



Adult Pallas's Gulls in the Danube Delta (Zoltán Baczó)

DANUBE DELTA & DOBRUDJA IN AUTUMN with **SAKERTOURS** 25th – 31th August, 2024

Leader: Márton Molnár

Birding in the Dobrudja and Danube Delta areas in autumn offers a fantastic experience. Migration is at its peak in late August, so the wetlands are full of waterfowl. The bushes and reed beds are also crowded as enormous number of passerines are crossing the region. There is never a moment's peace, because there is always something new. Besides watching the magical migration it is still a good time to pick up the local specialities too. Most of the local breeders are still hanging around, and the regular migrant Eastern rarities are also here. Last but not least the Macin Mountains also provide fantastic opportunity to see some good birds combined with beautiful landscapes.

This year rainy and windy weather made birding very difficult on several days, thus producing a very long triplist was a challenge. However, we have seen all the top ten target species and many other specialities. This year highlights at the wetlands were Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans, four species of Grebes, Pallas's Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Little Bittern, Little Crake, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Collared Pratincole, Paddyfield Warbler, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler. The woodlands, agricultural fields and steppe habitats produced also some memorable birds like Eurasian Dotterel, Booted Eagle, Grey Partridge, seven species of Woodpeckers, Pied Wheatear, Collared Flycatcher, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Sombre Tit, Spanish Sparrow, Woodchat Shrike.

25th August (Sunday)

After picking up the guests on the bus, we left the airport area near Bucharest-Otopeni heading east towards the Black Sea coast. There was a heavy traffic on the way, thus we arrived late to the village of Vadu. Since we had little time left for birding today, we decided to visit a nearby small wetland. It turned out to be a good decision as it produced really good birds within a short time. On the mudflat we saw Little Stints, Temminck's Stints, Common Snipes, Black-winged Stilts and many other waders. A Gull-billed Tern family was also present, the adults were still feeding the juveniles. While watching the shorebirds a small raptor appeared above the lake, soon we realised that it was a juvenile Levant Sparrowhawk. It was coming closer and closer until it flew over our heads so we could enjoy fantastic views. Just before leaving the area we spotted a Red-rumped Swallow amongst Barn Swallows and Sand Martins. While driving to the hotel we had another short stop and we had good views of two Syrian Woodpeckers and a Golden Oriole perched on the top of a tree. All in all we had a pretty good start!



Juvenile Levant Sparrowhawk (Zoltán Baczó)

26th August (Monday)

We started the day with a prebreakfast birding around the village. We visited some small wetlands and we soon saw our first Glossy Ibises, Spoonbills and Black-crowned Night Herons. We also spotted an adult White-winged Tern on the mudflat moulting to winter plumage. Gull-billed Terns, Ferruginous Ducks, Pygmy Cormorants also delighted us, although the highlight of this morning was a beautiful adult Dalmatian Pelican passing by very close.

After having a nice breakfast at the hotel we headed towards Sitorman rock quarry. We took an alternative route to the quarry, where we could check some grasslands and agricultural fields for some birds. It turned out to be a good choice as we saw a small flock of Greater Short-toed Larks, a single European Roller and plenty of Lesser Grey Shrikes. Moreover at the end of the road we spotted a nice Grey Partridge family roosting in the shade of a bush.

As we reached the quarry we bumped into an Isabelline Wheatear which later turned out to be our only individual during the trip. It was more hardworking but finally we found two Pied Wheatears too, an adult moulting to winter plumage and a juvenile. A half an hour long skywatching at the same area produced both dark and light morph Booted Eagles, Long-legged Buzzards, an adult female Levant Sparrowhawk and two Red-rumped Swallows. The weather was getting hot so we had a short rest at the hotel after lunch.

In the afternoon we visited one of the large lakes along the coast. The lake was really huge, and it was incredible, but it was full of birds! Thousands of ducks, gulls, pelicans and waders were present, it was simply amazing. Besides being amazed by the huge number of birds we added some good birds to our list, a single Broad-billed Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpipers, Caspian Tern and Ruddy Shelduck just to mention a few. After this fantastic area we finished the day at the coast. On the way we spotted a nice Red-breasted Flycatcher hunting for insects under a close bush. We could watch it for minutes, sometimes it showed very clearly when sit on the ground. The seawatching at the coast produced an Arctic Skua, a Black-throated Loon, Little Gulls, Mediterranean Gulls and Black Terns.



Red-backed Shrike was one of the most numerous passerine during the trip (Zoltán Baczó)

27th August (Tuesday)

We dedicated this morning to the passerines, but at first we checked around the village for Little Owls. We successfully found one sitting in an attic door. It was so funny as it was watching us and circling its head. After the Little Owl search we quickly picked up Eurasian Reed Warbler, Great Reed Warbler and Savi's Warbler in the reed bed. After trying several spots we finally found a beautiful Paddyfield Warbler too. It was moving on the edge of the reeds, very close to us, so we could easily go through all the key ID features. The nearby bushes were also crowded, besides the common species we managed to see a nice Collared Flycatcher too. After this successful morning we went back to the hotel to have a nice breakfast.

