9 and some still on the ground. They were beginning to rise on thermals in late morning and at least 85 birds were present, possibly many more, as we were unable to stop to carefully check them. All would have been migrants.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Just two singles seen, one near Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and one on 10/9 from the ponton en route to Stantu Gheorghe.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Two en route to Bucharest on 7/9 was the only sighting.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

One burst out of the reeds and flew over the boats en route to Sacalin Island on 11/9.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Seen daily from 9/9 to 13/9. Most sightings were of ones and twos in the delta, although 12+ noted on 12/9. Others heard calling after dusk.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Only seen in the delta where it was common and recorded daily from 10/9 to 13/9, with highs of 80+ at and near Sacalin Island on 11/9 and 40+ at Erenciuc Lake on 12/9.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Widespread in small numbers with up to 15 recorded daily throughout the week. Most numerous in the delta region.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Recorded daily from 9/9 to 13/9, generally in smaller numbers than Grey Heron, but an estimated 15 during the day on 11/9.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Status and distribution similar to that of Purple Heron, although the daily maximum was 25+ at Sacalin Island on 11/9. Otherwise counts were in single figures.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Common on wetland areas especially so on the Danube Delta.

White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

Our first were nine on Nuntasi Lake on 8/9, followed by c. 300 at Sacalin Island on 11/9 and 250 migrating south over Murighiol Lake on 13/9.

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*

Two photographed as they flew low over the restaurant in Vadu on 9/9, at least ten at Sacalin Bay on 11/9, and three juveniles at Erenciuc Lake on 12/9

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*

Noted on six dates, with the first being three at the refinery pools at Navodari on 8/9. Widespread in small numbers in the delta, the highest being 30+ along the S. Gheorghe Channel on 10/9, followed by six at Sacalin Bay on 11/9 and a further six later the same day. We ended with nice 'scope views of half a dozen on fish ponds near the Danube en route to Bucharest on 15/9.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Common throughout the tour and seen daily. Huge numbers, well in excess of 3,000 were seen in flight at dawn over the ponton on 11/9 and presumably the same birds later that day at Sacalin Bay and adjacent beach.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Up to six recorded daily throughout the tour.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

Three males over woodland near Vadu on 9/9, a juvenile over Murighiol Lake on 13/9, a male at Macin NP on 14/9 and a distant juvenile en route to Bucharest on 15/9.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Common, widespread and recorded daily. These included the two or three birds playing noisily near the hotel at Mamaia on 18/9. Ones and twos recorded daily until we reached the delta, then they became particularly numerous with up to 60 birds daily, many perching in riverside trees, hunting alongside the waterways, and just generally having fun. Wonderful to watch, and their screaming calls became a characteristic sound of the delta dawns.

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Quite scarce, as most had already moved through. Two birds over Nuntasi Lake near Vadu on 8/9, two along the S. Gheorghe Channel on 10/9, two dark birds on 11/9 en route to Sacalin Island, two single birds near Erenciuc Lake on 12/9 and one on 14/9 at Macin Mountains NP.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Quite scarce this year. A distant adult at Histria on 9/9, two singles along the S. Gheorghe channel from Murighiol on 10/9, an immature at Sacalin Island on 11/9 and one at Erenciuc Lake on 12/9.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Recorded daily from 10/9 to 13/9, most were single birds but two together over the river at Stantu Gheorghe on 10/9.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Common and recorded on every day of the tour.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

An adult male flew overhead while we ate lunch on the expressway just beyond Slobozia on 15/9, and a very distant juvenile, probably this species but Pallid not entirely eliminated, en route to the Macin Mountains NP on 14/9.

Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*

A juvenile in flight over woodland near Vadu on 9/9; great views of a juvenile perched in a tree en route to Sacalin Island on 11/9. Two birds, possibly this species, were seen on 13/9.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

One soaring with the Spotted Eagle en route to Murighiol on 10/9, and another probably this species was seen on 8/9.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Recorded on six days of the tour but absent from the lower delta region.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Noted on four dates, with a pair at Sitorman Quarry on 8/9, a pair at Murighiol Lake on 13/9, at least four at Macin Mountains NP on 14/9 and one en route to Bucharest on 15/9. Significantly larger than Common Buzzard when seen together.

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina*

Just two seen this year and both were distant. One near Vadu on 8/9 and one at the Macin Mountains NP on 14/9.

Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga*

An immature bird on a roadside power pole near Murighiol on 10/9 showed very well, enabling everyone to appreciate the subtle characters which define this species.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

A pale morph bird on 8/9 and single pale and dark morph birds at Macin Mountains on 14/9.

Diver (Loon) *Gavia sp.*

A group of 26 birds flew over the lake by our hotel and continued south during the pre-breakfast walk on 8/9. They were too distant to be certain of their identity, but Black-throated is the most frequently occurring species.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Heard at Erenciuc Lake on 12/9.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Widespread in small numbers throughout the delta, with 30+ at Erenciuc Lake on 12/9 being the highest count.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Generally common at wetland areas and seen most days. The fishponds near the Danube held 2,000+ birds on 15/9.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostraelgus*

At least 24 in the delta at Sacalin Island on 11/9, and two along the S. Gheorghe Channel near Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Two at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and three there the next day, one on the lagoons at Vadu on 9/9, and a juvenile at Murighiol Lake on 13/9.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

At least 4,000 at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and 9/9, and c. 20 at Murighiol Lake on 13/9.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Widespread in small numbers in agricultural fields and wetland areas, and recorded daily from 9/9 to 13/9. The highest numbers were at Nuntasi Lake on 9/9 when 60+ were seen.

Grey (Black-bellied) Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Three at Sacalin Island on 11/9 and two at Murighiol Lake on 13/9.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Two or three at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and 9/9, 20+ at Sacalin Island on 11/9, and one at Sarinasuf Lake on 13/9.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Six at Nuntasi Lake on 9/9 and four on the S. Gheorghe Channel near Dunavatu de Sus on 13/9.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Two on the S. Gheorghe Channel near Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Two flushed at Vadu on 9/9 and seen in flight, but two at Sacalin Island on 11/9 showed very well.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

At least 80 at Sacalin Bay on 11/9, two on the S. Gheorghe Channel near Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9 and one there the following day, two or three at Murighiol Lake and at least 30 at Sarinasuf Lake on 13/9, and 25+ at fish ponds near the Danube en route to Bucharest on 15/9. All were of the nominate race and a few young birds still retained juvenile plumage.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Two at Histria on 10/9, two at Sacalin Bay on 11/9 and one at Sarinasuf Lake on 13/9.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Noted on six dates at many wetlands, mostly in small numbers, the highest count being 25+ at fish ponds near the Danube en route to Bucharest on 15/9.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Much scarcer than the previous species. Ten or more at Sacalin Bay on 11/9, followed by singles on the S. Gheorghe Channel near Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9 and 13/9.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

At least 40 at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and six there the next day, and one at Sarinasuf Lake on 13/9.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Seen or heard daily in small numbers from 8/9 to 13/9 at many wetlands, with highs of 6+ at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and Sacalin Bay on 11/9.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Three or more at Vadu settling lagoons on 9/9, four on the S. Gheorghe Channel near Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9 and six there the next day.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Widespread and recorded at many wetland sites on six dates but only in small numbers, the highest being 6+ at Nuntasi Lake on 9/9.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

One on the S. Gheorghe Channel near Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9 and again the following morning.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Just three birds seen, with singles at the refinery pools at Navodari on 8/9, Vadu settling lagoons on 9/9 and one on the S. Gheorghe Channel near Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

One at Sacalin Bay on 11/9 was the only sighting.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

A juvenile at Sarinasuf Lake on 13/9 and another juvenile at the fishponds near the Danube en route to Bucharest on 15/9.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Good numbers recorded this year with sightings on four dates. Most numerous at Nuntasi Lake with 300+ there on 8/9 and 400+ the next day, 300+ at Sacalin Bay on 11/9 and six at Sarinasuf Lake on 13/9.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

One heard at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and seen there the next day. Four at Vadu settling lagoons on 9/9.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Less numerous than Little Stint but shared a similar distribution. At least 60 at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9, 20+ at Sacalin Bay on 11/9 and 12+ at Sarinasuf Lake on 13/9.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Status similar to that of Curlew Sandpiper, with 60+ at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and six there the next day, 30+ at Sacalin Bay on 11/9 and one at Sarinasuf Lake on 13/9.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

A good year for this species, with two juveniles at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 followed by one there the next day, and 35+ at Sacalin Bay on 11/9.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Common and widely recorded at wetland sites throughout on seven dates. Most numerous at Nuntasi Lake with 130+ on 8/9 and 150+ there the next day, followed by 40+ at Sacalin Bay on 11/9.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

At least three hawking insects in flight over grassland at Vadu lagoons on 9/9 was the only sighting.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Very common, recorded daily throughout the tour.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Widespread and recorded daily from 8/9 to 13/9. Quite common over the lake by the hotel at Mamaia, with up to 30 present, and ten at Sacalin Bay on 11/9. Smaller numbers noted elsewhere.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyhaetus melanocephalus*

Exceptional numbers, at least 1,000, present at Nuntasi Lake on 8/9 and 9/9. Noted on five dates but numbers elsewhere typically <10 daily.