After breakfast we visited Histria area. Even though the habitat was dry because of the rainless summer, we saw some good birds. Amongst roosting Caspian Gulls we picked out five adult Pallas's Gulls. Red-footed Falcons were also hanging around, while a Montagu's Harrier was hunting continuously in the background. After we checked the area we started to walk back to the car. Then we heard strange laughing noises so we raised our eyes to the sky and we spotted nine Collared Pratincoles passing by. But this was still not enough, at a nearby agricultural field we bumped into a large flock of sparrows. We started to check them one by one and soon we spotted several Spanish Sparrows amongst them.

After the fantastic morning sessions we drove to Lake Techirgiol. This area offered easy birding as we could drive around the lake and check all the birds on the shoreline. While driving on the dirt road we spotted a huge flock of birds just roosting on the ground in front of us. It turned out to be approximately 5000 Mediterranean Gulls! It was so amazing to drive on the road, while endless lines of Mediterranean Gulls were flying around the car. The second most numerous species in the area was Black-necked Grebes. Everywhere we looked on the lake, we saw Black-necked Grebes, and it was also a great pleasure. Moreover we added some new waders to triplist such as Grey Plover and Ruddy Turnstone. On the way back to the hotel we did another short stop at a harbour. Here we saw a small flock of waders, including a nice Broad-billed Sandpiper. A juvenile Peregrine Falcon attacking the shorebirds and two fly-by Sandwich Terns also delighted us.

At the end of the day we revisited Lake Tuzla where we were yesterday afternoon. It was great again, now we had much better views of two Broad-billed Sandpipers amongst Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers. Another good moment was when a nice Osprey with a big fish flew over the lake. We spent our last night at this nice hotel.



Flock of waders at Lake Tuzla and light morph Booted Eagle (Zoltán Baczó)



Flocks of Little Gulls were often seen (Zoltán Baczó)

28th August (Wednesday)

In the morning the sky was cloudy and the weather became windy. We were able to do only a short birding at Lake Tuzla before the storm arrived. We saw the two Broad-billed Sandpipers again, one more Marsh Sandpiper and of course we were still amazed by the huge number of birds on the lake.

After breakfast we headed towards Tulcea city. Unfortunately we had to skip some birding destinations on the way because of the heavy rain. Instead, we had a nice lunch in Tulcea. Luckily the rain stopped when we arrived to the harbour, so we could comfortably start the long-awaited boat trip to the Danube Delta. We started to discover this unique habitat made up of endless reed beds, riverine forests, beautiful lakes and lovely channels. Along the channels we saw several Little Bitterns and we picked up Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Grey-headed Woodpecker too. In the reed bed we observed Bearded Reedlings, Eurasian and Great Reed Warblers. The large lakes were just amazing! Thousands of Coots and Ferruginous Ducks were present, also amazing number of Squacco Herons and Great White Pelicans were observed by us. We also saw four species of grebes (Little, Black-necked, Red-necked, Great Crested), but the highlight of the day was a foraging Little Crane seen very well for a long time. Romi our boat guide was fantastic again, he professionally directed us to the right places to see all the Danube Delta specialities. As always, we were really impressed by this fantastic habitat!



We saw several Little Bitterns along the channels (Zoltán Baczó)

29th August (Thursday)

Today windy and rainy weather made birding difficult. We started the day with a prebreakfast birding around the hotel. Several Thrush Nightingales were calling from the bushes and we successfully managed to see one well. We have not seen many more birds because of strong wind. However, two male Grey-headed Woodpeckers put on a show for us. They were fighting for territory just in front of us. Sometimes the fight looked really serious as one of them plucked some of the other's feathers.



Great White Pelicans and Sandwich Terns (Zoltán Baczó)

As the reeds and bushes were quite because of the wind, we decided to visit a nice island on the border of the Black Sea and the Danube Delta. It was a long boat trip but we finally got there. The island was amazing! Thousands of birds were roosting there, mainly terns and gulls. The mass of the birds was mainly Sandwich Terns, it was an incredible sight when a White-tailed Eagle flushed them up. We also saw several Pallas's Gulls

there. It was simply amazing to feel the magic of the autumn Danube Delta! On the long boat trip back to the hotel we saw one more Pallas's Gull, a nice White-winged Tern still in breeding plumage, and many Great White Pelicans.

After lunch we started back to Tulcea. Just as we were leaving the hotel, we heard a strange call from the canopy of willow trees. Soon we spotted the bird and it was a nice Eastern Olivaceous Warbler. Meanwhile, on another tree a Black Woodpecker and a Grey-headed Woodpecker were perched on the same snag. It was a perfect finish in the delta.

In the afternoon we headed towards Macin. We stopped at Horia forest, where we did a walk. Despite the bad weather we observed many birds, Hawfinches, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Treecreeper, just to name a few. However, our main target bird, the Sombre Tit, has not been found. We were not discouraged, we tried it again at another site. Here we were luckier, after a few minutes of walk we heard two Sombre Tits. They came really close to us, so we could get fantastic views! A dark morph Booted Eagle, a Green Woodpecker and a Middle Spotted Woodpecker were also memorable birds at this site. There was nothing left to do but to take our accommodation and have a nice dinner.