Great Black-headed Gull *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*

A good year for this impressive larid. Three adults and a first-winter at Sacalin Bay on 11/9, and an adult at Sarinasuf Lake on 13/9. This species has nested in the Danube Delta since 2009, its westernmost breeding and only accessible breeding site in Europe.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Two adults at Sacalin Island on 11/9, and a juvenile and eight adults on the S. Gheorghe Channel near Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9. All were of the black backed nominate race which winters in eastern Africa.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Common and recorded most days, most numerous at Mamaia and scarce in the delta.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

Very common, recorded every day of the tour. Much more numerous than the previous species, and particularly numerous away from urban areas where Yellow-legged Gull dominated. Most adults were completing primary moult.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

At least 30 at the refinery pools at Navodari on 8/9 and one at Sacalin Bay on 11/9.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilocta*

Three feeding over the dry fields and settling lagoons at Vadu on 9/9, and an adult and juvenile flew along the S. Gheorghe Channel on 11/9.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Seen on five days at Vadu, Histria and in the delta. Most numerous at Sacalin Bay on 11/9 when c. 90 birds were present, and 18 at Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9 and 13/9. On the latter two dates many birds were noted to be carrying rings, and presumably originate from the Baltic/Gulf of Bothnia population.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

Very common and widespread this year and noted on seven dates. Most numerous in the S. Gheorghe channel, with 1,000+ noted on 10/9 and 12/9, and 600+ on moving along the channel on 13/9 in the 45 minutes between 06.30 and 07.15. Other daily totals ranges from two to 130+.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

Four juveniles over the lake by the hotel in Mamaia on 8/9, a juvenile at Sacalin Bay on 11/9, and another juvenile in the S. Gheorghe channel on 12/9.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Single juveniles in the S. Gheorghe channel on 12/9.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Six at the refinery pools at Navodari on 8/9, two at Mamaia on 9/9 And 250+ at Sacalin Bay in the delta on 11/9.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Noted on five dates, with 25+ at the refinery pools at Navodari on 8/9, c. 150 at Vadu settling lagoons where they were clearly breeding, 60+ at Sacalin Bay on 11/9, two along the S. Gheorghe channel at Dunavatu de Sus on 12/9 and 13/9, and six at Murighiol Lake on 13/9.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

At least three seen distantly at Sacalin Island on 11/9.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Recorded each day except in the Danube delta.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

One flew over the ponton at Dunavatu de Sus on 13/9.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Noted on five dates but most numerous in the delta with highs of 40+ on 12/9 and 13/9, mostly seen in flight over the river from the ponton.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Two in woodland near Vadu on 9/9, singles near Stantu Gheorghe on 11/9 and Erenciuc Lake on 12/9, and 12 or more on overhead roadside wires near the Babadag Forest on 14/9.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Very common throughout the tour except in the Danube delta.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Two singles on 10/9 near Histria, and one on 12/9 at Erenciuc Lake.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

One on a derelict building at Nuntasi Lake near Vadu on 8/9, and one near the Macin Mountains NP on 14/9.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

Two distant birds over the expressway just beyond Slobozia on 15/9.

Roller *Coracias garrulous*

Small numbers noted on five dates, with two on 7/9 and 10/9, and singles daily from on 13/9 to 15/9.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Widespread and noted on six dates, including the lake by the hotel in Mamaia. Most numerous in the delta with daily sightings of up to six birds.

Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Recorded in good numbers everyday, the vast majority being juveniles mostly moving south.

Numerous throughout, although many were too high to see, but their distinctive calls gave away their presence. Maximum estimate was 400+ in the delta on 12/9 and 500+ at the Babadag Forest on 13/9.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Two birds near the Sitorman Quarry on 8/9 was the only sighting.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

A female seen well before breakfast from the ponton in riverside trees along the S. Gheorghe channel on 11/9 and one heard near the channel leading to Erenciuc Lake on 12/9.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*

A male at Babadag Forest on 13/9 was the only sighting.

Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*

Two at Histria on 10/9, a pair at Babadag Forest on 13/9 and one, either this species or Great Spotted seen distantly at Babadag Forest on 14/9.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Up to four daily from 10/9 to 12/9 in the delta region.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

One briefly as it flew overhead as we birded along the bund bordering the Tataru channel on 11/9, and a male which showed superbly near the ponton at Dunavatu de Sus on 13/9.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridus*

One calling and seen briefly in flight at Babadag forest on 14/9.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

On the Danube Delta two seen while travelling along the S. Gheorghe Channel on 10/9, two on 11/9 including one hammering away at the top of a concrete power pole along the Tataru channel, and three calling then flew over the river at Dunavatu de Sus on 13/9.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Common and widespread along the coast with a high of 40+ recorded 9/9. Less numerous in the delta and inland where daily totals were < 10, although our best views were of an exceedingly confident juvenile at the Macin Mountains NP on 14/9. All were young birds apart from one or two adult males near Vadu on 9/9.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

One seen by some participants on 10/9.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

A juvenile showed well at times along the Tataru Channel on 11/9, and two flew over the ponton while moored in the S. Gheorghe Channel near Erenciuc Lake on 12/9, and another later that day.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Two en route to Murighiol on 10/9, at least 40 at the Babadag Forest on 13/9, and 15+ in another part of the forest the following day.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Very common, recorded daily in good numbers.

Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

Recorded daily in good numbers apart from the lower delta where it was absent.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Very common throughout the week except in the southern part of the delta where it was absent.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Widespread and common, and recorded regularly throughout the week. Most numerous corvid in the delta.

Raven *Corvus corax*

Two in flight at the Macin Mountains NP on 14/9.

Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris*

Two showed well, albeit briefly, at the Babadag Forest on 13/9, and one calling and briefly seen by some in another part of the forest the following day.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Two at the Babadag Forest on 14/9 was the only sighting.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Seen daily apart from 8/9, typically singles or pairs, but four on 12/9 and 14/9.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Heard in woodland near Vadu on 9/9, thereafter seen daily from 11/9 to 14/9 with a high of 10+ on 13/9 at the Babadag Forest.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*

A young bird showed well at Erenciuc Lake on 12/9.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Numbers much smaller than in the same period in 2012. Recorded daily from 9/9 to 15/9, typically <20 daily, but several hundred going to roost over the S. Gheorghe Channel near Stantu Gheorghe on 10/9, and 80+ over the Babadag Forest on 13/9 with Swallows and Bee-eaters.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

More numerous than Sand Martin but numbers not matching those seen in 2012. Up to 100 recorded daily, with highs of 500+ over the Babadag Forest on 13/9, and a continuous southerly passage on 15/9 that must have amounted to many thousands if we had the time to sit and watch.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Surprisingly scarce this year. Noted en route to Bucharest on 7/9, followed by 20+ at Nuntasi Lake near Vadu on 8/9 and 15+ at Histria on 10/9. Scattered ones and twos occasionally noted elsewhere.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Heard in the trees near Erenciuc Lake on 12/9 but stubbornly refused to come into view.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Noted on four dates, with 16+ on 10/9 including several birds giving nice views at the Sitorman Quarry, three or more on 9/9 and 10/9, and one at the Macin Mountains NP on 14/9.

Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*

At least two at Histria on 10/9 was the only sighting.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*

Three on roadside wires at the Macin Mountains NP on 14/9 was the only sighting.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

One calling along the S. Gheorghe Channel at Stantu Gheorghe on 11/9 but not seen.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

Two seen at Histria on 10/9, heard (and seen by some) along the channel to Sacalin Bay on 11/9, and one or two showed nicely by the ponton while moored in the S. Gheorghe Channel near Erenciuc Lake on 12/9.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

One showed nicely by the ponton while moored in the S. Gheorghe Channel near Erenciuc Lake on 12/9, and another was seen later the same morning.

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*

One showed well in the reedbeds at Histria on 10/9.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

One showed well in the reedbeds at Histria on 10/9, making a nice comparison with the Paddyfield Warbler. One along the channel to Sacalin Bay on 11/9, and one or two showed nicely by the ponton while moored in the S. Gheorghe Channel near Erenciuc Lake on 12/9.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*

One in woodland near Vadu on 9/9.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

One in woodland near Vadu on 9/9, and after much searching one eventually showed well in the trees by the archaeological centre at Histria on 10/9.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Widespread in small numbers and noted on six dates with maxima of 16+ on 10/9.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

One singing bird heard at Erenciuc on 12/9, but not seen.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Scattered sightings on four dates but only one or two noted daily.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Just one, in the trees by the archaeological centre at Histria on 10/9.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Widespread in small numbers, and noted on five dates. All singles apart from three in the small woodland near Vadu on 9/9, and seven or more in the trees by the archaeological centre at Histria on 10/9.