Pallas's Gulls amongst Caspians and Black-tailed Godwits (Zoltán Baczó)

30th August (Friday)

Today we started to discover the Macin Mountains and surroundings. On our usual prebreakfast birding we visited a nearby pasture. The strong wind made it difficult to find our target bird here, but finally we spotted a nice adult Woodchat Shrike perched on a bush. It didn't want to fly away because of the wind, so we had a great view.

After breakfast we visited several different habitats in the area, including bushy areas, grasslands, forests and a quarry too. Booted Eagle, two juvenile Montagu's Harrier, European Roller, Turtle Dove, Pied Wheatear, Red-

breasted Flycatcher were the highlights. We also saw two Levant Sparrowhawks which were soaring together with a Eurasian Sparrowhawk, offering good opportunity to compare these two species.

In the afternoon we went to the neighbouring Balta Alba region. We checked two steppe lakes that produced a number of shorebirds, Black-necked Grebes and Little Gulls. There was only a huge grassland left to visit in this region. We stopped at the edge of the habitat and started to scan around. Curlews, a single Long-legged Buzzard and plenty of Northern Wheatears were foraging on the grassland. Finally we spotted some lovely small birds crazily running around on the ground. A small flock of Eurasian Dotterels! This was the last piece of the top ten targets on this trip. We managed to get closer and finally we counted 33 individuals. Perfect ending of the tour!



Sombre Tit (Zoltán Baczó)

31st August (Saturday)

On the last day we had only a short time in the morning to watch birds. We visited two different quarries, but we didn't see too many birds because of the strong wind. Pied Wheatear, European Roller and Turtle Dove were the best. Sadly we had to stop birding and start back to Bucharest. Even though the weather was often bad, we had a super week with fantastic birds. All the top targets were seen, the magic of autumn migration was amazing, and we were really satisfied with the nice food and accommodation. All in all we had a great time here again!

BIRDS – list of bird species recorded on the 2022 tour

C = Commonly seen, more than 10 individuals

'Numbers' = Actual number seen on the tour

H = Heard only

LO = Leader only

NL = Non-leader

1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	C
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	C
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	C
4	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	C
5	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	C
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	C
7	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	C
8	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	C
9	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	3
10	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	C
11	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	C
12	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	C



Squacco Heron and Little Bittern (Zoltán Baczó)

13	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>	9
14	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	C
15	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	C
16	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	1
17	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	C
18	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	C
19	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	6
20	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	C
21	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	2
22	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	6
23	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	C
24	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	C
25	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	C
26	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	C
27	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	C

28	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	C
29	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	C
30	Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	2
31	Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmeus</i>	C
32	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	C
33	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1
34	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	3
35	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>	4
36	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>	5



Pygmy Cormorant (Zoltán Baczó)

37	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1
38	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	C
39	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	5
40	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	C
41	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	C
42	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	C
43	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H
44	Little Crake	<i>Porzana parva</i>	1
45	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	C
46	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	C
47	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	C
48	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	C
49	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	C
50	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	C
51	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	2

52	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	C
53	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	C
54	Eurasian Dotterel	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>	33
55	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	C
56	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	C
57	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	2
58	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	C
59	Broad-billed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris falcinellus</i>	4



Caspian Gulls (Zoltán Baczó)

60	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	C
61	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	4
62	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	C
63	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	C
64	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	C
65	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	C
66	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	C
67	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	C
68	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	4
69	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	C
70	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	C
71	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	C
72	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	9
73	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	C
74	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	C

75	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	C
76	Pallas's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus</i>	C
77	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	C
78	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	C
79	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	C
80	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	C
81	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	C
82	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	C
83	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	C
84	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	3
85	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	C
86	Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	1
87	Black-throated Loon	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	1
88	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia f. domestica</i>	C
89	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	C
90	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	6
91	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	C
92	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	C
93	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	6
94	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	C
95	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	C
96	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	C
97	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	C
98	Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocoptes medius</i>	3
99	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>	C
100	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	C
101	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	C
102	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	1
103	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	C
104	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	3
105	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	C
106	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	C
107	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	C
108	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1
109	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	C
110	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	C
111	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	1
112	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	C
113	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	C
114	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	C
115	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	C
116	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	C
117	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	C
118	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	C
119	Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>	2
120	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	C
121	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	C
122	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	C

123	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	1
124	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	C
125	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	C
126	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	8
127	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	C
128	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	C
129	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	C
130	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	5
131	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	C
132	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	C
133	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	1
134	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	3
135	Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	1
136	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	C
137	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>	1
138	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	C
139	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	C
140	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>	C
141	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	C
142	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1
143	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	C
144	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	C
145	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	C
146	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	C
147	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	C
148	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	1
149	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	2
150	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	1
151	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>	C
152	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	1
153	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	1
154	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	C
155	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	C
156	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	1
157	Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	C
158	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniensis</i>	5
159	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	C
160	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	C
161	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	C
162	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	C
163	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	C
164	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	C
165	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	C
166	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	C
167	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	1
168	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	C
169	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	C



Immature Pallas's Gull (Zoltán Baczó)



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