Bearded Tit *Parnurus biarmicus*

Heard along the channel to Sacalin Bay on 11/9, and heard in reedbeds adjacent to Erenciuc Lake on 12/9. Unfortunately, not seen in either location.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

At least three at the Babadag Forest on 14/9.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Several heard and one seen on the island in the S. Gheorghe Channel near Erenciuc Lake on 12/9.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Very common, recorded in good numbers, typically 1,000s, every day of the tour.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Single birds glimpsed from the ponton at while moored near village of Stantu Gheorghe on 11/9, and along the small channel leading to Erenciuc Lake on 12/9.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

One heard from the ponton while moored in the Gheorghe Channel at Dunavatu de Sus on 13/9.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

One at Sitorman Quarry on 8/9, and at least six at the Macin Mountains NBP on 14/9.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

A male near the hotel in Mamaia during our pre-breakfast walk on 9/9, and at least four in the small woodland near Vadu, also on 9/9. A male at the Macin Mountains NBP on 14/9.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

At least six in reedbeds and around the archaeological centre at Histria on 10/9. Elsewhere, just two in scrub along the Tataru channel on 11/9.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

Two at Sitorman Quarry on 8/9, one of which annoyingly chased off the Pied Wheatear that we were watching.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Noted on just three dates, with eight on 8/9, mostly at the Sitorman Quarry, six on 9/9 at the Vadu lagoons, and one at Sacalin Island on 11/9.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

Two males eventually showed well at the Sitorman quarry on 8/9. A rare bird in Europe, here at the western extremity of its range.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Common and widespread, and 10+ recorded daily, with a high of 25+ noted on 10/9.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Surprisingly scarce this year compared to previous years, typically numbers were in single figures but at least ten seen on 9/9, mostly in the small woodland near Vadu. Great sparring and tail flashing when two birds came together.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Common around towns and villages, but largely absent from the delta.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

A group of about 20 birds by the restaurant where we ate lunch near Sitorman Quarry on 8/9.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

One or two near the hotel at Mamaia on 8/9, and six in Vadu on 9/9.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Recorded in good numbers throughout the week and seen or heard daily although most were in flight, calling as they went overhead. All calls were those we are familiar with in western Europe (so presumably given by Blue-headed (*flava*) or Grey-headed Wagtails (*thunbergi*). Of birds seen on the ground, the majority were first-winter birds, which were difficult to assign specific subspecies, but all of the adults we saw were nominate *flava* (Blue-headed Wagtail).

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Singles noted on three dates, with fly overs heard and seen on 9/9 and 15/9, and one showed well in the St Gheorghe channel on 12/9.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Quite common and recorded daily throughout the week.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Heard calling in flight on four dates, particularly just before/after dawn near the hotel at Mamaia and in the delta. Only one bird showed well, by the restaurant near the Macin Mountains NP after the rain stopped, on 14/9.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Two at the archaeological centre at Histria on 10/9, at least ten at the Babadag Forest on 13/9, and 60 or more in another part of the Babadag Forest the next day.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

One at Nuntasi Lake on 9/9, and two seen plus others heard at the Babadag Forest on 14/9.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Heard at Nuntasi Lake on 10/9, and at least one at the Babadag Forest on 14/9.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

At least one at the Babadag Forest on 14/9.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

At least 20 along the road to the Histria archaeological centre on 10/9, with one giving nice views there through the 'scope as it perched in a bare tree.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

At least one in the reedbeds at Histria on 10/9.

MAMMALS

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

One at the Macin Mountains NP on 14/9.

Polecat *Putorius putorius*

One dead by the roadside en route to Bucharest on 15/9.

European Sousek *Spermophilus citellus*

Common in steppe grassland regions.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

At least three in fields by the expressway east of Bucharest on 7/9, and three near the Macin Mountains on 14/9.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Dice Snake *Natrix tessellata*

One on the bund beside the Tataru channel on 11/9.

Green Lizard *Lacerta viridis*

One at the Babadag Forest on 13/9.

Balkan Wall Lizard *Podarcis taurica*

At least five at the restaurant where we ate lunch in Murighiol on 13/9.

Marsh Frog *Rana ridibunda*

The numerous frogs we saw on 12/9, displaying a wide variation in pattern, must have been either this species or Pool Frog *R. lessonae*.

DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES

Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*

Moustached Darter *Sympetrum vulgatum*

BUTTERFLIES

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Lesser Clouded Yellow *Colias chrysotheme*

Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Cardinal *Argynnis pandora*

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Hummingbird Hawk Moth *Macroglossum stellatarum*